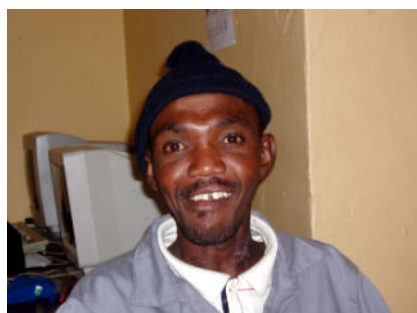


Hello everyone.

Finding where to begin these newsletters is always difficult. There is so much that happens every day, things that are not always connected but when put together in the experience of a day or a week, they stitch together the big blanket of this ministry. But it's amazing how easily complacent one can get – even when it comes to poverty!



Thanks to Hamilton's contribution driving the pick-up route, and although I still had to do some work one or two days a week, I was able to take some time out over the holidays. What a world of good that did to renew my perspective and the vision God has given me for what he has called us to do. Spending each day surrounded by people living in poverty can drain you but also make you strangely complacent to it! Yes people are suffering and live difficult lives – but life goes on! You build relationships, you see people around you with enough to eat. They wear decent clothes, they smile and laugh, they have a plan for their futures and they are working towards it and you think this is really not all that bad! Then you realize the reason it doesn't seem all that bad is because of all you have allowed the Lord to do through you and all that He has given through the many other people who are responding to His call!



Not spending most of my time out there during the holidays has opened my eyes again to see the immense discrepancy between the way these people have to live and the way many of us are privileged to live! You don't really get it until you've been surrounded by both ways of life. Glad to say that complacency has left the building!

Many other feeding programmes close during the holidays so we were loaded with food almost every day, and this has helped us penetrate deeper into the community around our Centre in KwaZakhele. The kind of places where there is simply no room for complacency. Many, many people have been walking up from two desperately poor shack areas known as Yizo Yizo and Masakhane-1, about a kilometer away from us, on the bank of part of the Swartkops River. Sometimes up to 150 families a day! Needless to say Nondo and her team of helpers have been feeling a bit overwhelmed!

I began putting in full days again on Monday the 16<sup>th</sup> Jan and we arranged to begin interviewing the people who were coming to us for food – to assess their situations so that we can get a grip on our food parcels for the year ahead. We need to weed out the “chancers” (those who do have sufficient income to meet their basic needs or those who would rather spend what money they do get on alcohol instead of supporting their children etc) and then scale the rest based on their individual needs. Then we need to decide where to draw a line that will enable us to accommodate as many families as possible with the food we have. These will also be the people who's children we will be trying to help the most with their education and encouraging them to get involved with the programmes run at the Centre.



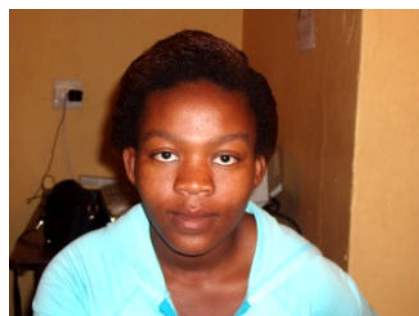
This all sounds great as theory, to me too, until Alma and I arrived that Friday morning to begin the process. There were already 40 odd (seems the “chancers” knew it would be best to stay away!) hungry people waiting for us – some have since even slept outside our gates waiting for

food and to be interviewed! As we drove up to the gates and got out the car, something inside me began to sink. I realized that, unlike these hungry people waiting for me, I could choose what I had for breakfast that morning. "Lets see? Weetbix? Pronutro? Toast? Tea/coffee? Hmm, what shall it be?" But now I had to begin choosing who would even be able to eat at all this year! I felt ashamed! All I could do was greet and look away as we went inside. I couldn't bring myself to look in their faces. In this sense, the past week has been a terrible one!



There is no way I can turn away from all of this though. I am determined to carry on and care for and help the poor and their children just as the Lord has called us as Christians to do. I believe that because of the Lord's work through this ministry, many of these people's children will not live in poverty one day and that they will know, better than many of us, the saving power of the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

I have been very encouraged by the five "helpers" we have working with us daily at the Centre. All from poor situations themselves, they are dedicated and seem to have a new vigor this year. Almost like they are beginning to realize that they are part of something worthwhile and that if



they sincerely work at it, there are people who will support them and their families and their community and that many of the desperate prayers they've had in their hearts almost all their lives will be answered. They want to work! And I can see a meaningful momentum beginning to build up. I'm excited!

As I've said before, we have a few things we would like to get moving on this year, like an educare programme for children at risk (poverty/disease), an after school assistance programme for kids at primary school, better recourses for the teenagers etc. Our biggest need in this area though would be to find the right people to do the job. This has occupied my mind a lot over the holidays but already we have a few possibilities! It's amazing how things happen and fit together when you're in part of God's plan! But more about all of this later when it starts coming together. Pray for it, please.

Jan 26<sup>th</sup> now. – Yesterday afternoon we went down to Yizo Yizo to see some of the people who have been coming up to us for bread, and address them. I hope you and I will never know what it is like to live like these people do. Spot the kids' "playground"! Bricks and pieces of plastic for toys! No money around here for school stuff. There are no ablutions, running water or electricity for the shacks in this picture and the people living there suffer through no cause of their own. We can help them and help produce a better future for their children. Today we are holding the last of the interviews for now.



We have interviewed 86 people from different households so far but were not able to get to everyone. About twelve will return tomorrow for their chance. We have spoken with able-bodied men and women with children they are trying to raise and who have lost the jobs they had and not been able to get new ones. There has been a 20-year-old girl who has been looking after her

younger siblings after their mother died of AIDS two years ago. She has finished Grade 12 and has been putting her four brothers and sisters through school with money she was earning as a nanny last year but she doesn't have that job anymore. There have been women who are raising the children of their drunken brothers as their own. They are respected as mothers by the children who go to school and do the best they can with what little they have. 86 different stories so far! I wonder how many we will be able to help? What has really humbled me during these interviews has been the way many of these people have really gone out of their way to wear the best they can to be as presentable as possible to us. The clothes may be old hand-me-downs but they are clean, neat and truly the best they can do.

All our regular programmes (Sunday School, Good News Club, Emmanuelle Teen Club, Teen Lifeskills, Soup Kitchen) are coming back online with good attendance and we have also started delivering to some of the other ministries we support but who closed for the holidays. Things are stretched a bit thin though due to the added people we have been able to reach, so a lot of work needs to be done building our support base of bread from the stores. Please pray for us in this area. And if you have any contact in a bakery that is looking for a better way to get rid of it's waste, please approach them on our behalf and give me a call.



I've asked the teenagers I work with to write us a letter telling their life stories, details of what they plan to achieve this year and what they still need for school this year and why their families aren't able to supply them. When I have received them all I'll write another short letter with some of the details. They have until Mon 30<sup>th</sup> Jan. In the meantime though, if anyone would like to contribute towards buying or donating stationery for these kids, please let me know.



Thank you to those of you who have decided to join others this year in supporting me financially and thank you to those of you who have taken it upon yourselves to spread the word, get people involved and raise support, in your spheres of influence, for myself and the ministry's needs. There are some exciting stories to tell, but another time. What really excites me is that people are standing up in answer to God's call to them and doing something about it. This is not about me being out in the townships, it's about our individual obedience to God. And that obedience can serve God's purpose to make the needed difference in the lives and families of many people like those whose faces are on these pages.

"and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." - Isaiah 58 vs 10&11.

I find it is always good to take the Lord up on His word.

Thank you again.

Blessings.

M a r k