

HIV/AIDS, Church and Lifestyle

I was in Lusaka, Zambia with a group from the Bopaganang Basha youth Centre in Francistown. We went to learn how churches are responding to HIV/AIDS. There was one programme that we encountered that seems to have potential in our ministry and to the churches that we are working with. It was called the Behaviour Change Programme. It is a four day event offered by a number of organizations including the Reformed Church, where people are encouraged to look at themselves and consider the consequences of certain life style choices. They are invited to choose to make changes.

HIV/AIDS is not a simple disease. It affects people at their most intimate, and it touches people as they define who they are. I have not been here long, and so I am still learning about the disease, and about how it affects people. But at the core it is a disease about life style and choices. I am not sure what traditional Batswana lifestyles were like. What I do know is that through colonial policy trying to keep workers flowing to the South African mines and the forces of modernity, traditional family values have been largely lost. This means that modelling of appropriate male-female behaviour, both before and after marriage has been largely lost. The society here in Botswana has undergone the sort of changes in the last 40 years that Canada has taken 150 to make. This puts people at incredible levels of stress, one outlet is to turn to substance abuse. Young women desperately want to get married. It seems that getting pregnant is an understandable if not encouraged approach to getting married, though it is not particularly successful. While not part of official culture, it appears that premarital and extramarital girlfriends and boyfriends have been and are common. All this puts people at incredible risk for contacting HIV/AIDS. There are many ideas in circulation about how HIV/AIDS is contacted. Even with massive public education efforts, people are often not clear on how it is contacted, and the risks of various behaviour.

Thus a programme that spells out the consequences of actions in the context of lifestyle may be able to reach people who do not hear the current warnings and connect them with the life they are living. Part of life style choices is also recognizing purpose and meaning in ones life, which is related to choosing to recognize God and to follow God in one's life.

I am hoping that this programme maybe at least one way that we can get a handle on HIV/AIDS ministry in Botswana. It is a pressing need, with 37.5 percent of the Adults infected with HIV, and much higher rate of infection among Young Adults. If this does not work we will continue to look for other ways to help the churches we work with minister to people with HIV/AIDS and equally importantly communicate to people about choosing life, and making changes in their lives to reflect God's values and life giving values.

Glyn



Group in Lusaka listening to Felix Mwale at the Anglican Children's Project.

Partners

We need partners to do what we have been sent here to do. Part of our task is to develop African partners. This includes the people who teach bible classes, and the congregations and congregational leaders who we work with.

We also need North American partners. Mennonite Church Canada Witness our sending agency is an important partner in our task. Mennonite Church Canada is made up of individuals and congregations. We need individuals and congregations who will partner with us in the work we have undertaken. Congregational Partners are congregations who will take an interest, pray and support the work that is happening here. Partners are also congregations that share with us needs so that we can pray for you. If you think that your congregation would be interested in being a partner with us in this ministry with African Initiated Churches in Botswana let us know and we will help make the connections, or contact Ingrid Miller at the Mennonite Church Canada offices.

Snapshots of Life in Gaborone

*Today we went with a Mostswana friend to the Main Mall for lunch. The Main Mall is the downtown shopping area. It is a series of buildings situated between two main roads that covers a city block. The buildings face inward to an open courtyard which extends the length of the block. In this courtyard people spread out the things they have to sell. This ranges from curios (many of which come from other African countries), to newspapers and phone cards to vegetables and fruits. (For those of you who have read the No 1 Detective Agency books this is where the President's Hotel is located.) At lunch time women set up tables and sell meals. For 8 Pula per plate you get a generous meal of traditional Setswana food. It's a great cultural experience!

*Every Tuesday evening I go to class in Old Naladi. Following class I take a young woman to her house. She and her son (Grade 7) rent one bedroom in a house. Outside of this house is a "tuck shop". Tuck shops are located all over the place and are where people go to buy food and drinks (including alcohol). Every evening (except for the very coldest nights) there are always about a half a dozen men hanging around, drinking and socializing. Excessive consumption of alcohol is a major problem and creates many other drinking related problems.

*Funerals are a part of everyday life here. We were told that the village where we lived had seven funerals last weekend. Four on Saturday and three on Sunday. Only two of the people were considered to be "old".

*Combi's, vans which have scheduled routes, are a regular means of transportation for people here in Botswana. A couple of weeks ago the fare went from One pula twenty five thebe to two pula (50 cents Canadian) per ride. While 75 thebe may not seem like a huge increase it is significant for those who are already on tight budgets. Someone like Mavis (our household helper) must now spend an additional 3 Pula a day to get herself to work and one of her children to school. This now represents about 20 percent of her monthly pay. We will increase her salary to help cover some of the increase but most employers are not doing this. The discrepancy between those that have and those that do not just seems to grow bigger everyday.

One Year Later...

On August 19th we celebrated our first year anniversary of arriving in Gaborone. We have learned and experienced much in the past year. While our Setswana is far from where we would like it we are slowly picking it up. We are feeling more comfortable with the ways of this culture and feel that we are continuing to make strides in understanding the culture and the people. We are grateful for the ministry which we have been given and are feeling good about the relationships that we have established with people from AIC churches. As we learn more about the Bible Teaching Programme we are discovering ways to nurture the teachers and strengthen the programme. As we look forward to the year to come we recognize that we will no longer be able to use the "we're new here" as quickly as we have in the past. We see many new possibilities in front of us and are looking forward to seeing where they will lead us.

Susan

In the Future

Sept. 7 Third Term Begins for Girls at Thornhill.

Sept. 7-10 Evaluation and planning time for Glyn and Susan

Sept.18-27 Susan in Burkino Faso to attend AIMM meetings.

Oct. 5-7 Meetings with AIMM mission representatives and our Batswana partners here in Gaborone.

Every Week

Monday: Classes in Francistown, Selebi-Pikwe, Old Naledi, Bontleng and Broadhurst in Gaborone,

Tuesday: Class in Old Naledi in Gaborone

Wednesday: Class at the Spiritual Healing church in Gaborone

Saturday: Classes in Mogoditshane and Kumakwane

From our family...



The main road from Nata to Kasane, Botswana

The girls just completed their second term at Thornhill. This term was particularly busy for Maeyken as she was part of the Standard 3-7 school play. A delightful musical comedy called “Ali Babba and the Forty Thieves” was presented three nights in a row the second last week of school. Maeyken thoroughly enjoyed her first opportunity to sing and act and is already looking forward to the next opportunity.

We are discovering the rhythm of life here in Gaborone. Three terms of school where we are primarily focussed on ministry here in Botswana each followed by about a one month where our schedule is not dictated by the girl’s so much! We will use these times to do some extra family things. This holiday we spent one week in Northern Botswana and in Southern Zambia. The highlight of this trip had to be elephants, elephants and more elephants. Everywhere we went there were elephants! Other highlights include:

*visiting with former Botswana MCCer’s Art and Ruth Thiessen at their house on the shores of Lake Kariba. (Zambia) We spent a wonderful day with them at the island lodge that they are managing.

*Seeing water as far as they eye could see at the Nata Pans (Botswana). With the water comes lots of birds. We especially enjoyed the pelicans swimming in the water and stood in breathless awe as a group of them flew directly over our vehicle.

*Spending a day at Victoria Falls, (Zambia side) enjoying the sound and sight of tons of water rushing over the falls, getting soaked in the mist, eating lunch at the top of the falls, and just enjoying being in God’s wonderful world.

*A boat cruise on the Chobe River (Botswana). We got close up looks at such wonderful animals as Cape Buffalo, Crocodiles, Hippopotamuses, various species of birds and of course Elephants! Particularly memorable was watching two elephants swim/walk across the river to the island. As soon as they got out of the water they immediately found a mud hole and began covering themselves with mud, flinging the mud around with the big feet and their trunks.

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Our web site which includes
pictures and previous
newsletters:

Please note, for technical reasons,
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Please Pray for...

AIC Bible teaching ministry. Thank God for wonderful people that are dedicated to teaching classes in a variety of locations. Pray for us as we discern ways that we can be most helpful in nurturing these teachers.

HIV/AIDS affects a large portion of the population, particularly young and middle aged adults, those who are parents and are in their most productive years in the work force. Pray for this country and the challenges that are faced. Pray for us as we discern ways to work with churches dealing with this crisis.

Planning. We have committed ourselves to evaluating and planning at the beginning of each school term (three times a year). We want to prayerfully consider what we have done, how it has worked, and what we should be doing over the next couple of months. We would ask you to join with us in prayer for our planning from September 6 to 10. Pray that we be honest with ourselves, and open to hearing God lead us through the next steps.

Contentment. We all have our days when we miss the familiar from home. One of the reasons our trip to Zambia and Northern Botswana was such a delight was because of water. Everywhere we have lived up till now we have been surrounded by rivers or canals and have been close to lakes. We miss water very much and now realize what a big role it played in renewing and refreshing our souls. We also miss our friends and family. This summer we missed a 50th Wedding Anniversary celebration for Glyn's parents. All were home except for us. We also miss going up to Markdale for a home cooked meal and time to "hang out" with family there. While being here in Botswana may be a wonderful opportunity for all of us, there is a cost. Pray for us that we can be creative in the ways in which we find renewal and refreshment and how we nurture important relationships long distance.



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