

2005 Annual Mission Update

Another year has come and gone, but 2005 has been good to us. Our priest house that was under construction has now been completed and John and I were fortunate enough to be able to travel to Africa to be present for the dedication and opening ceremonies presided over by Bishop Frank.

Because of the extensive travel requirements of John's job, he was able to accumulate 350 000 points that allowed both of us to travel to Africa for free. Arriving in Francistown after four days of travel, we were met by Bishop Frank at the airport who took us to our hotel where we stayed for five days. A friend of the bishop who is a doctor loaned us his Land Rover for use while we were in Francistown. We were also invited to their home for dinner one evening.

The morning after we arrived, we had arranged an 11:00 appointment at Bishop Frank's office to meet his financial administrator, Sister Cathy O'Gorman. At that time, we presented Bishop Frank with Fr. Padelt's chalice. Now that he is retired, Fr. Padelt was happy to see his chalice being put to good use. Bishop Frank said he would use it in his cathedral. Margaret Dube was also invited to attend the meeting. She is the head of their St. Vincent dePaul Society. I gave her a letter from the Blessed Sacrament Church St. Vincent DePaul and explained to her that the Blessed Sacrament society would like to hear from her to learn more about the challenges she faces on a daily basis with the understanding that eventually, they might be able to provide some assistance to her.

Our next priority was to travel out of town to see St. James Church once again and to see, for the first time, the recently completed priest house. It was great to see that the church now has pews and that arrangements have been made to furnish the new priest house. Next on our agenda was to cross the street to tour St. James School. We met the principal and the teachers and spent the afternoon playing with the children. They loved having John take their picture and then showing them what they looked like on his digital camera. In addition to these visits, a great deal of our time was taken up with numerous meetings that had been scheduled with different organizations associated with St. James Church. Each group explained what their role was in the community and how the efforts of their organizations helped to support and build the congregation of St. James.

On Saturday, we attended a teenage mass at 8:00 a.m. that was offered by a priest who has attended the opening of the church two years ago. It was nice to see him once again. After mass, the teenagers stayed for choir practice in preparation for the dedication mass on Sunday. They have such beautiful voices. On Sunday morning, the 8:00 a.m. mass was said by the Bishop. Just before the consecration, we heard singing coming from the back of the church and watched as about thirty little children singing and dancing as they entered the church after their Sunday school lessons out in the church yard. After mass

we proceeded over to the priest house for the official opening and blessing. A small girl in white presented John with a pair of scissors on a white satin pillow. After the ribbon-cutting ceremony, John and I unveiled the plaque which said:

St. John's House.

Built with the support of John Curtin.

To the Glory of God

13/11/05.

The house was built in memory of Jim's father, John's grandfather. John brought the crucifix from his grandfather's coffin from 54 years ago and asked that it be hung on the wall at the entrance to the church for all to see.

After a number of speeches, Bishop Frank, John and I had a final lunch together as Bishop Frank had to leave in order to fly to South Africa for a Bishop's conference. He informed us that he had been invited to Las Vegas next year and that he hoped to be able to arrange for some time in Chatham to meet all of the co-missionaries again. I hope we can make this a reality.

Sunday afternoon, I was scheduled to attend a catechism meeting in the church. There were five different prayer groups studying in different areas of the church. One group was adult, one was preparing for Baptism, another preparing for First Communion and another for Confirmation. My heart went out to a small group of young children learning about Jesus through song and dance and learning to make the sign of the cross. It was encouraging to see how much the church is being used and how it is so important in bringing the community together.

On Monday, I took the day off from official meetings in order to relax, do a little exploring in the desert and get ready for the 40 hour journey home.

A number of projects have been spawned by your efforts. One project (#3) is a to erect a small building in the school yard in which the children can hold their Sunday school classes. We believe that the doctor and his wife will finance that project. For project #4, about 50 mass books at \$6.00 each are needed. I hope to arrange that soon. Another project on the drawing board is a soup kitchen in Francistown where the orphans/students can come after school, take a shower, eat a good meal and do their homework in a quiet place before leaving to find a place to stay for the night – not at home, but with whomever will take them in. Some of the young people live by themselves because both of their parents are dead. They are trying to keep their families together. Last but not least, Sister Cathy is supporting a group of 38 orphans about 140 km from Francistown with food and support for life skills on Saturday – a never ending project with great need throughout the region.

It was a wonderful experience and I wanted to share a little bit of it with each of you. It was hard to say goodbye to all of the beautiful people who went out of their way to make us feel welcome and who showered us with gifts, love and kindness.

Once again, thank you for all of your support. Through your efforts you have truly made a difference in the lives of many wonderful and worthy people.

Theresa