

Moments about Life

A belated good new year to you all. Just to bring you up to date. We saw Gregor and Catriona off in Lusaka at the beginning of the month and then returned to Mwandu with a consignment of Milk Formula. We stopped off to shop for the monthly basics in Livingstone for Kandiana, the Old Folk's Home. In the past we were able to provide a monthly bag of individual necessities for them. We have received no subsistence grant from the Government since August, so we are feeding them through the generosity of individual Churches. We are about to receive another mouth to feed, an old man from Simungoma who is partially paralysed from polio. There is also Julius, the cook to pay as well as Catherine, the carer who is covered until August by the Church of Scotland.

The Silozi for January is Sope which means the first month when some food is available. This season is reminiscent of Alexander Gray's lines: "With want an attendant, not lightly outpaced." What is true for food is also true for the other of life's necessities. This is also the start of the academic year and we are helping a student, a widow's son at Banking College a girl at teacher training and two others at Technical College. Keith's Kids still sponsors 8 pupils who started Grade 10 at Sesheke High before the opening of our High School in Mwandu. 5 Grade 8 pupils have been helped with PTA Fees and 8 vulnerable Grade 1s from Sikuzu with a contribution towards school uniforms. The new Grade 10s will be starting next month.

We are having desks and chairs made locally to seat 120 pupils, thanks to the generosity of a Milwaukee Church. Both staff latrines are now complete and we are waiting to hear about applications for staff housing from Norway and Switzerland. We will require another 3 classroom block if we receive 3 Grade 10 classes this year, as seems likely. We have now received permission from the Provincial Education Office to proceed with the UCZ Community Classroom at Sikuzu.

Yesterday a Pre-school was opened for the first time at Simungoma, this is the most recent Church to be roofed in corrugated zinc. Grace, an Anamoyo (Woman's Christian Fellowship Member) and a former pre-school teacher at Mwandu is heading this up. With the Teaching and Learning Centre Pre-School at the Mission and Sikuzu opening 18 months ago and now Simungoma this is the third UCZ Pre-school group to open the latter, two being in fairly remote rural situations. This means that opportunity to attend pre-school is being offered to over 180 three to five year olds who would not otherwise be catered for.

This is all part of a wider strategy for rural development involving the Mission, comprising of the Church with its Health and Education Ministries. Attempts are being made to prompt the reinstatement of defunct Community Health Committees so that the communities works together to make small but incremental steps towards making health care and their childrens education better for all. The community itself is taking the action but the Church and Mission is there to help the community help and develop itself.

We have assisted with the building of a new Community Health Post at Kangugu and are working on similar plans at Simungoma as funds have recently become available. Two Churches should be reroofed this year. The Australian Church has pledged to help Simenso and Magumwi

is next on the list when a sponsor is found. It is hoped that the Home-Based Care that presently serves Mwandu Village can be extended to the rural areas of the consistory. A first pilot programme is being planned for Simungoma.

The foundations for much of this has been done on our visit each Sunday to the rural congregations. The journeys to these places are becoming more difficult with the regular rains we have been having, but it has been good to visit these communities and encourage them in their Christian witness to their communities. These Churches are run by the lay Eldership with only the occasional presence of a minister, yet they are mostly lively and busy congregations with many facets of Christian service.

We still need your prayers for peace in this part of the world. The Paramilitary Police who were dispatched to Mwandu following the riots in Mongu earlier in the month have been withdrawn, but there was renewed unrest in Sesheke on Friday. There have been 23 arrests and detentions those arrested being charged with treason. They appeared in court earlier this week. There have been a number of causes for concern as regards freedom of expression. Radio Lyambai, a mainly Silozi local radio station has been closed down by the Government and one of the management arrested for allegedly broadcasting an advert for a banned meeting to discuss the Barotseland Agreement of 1964. The Government has banned all phone-in programmes on the BA of 1964. Mr Mwala Kalakula, a Post reporter has been detained for allegedly speaking about the situation to Voice of America.

Finally the National Minimum Monthly Wage has been raised from K268 000 (GBP40/\$60) to K419 000 (GBP60/\$90) It should be borne in mind that the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection's Basic Needs Basket for a family of 6 living in Lusaka for October 2010 was K2 877 830 (GBP410/\$640). For food-stuffs alone which includes mealie-meal, vegetables, dried fish K895 000 is required (GBP130/\$200).

In our comings and goings here with the people and the chain of intense moments meeting together with the visitors to the door we are aware of Jesus drawing near in their eyes, voices and hearts and we pray that we may respond with his kindness, tenderness and compassion. We continue to learn what life is about. With the people here it is not about possessions or accumulation of wealth to store in barns.

It is not about enriching oneself at the expense the soul. Life here in all its poverty is more than just all the things necessary to sustain it. More than money, clothes and food, necessary as these things are. You learn to treasure the things our Lord treasures, despite the greed and avarice of the elite - those who already have; and seeing and living with the needs of those who literally don't know where the next meal is coming from. We bring nothing into this world and all we take is what we have given to others in need.

As my granny used to say –there's nae pooches in a shrowd! (A winding sheet has no pockets!)