



# Under the Southern Cross

September 2007

Years ago, in Thailand, some friends started sending out their newsletters under a banner such as this... It did seem a good idea and so I am trying it now. Thanks to the Fucellas for the idea... Please let me know what you think.

## Zambia

Since last writing, I have been to Zambia twice, first, in January, and then again for meetings in August. Part of the January trip was to help show friends around the Community Schools and meeting with home-based care volunteers. This was very interesting as it gave us the opportunity to see what we were doing through new eyes. The AIDS Program of the CCAP-CoZ is one that has developed both relatively fast and very well. Churches use different models for reaching out to children. For the CCAP it is through the community schools. These were developed to provide not only an education for children who have not been able to access schooling through other means but also to care for the whole child. A good number of these are children orphaned by AIDS or very strongly affected by it.

In the Copperbelt region I did a couple workshops, visited some very interesting folks and preached on Sunday. This is not remarkable but I need to go back and re-do these events as I had picked up some sort of flu bug and had lost my voice. My heart goes out to the folks who had to listen to me try to speak!

Throughout my 5 years here in Africa, I have made it a point to talk to pastors – and other people for that matter – about how HIV and AIDS are affecting them. The pastors and their partners have especially held my concern because pastors are the ones who are expected to be strong for the community, to have the answers and to share everyone else's sorrows. This takes a toll on the pastor and partner. In conversation with Mr. Costin Mwale, the CCAP-SoZ AIDS director and the leaders of the church we have agreed to run a pilot project with the CCAP pastors (there are less than 40) and their partners. So while in Zambia we administered a survey to pastors and their partners to see if there might be any way of identifying and quantifying stress symptoms and their intensity. I did learn

quite a lot from the process, perhaps the best lesson is that I have a lot more to learn. :-)

## Legae - Davyton, South Africa

The second week of April a dream came true for members of the St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Benoni (a predominantly white, suburban church which I attend), St. Mark's Presbyterian church in Davyton (a predominantly black church in a township near Benoni) and SKF (a multinational corporation). After over a year of praying, dreaming and planning together Legae, a community child-care center was opened. Currently about 40 children between the ages of 2 and 6 attend. There is also an after-school program for the older siblings of the kids in the center.

I wish that you could come visit the center. Each time I go I am again impressed with how relaxed and happy the children are, singing songs about how God loves them and that they are special. In one group is a little girl whose tongue was attached to the bottom of her mouth so she was not able to speak. A visitor to the program volunteered to pay for her surgery (which, in the hands of an oral surgeon was really quite a simple procedure). Having the surgery was not an instant cure. She still needs speech therapy so the staff is working with her on exercises to help strengthen her tongue.

In another group is a boy who is happy and healthy-looking. When we first opened the center it was clear that there were some children, like this boy, who were in great need of the antiretroviral therapy (ART). Thanks to some connections SKF has with an AIDS clinic, Legae was able to have a day for HIV testing for both parents and their children who were interested in being tested. Of course the testing was completely voluntary and at the discretion of the parents or guardians, Legae just organized for the nurses and counsellors to come to do the pre- and post- test counselling. It turned out that this little boy and a couple others needed to start ARTs right away and for him it has made a remarkable difference. And, because the best thing you can do for a child is to keep her/his

parents alive, the parents are also eligible for free ARTs.

Which reminds me, when talking with one of the women who helped set up the center recently, she asked if I could look for tinker toys when I am in the US for meetings later this month. So... if you happen to have some old tinker toys that are in good condition please let me know and I will be happy to share them with some kids who will greatly enjoy them.

### **Malawi**

In May I spent several weeks in Malawi. It seems that things are in a time of change there. The Livingstonia Synod AIDS Control Program (LISAP) is in the process of looking for a new director. They have gone far and done well over the past few years so they are praying for someone who will be able to keep the vision of what LISAP can be and how it can be faithful to God and God's people in their area.

The Nkhoma Synod, I was surprised to find, had instated a new director for their AIDS program. He had been there less than a month so was in the period of a steep learning curve as always happens when one is new.

The re-structuring in Blantyre Synod took place a year or more ago but it was so far-reaching that 'things' are still settling into place. They have just elected a new slate of officers so pray for them as they take the Synod forward.

### **NetACT**

The Network of African Congregational Theologians (NetACT) held its Annual General Meeting in Lusaka, Zambia the first week of August. (My second visit to Zambia.) NetACT is a network (as the name suggests) of reformed theological institutions throughout Southern Africa, many of which are also our PC(USA) partners. This is the second year that they have asked me to attend. They are very concerned that the pastors and lay leaders that are being trained in their institutions come out prepared to address HIV and AIDS issues with the communities in which they will be serving. One thing to come out of the meeting this year is that each institution will need to revisit their curriculum on HIV and AIDS to see if and how it needs to be up-graded. At this point I am hoping that we will be able to do this in a gathering with the AIDS point people from each institution in December but... we shall see.

### **Looking Ahead**

Tumekutana Tomorrow I head off for Kenya to help with final preparations for Tumekutana, a conference for African Presbyterian women leaders from all over the continent. It is the first time that a gathering of this type has taken place. Please pray for the meeting, 9 – 13 September. I must say that I am really very excited about this.

Meetings in Louisville A few days after getting back from Kenya I will turn around and go to the US for a couple different meetings. First is with the International Health Ministries Office to look at policy and goals etc.. Second will be the Celebration of Grace conference where there will also be some meetings of networks of presbyteries and congregations that have relationships with partner churches throughout the world.

Home again After a couple weeks vacation in the US I will return to South Africa and hit the road running. Almost the entire month of November and part of December are already full with visiting a presbytery here in South Africa, a retreat for mission personnel and a trip to Zambia to do some strategic planning... but more on all that next time.

Interpretation Assignment In 2008 it will be time to spend several months in the US. This will be a time for speaking in churches and renewing connections with folks around the country. At this point I believe that the time frame will be beginning sometime the middle or end of April and I am not sure just how many months it will entail. It is not too early to let me know now if you would like me to come visit.... :-)

Finally, I hope this finds you in good health and good spirits. The spring has finally arrived here after an extended winter so we are celebrating temperatures in the 80's but down to the 40's at night.

Blessings,

*Janet*

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