



COMBINED CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES TO THE POOR

24 January 2007

I should have put out a letter at the end of December but, honestly, I think I came a bit too close to “frying in my own pan”! I’ve been trying to figure out what it is about this kind of work that makes the stress so different to the stresses found in other kinds of work.

The first (maybe obvious) point is that you’re constantly immersed in an entirely unfamiliar environment which creates an understandable strain. A little less obvious is that so much of the work is open-ended, i.e.: you can’t really attach deadlines to many of the goals you set. For the most part you find yourself involved in the lives of a community of people in whom the capacities enabling higher levels of competence and independence were never instilled and you have little control on a final outcome which often leads to feelings of frustration and sometimes even feelings of failure. Progress is made but the sheer immensity of the problem often makes you feel like there is little hope.

Added to this, December tends to be a rather disappointing month! For many the wheels simply fall off! Attendance numbers at the programmes decline as the “festive season” takes hold and conditions in poor communities, like the one we work in, degenerate. A regular volunteer who has made wonderful personal progress over the year comes to work fall-down-drunk and you have no choice but to send him away! A teenager who has finally found the confidence to start coming out of her shell and take charge of her life suddenly withdraws again and you discover how the situation in her home has again become a place of instability, drunkenness and abuse! Children are torn away from everything they know to live with a relative in another part of the country because their own parents aren’t able to be responsible enough to care for them adequately. You get a scribbled note for help from a teenager who has spent the weekend lying on his bed unable to get up while his parents care more for the “festive season”. After we get him to hospital and discover the TB he suffered from years ago has moved into the bone marrow in his legs, our volunteers are the only ones who visit and care for him and he doesn’t hear from his father and mother until we take him home a week later! The “festive season”!?!? December tends to be a rather disappointing month!

Like I said though, progress is made and if it wasn’t for the change in the lives of so many of the people who participate in and assist with the programmes we run from the Centre, there would be no incentive to carry on. So, let’s get to the good news!



The Lighthouse Family Church youth, Firehouse, ran a holiday club (3rd this year!) for the children, themed “Jesus Is My Superhero!”, which

was a blast like it always is. So many of the community children find the kind of love they need when these teenagers (and a few adults) come and play with them,





hold them, encourage them, educate them Its so amazing, every time!

Firehouse, also hosted the Emanuel youth from the Centre for a night at the church. They were treated to supper and desert, a full youth

programme, Christmas gifts and a sleepover! It has been great to see relationships develop and grow between these two groups and the impacts this is having on both sides.



Lighthouse hosted our volunteers for a sit down dinner, at the church, with volunteers from some other groups to encourage them, bless them and thank them for the work they do – “serving the servers”.

It was so great to be able to bless so many of the people we work amongst with something special just

before Christmas. We were given 20 food buckets for our volunteers and various individuals and groups gave money which enabled us to bless our volunteers with between R100 and R500 each depending on their involvement. Remember that most of our community volunteers came to us originally needing help but ended up giving from what little they had to work together and make the Centre operate the way it does.



From the money we received we were also able to give every kid who came to the final Sunday School for the year a crammed sweet-pack and a small toy. We shared the true story of what the season was really all about (including a drama by the children) and “Father Christmas” pitched up to give presents (attendance awards) to those with a good attendance record. Really nice gifts, the kind of things you and I like buying for our own children. Other



than the odd little-one screaming in terror at the sight of Santa (!) there were enough tears to be seen on the faces of children and some parents who were just overwhelmed by what they had received! I was so encouraged and at the same time disturbed knowing that what was given probably had little effect on the daily lives of those who were able to give and what a HUGE difference it made to those who received! We really are able to do so much – too

many scriptures come to mind to write down here but I'm sure you know what I'm talking about.



We were also able to take some (attendance record again) of the teenage youth to the beach for an afternoon and get KFC for supper. A first for some! A week later we took the Centre volunteers



down for the same treatment. Again, a first for some!



A personal highlight for me though was taking seven teenagers, who really applied themselves to their lives and made great progress during the year, out for an amazing day. We went to the movies, had lunch at the Spur and with a combination of donated money, vouchers and discounts we were able to give them R250 each to buy brand new clothes!

Talk about incentive to keep going! And it turns out that of the seven – five are orphans, six had never been to watch a movie in a cinema before, five had never had a meal in a restaurant before and four had never been to a shop to buy new clothes before that day! It was a truly overwhelming time.



Over and over again people came to me saying, "This is the best day/This is the best time/This is the best Christmas I have ever had!" WOW!! - really, WOW!!

Thank you everyone who was involved in some way by being a part of blessing these people, collecting money and/or giving towards making all this happen. The Centre never really closes completely, most of the programmes close for the holidays but we carry on collecting and distributing food around town and in the community around the Centre. We also arranged to play BIG SCREEN movies at the Centre for the kids each Wednesday which was a big treat. Thanks to those of you who went out to the Centre to touch base for me while I was away. Someone even volunteered a week of their own holiday to drive the bakkie, do the food collections and spend time being in the community so that Hamilton could have a break. What's interesting is that he says that of all the things he did with his time while on holiday, he enjoyed that week the most! Thank you.



I'm beginning to feel that we are now beginning to accomplish some of what we have set out to do. Not make people happy for a day and ease our own consciences, but to work

together and alongside each other giving of our abundance, meeting the needs and some of the desires of our poorer neighbours who are unable to do it for themselves and building into the lives of children so that they too may one day have the capacity to live self-sustaining and productive lives. Bringing hope where it can't be found, exchanging relief for oppression, friendship for suspicion, love for fear, bringing life where there is death. This is what Christ has called us to.

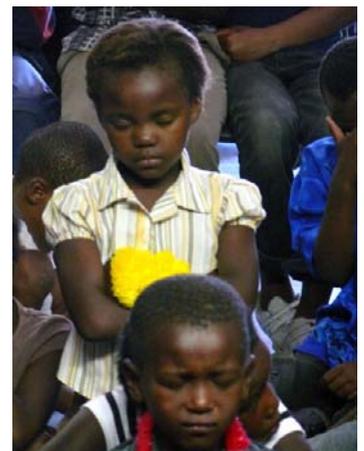


2007 promises to be a lot of work. The year has started well but with many challenges. Our vegetable garden has been working well but it is really taking a beating from the heat wave we are experiencing. The school year has begun and the great deficiencies in the capacity of many schools to educate properly are again painfully visible – as is the ability of many families to provide all that their children need to work effectively. Our Centre Management Team made up of community volunteers has come together nicely and are looking forward to being stretched and learning new skills. We will be looking at reaching further into the community (schools, etc) and there are more individuals and groups than ever before who have come out and “walked the land” and had a “look-see” and realised just what it is they can do and are preparing to come back out and work! And work it will be!



I know I've put these words from a song by John Michael Talbot in a newsletter before, but they capture for me so clearly what we, who have found more than just belief, but truth and the reality of redemption given by God through Jesus Christ, are to do. –

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which He looks compassion on this world, yours are the feet with which He walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes. You are His body”



We do have many, many needs but I'll give it a couple of days and then send out a list with some of the plans for the year and what will be needed. If you would like to get hold of me, my cell no. is 082 473 4389, home no. 041 360 2780 and my email address is mark@ccmp.org.za.

Bless you all.

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