

Agencies respond to Ebola outbreak

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [September 3, 2014](#) issue

Church-based organizations are among those responding to—and affected by—the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

The World Health Organization [has reported](#) more than 1,200 deaths and 2,200 cases either confirmed or suspected to be caused by Ebola virus disease in Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Preventing spread of the illness requires limiting contact with infected patients as much as possible and “promptly and safely” burying the dead, whose bodies can transmit the virus, the WHO stated. “Currently there is no registered medicine or vaccine against the virus, but there are several experimental options under development.” The organization convened medical ethicists in mid-August to consider using treatment that has not been tested.

“What affects one, affects us all,” [wrote Isabel Apawo Phiri](#), associate general secretary of the World Council of Churches, in a letter to the Liberian Council of Churches in Monrovia, Liberia, intended for other West African Christians also.

“We understand the fear that has gripped these countries and the difficulty of extending pastoral care to the patients of Ebola,” she wrote.

Phiri, who is originally from Malawi, acknowledges the need to take measures to prevent further infections.

“We also understand the troubling sense of isolation felt by the patients, as it goes against the African culture to suffer or to die alone,” she wrote. “Cultural understanding also leads us to call for the dignified burial of deceased victims of Ebola.”

She also called for WCC member congregations to support “Christian health services in the affected countries, which are overstretched and lacking many of the basic necessities and resources to deal effectively and compassionately with this crisis.”

Two U.S. medical missionaries—Kent Brantly, 33, with Samaritan’s Purse, and Nancy Writebol, 59, with Service in Mission—were infected with Ebola while working with

patients in Liberia. They received treatment at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, whose Serious Communicable Disease Unit was built in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Before they returned, Brantly and Writebol received an experimental drug, Religion News Service reported.

Spain's government flew a 75-year-old Roman Catholic priest back from Liberia in early August. He also received an experimental drug but died five days later in Madrid, according to European news reports.

Liberia Baptist Theological Seminary in Paynesville, Liberia, called for prayer and action after the nation closed all schools as a measure against new infections, according to [ABPnews/Herald](#).

Two figures in this article were updated August 19, 2014.