

The Botswana Mission Newsletter

2010



We can do no great things, only small things with great love.
~Mother Teresa

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1. Welcoming Address

The Christmas season is soon to be upon us and my mother, Theresa Curtin, is ready for her annual fundraising party for The Botswana Mission. I am John Curtin, her oldest son, and I recently returned after 3 years in Botswana. My job was to further the work that my mother and family started over 25 years ago after her chance meeting with the now Bishop Frank Nubuasah.

What started out as my desire to “just help people” grew into a full time job and was full of challenges. Working in Africa is so different from my previous global auto executive life, but so very rewarding and I have no regrets. When I left Botswana in October this year, the outpouring of appreciation from the children, parents, other stakeholders, priests and sisters was so humbling. It proved that I touched a lot of lives.

This newsletter is our attempt to show you my work which is not possible without your financial and moral support. Recently I saw the following prayer to my mother’s patron saint and perhaps it says it best.

Saint Theresa's Prayer

May today there be peace within.

May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you.

May you be confident knowing you are a child of God.

Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.

2. Current Projects

- **St. James Catholic Church**

For the past three years I have lived in the priest house at St. James with Father Victor Noronha. The parish continues to grow and now has a congregation of over 600 parishioners. The majority is youth, and their vitality, coupled with the Church choir and their enthusiastic singing, make St. James the envy of many of the other parishes. The catechism classes continue to grow for youth and adults, which ensures their future growth. As a strong Christian community, they provide a number of outreach programs to those in need in the local area. Construction has started on a Multi Purpose Hall which is self-funded by the people of Botswana.



- **Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Support**

The Vicariate of Francistown, of which Bishop Frank heads, has a number of programs that support OVC's. In addition to their work, we carried on a number of activities with your support and the support of local companies and organizations.

- **School Tuition, Uniform and Transportation**

In Botswana, only primary and secondary education is free. Uniforms, books and lunch are provided each day. The Vicariate of Francistown has a number of preschools in major towns and local villages. Some children have families who pay for them to attend but up to 25% of the students are orphans. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) pays for most of these orphaned preschoolers' tuitions via funding from the US President's Emergency Relief Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR). The funding for this PEPFAR three year project has not been renewed and ends in January 2011 - there will be a big financial gap next year.

During the past three years we have helped to fund those preschoolers that were not funded by CRS or that needed special assistance. This involved tuition and uniforms for 3 children, transportation for 20 and one college tuition for an older orphan. This was in addition to the many daily requests for shoes, backpacks and special needs in time of emergency from the less advantaged.



- **School, Sport and Recreational Supplies**

The Francistown Women’s Institute, a charity group, chose the Mother Theresa Resource Centre (MTRC) as their charity of choice for their annual knitting fund raiser. This year they raised a new high of 36900 Pula (about \$5,000 US). This money was used to furnish St. Joseph Preschool and the MTRC with sets of children size plastic tables and chairs, first aid equipment, soccer and net balls, art supplies and repairing the security fence for the MTRC property.



In addition, the Regional Department of Education and Skills Development helped to fund playground equipment which is used all day by the local children. It does raise the question:

“How many kids can you put on a jungle gym?”



○ Toyota Blanket Distribution

Through my work in Botswana, I developed quite an extensive network among many groups of people. Many times in Africa, people donate money and goods which never reach the intended recipients. It ends up in the wrong hands of those who do not need it or those who take it and sell it or just put it in the closet and never distribute it to the needy. As they grew to know me and my work, I became “the go to guy” when they wanted to help people but were not sure how and who to trust.

It gets very cold in Botswana during the winter months of June and July, sometimes even below zero. Imagine living in a mud hut with a thatched roof or in a tent with an outside fireplace for heat and trying to keep you and your family warm. For the past two years, we have distributed 300 blankets each year to some of the Catholic preschools, the Francistown Center for the Deaf, the Lepoi Center for the Visually Impaired and local HIV/Aids support groups.

At the Dukwe Refugee Camp, outside of Francistown, about 3000 people including children and elderly live in UN Refugee tents awaiting for years the disposition of their claim for refugee status. They come from Zimbabwe, Uganda, Namibia, the Congo and elsewhere – comprising a rainbow of languages and religious beliefs. There is a small Catholic community housed in a mud church in the camp. They help identify the needy - **regardless of faith**. Last year we distributed 80 blankets to the elderly and the same amount to orphans this year.

Provided Toyota continues this program in the coming years, local relationships are established and plans are in place to continue this work in my absence.



- Clothing Distribution

Much the same as blankets, I helped to distribute surplus clothes to the needy in Francistown and surrounding villages. Much of the clothing comes via donations to the Francistown Women's Institute or my friends. There is a lot of joy to see the kids, formerly in rags, with, in many cases, their first set of good clothes. They prance and preen just like all other youth – **so little means so much to them**. It is prohibitively expensive to ship clothes for US/Canada unless you have a huge container load. Thus direct donations are best as we can buy clothes quite inexpensive at the local shops.



- Feeding Programs

There are estimates of between 81,000 to 110,000 OVC in Botswana due to HIV/Aids. At present they estimate that 23% of the population has HIV/Aids, down from a high of 42% over 10 years ago. This has resulted in a very high death rate which has lessened due to education and the introduction of free ARV medication for those that need and use them properly. This has put a lot of stress onto the extended families and society to even feed these children.

As previously stated, during school days, most of the kids at least get one good meal a day at school. On the weekends, many of the children are left to fend for themselves and thus suffer a lot from hunger. In the Monarch area of Francistown, the poorest section, we are involved with two feeding programs.

The phase 6 feeding program is sponsored by the Vicariate of Francistown. Most Saturdays they feed between 75 – 125 children a hot meal. Less than 4 km away, we also feed another 150 – 200 children in conjunction with the local Rotary Club for food and The King’s Foundation with pre meal sports activity. This latter is held at the MTRC using our soup kitchen facilities. Plans are underway to provide better shelter from the rain and sun for the children.



- **St. Joseph Preschool Expansion**

Just as I came to Botswana, the St. Joseph Preschool in the village of Sekakangwe was opened. It has continued to grow and prosper. 45 children, of which 25 are classified as Orphans, from the local village and 3 surrounding communities, are given a great education for such a rural setting. It is one of my favorite places to visit, perhaps because when they see my truck, 45 little kids run to the gate and chant “Meester John, Meester John!”.

This year we were able to fund an expansion and add another classroom and offices. Just before I left they had the opening of the expansion combined with my farewell party. About 130 attended representing past and present students, their parents and families along with local politicians and the Chief. It was very emotional event and I miss them dearly.



- **Mother Theresa Resource Center (MTRC)**

The MTRC continues to meet its goal ***“to provide a safe and clean environment where the local children can play, learn and obtain assistance.”*** With the able assistance of our Peace Corps Volunteer, Mike Krause, we have developed a plan and path forward to make the project sustainable. Following is a list of programs now being offered with more to follow with the addition of a full time, local Program Manager and Site Coordinator.

- Boys soccer every Monday, Wednesday and Friday in conjunction with The King’s Foundation
- Local adult team soccer during the evenings after the boys above
- Netball training court used by local out-of-school girls team and smaller court for the younger children to learn
- Girls soccer to be established weekly
- Volleyball to be established weekly
- Art and play activities for the younger children
- Ad hoc games and activities by local children

- Life skills and capacity building courses have been conducted on site by SOS/CRS/The Kings Foundation/BOCAIP
- Monarch WMSAC monthly meetings held at site
- Chosen Generation, a men's peer group meet Friday evenings
- Catholic Ward meetings weekly on Monday
- Catholic mass on Sunday morning and Tuesday evenings

Getting mass at Mother Theresa Resource Centre was a great step towards mobilizing the Catholics in Monarch. Together, with the mobilization of other stakeholders, this is a giant step towards the sustainability of the ***Botswana Mission Project***.



3. Our Thanks

On Behalf of Bishop Frank Nubuasah, all the priests and sisters, his staff and all the people of Botswana, we would like to thank you for your support in the past and hope that you will be able to continue in the future. We estimate we have helped to improve the lives of hundreds of children and families in Botswana. My mom, I and our families are committed to continue this work and with your help and God's blessing, we will.



If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one.
~Mother Teresa



Visit our website – www.BotswanaMission.org

4. Your Support is Needed

In Canada

Please make your cheque or money order in **Canadian dollars payable to Blessed Sacrament Church**. A tax receipt will be mailed to you from Blessed Sacrament Church. Please indicate on the cheque that your donation is for Bishop Frank Nubuasah, SVD for **The Botswana Mission** with project designation if desired.

Mail it to:

Theresa Curtin
32 Faircourt Ave.
Chatham, Ontario N7L 2X1



Phone: 1-519-352-1945

In the United States

Please make your cheque or money order in **US dollars payable to Divine Word Missionaries**. A tax receipt will be mailed to you. Please indicate on the cheque or the money order that your donation is for Bishop Frank Nubuasah, SVD for **The Botswana Mission** with project designation if desired.

Mail it to:

Divine Word Missionaries
P.O. Box 6099
Techy, IL 60082-6099
Attn: Rev. Bro Dennis Newton, SVD
Mission Center



Phone: 1-847-272-7600

Please be assured 100% of your donation will support **The Botswana Mission** and that you will receive an income tax receipt.