

3 June, 2008

Greetings friends!

This is a long overdue letter! After our 3 month sabbatical we jumped back into full swing and somehow along the way a whirlwind of events delayed us from the chance of sharing with you life on this side of the world.

The 3 sites continue to grow. In total we have over 1100 children. The 3 safe parks have been beautified by the CYCW's with the help of Mike and Matt. Trees and flowers have been planted, containers colorfully painted, books and educational toys made accessible to the children...

The teen or Adolescent Development Program has been started in each site together with a special program for children with impairments. The CYCW's remain full of life, love and passion.

The effects of the global economy are very much felt here. Food prices have soared, and essentials like mealie meal, rice, and bread have become luxury items in many households. All of this in a province which has the dubious distinction of being the most ineffective and corrupt government, with the highest rate of unemployment paints a pretty bleak picture.

However, as we still linger on thoughts of the Feast of the Visitation, which we celebrated a few days ago, it becomes more evident that our call to follow Jesus is summarized in this Feast.

If someone asks us what we do, I will just say, visit. If someone asks what we have been doing these passed months, I would say we visited. And if someone asks what are our plans for the future? We will visit.

It may seem that this is an incredible waste of time, or maybe we are a bit lazy. Maybe because our task-oriented societies need to justify and quantify how we spend every minute of the day. To say we visit may not help us get more funding. (As Mary or Elizabeth didn't get any funding.) Nevertheless, to visit qualifies for a liturgical celebration. Certainly it wasn't an ordinary visit. Mary shows us what to do with our time. When we become aware that the Word lives within each one of us, we realize that we are invited to encounter the other. Mary's response the Annunciation is to hurry off and visit her older cousin who lives in the hill country (is this a hint for backward?), who certainly would have been better assisted by someone well-versed in childbirth and motherhood, instead of this young, pregnant, first time mother- to- be that still had a lot to explain to Joseph, her parents, and the rest of Nazareth. As the women greeted, Elizabeth recognized immediately through Mary's voice that something really big was happening. The Word is in their midst! Elizabeth's child immediately leapt for joy, and Elizabeth cried a prayer that we have repeated for centuries since. "Blessed are you, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." And Mary's response with her Magnificat shouts of victory recited generation after generation by those who awaited justice, awaited freedom, recognized the mercy of a God who raised the lowly on high, a God who finally fulfilled the promise to Abraham, shouting "God in our midst."

This is what the CYCW's do everyday, every morning. They visit old women who have much more experience in child rearing, in battling struggles, but it's in that sacred space of mutual recognition of the gifts that God has given to each one of us, when this ancient scene takes place all over again, as it took place in those dusty hills of Galilee centuries ago.

They teach us that the present moment is the moment in which eternity breaks into our lives. And that ordinary life carries an invitation to recognize the God within us and within each other.

That is why we want to say thank you to all those who have visited us, visited the Isibindis. It has helped the communities in Ilinge, Ezibeleni, and Alice to leap for joy, and to proclaim a God they have experienced in themselves. An absolute surrender to God as Mary teaches us in Nazareth, generates life and makes the Promise actualized. All this teaches us that if we spend more time visiting and recognizing the God within others, we will create places of great joy, encounter, places of recognition. We know we are far from that as the violent events and the image of the Mozambiquen refugee burning to death make us aware that we may have churches full of people on Sundays, we may put a lot of energy into "planting churches", organizing conferences, writing vision and mission statements, we may write powerful sermons, but it's only when we walk down the street and cross the borders that separates us from those who are different that we will pour the Divine Life into the World. Ordinary actions such as a visit, with no agenda, no time frame, no goal, no speech, is what transmits care and love.

As we see Kosi walking into the home of Nomhla who is very sick, and whose 10 year old son takes care of her..., as we see Phumeza walking into the Magistrate's court advocating for a child whose estate was kidnapped by the bank, as we see Pheliwe walk into the home of Mandi,¹³ who was raped repeatedly over a period of years consoling her... as we see Nomvuyo walk into the shack of a severely impaired young girl who had no access to proper care advocate for her first wheelchair... then we recognize in them glimpses of Mary, and it's in the sound of these very ordinary women's voices that God awakens in us the realization that God is in our midst. We are very grateful to the many women and men, Noxolo, Pumi, Andile, David, Lindiwe, Janet, Cikizwa, Mary, Fezeka, Gary, Nwabisa, Sindiswa.... who have helped us to understand that the church is not a distribution center of whatever we want to distribute: rituals, prayers, power, social models but rather an organic community, like the one that the simple girl from Nazareth builds as she carries God to the dusty mountains.

The visit of Mary and Elizabeth did not set up a program for pregnant women, but modeled a way of living that incarnates the reign of God. That reign didn't spread through organizational establishments or structural systems. It spread through touch, through visit, through life shared. It spread through people who like many in this forgotten land wake up early and hurry to the neighbor's home to prepare breakfast, to walk orphan children to school, to sit with those who are awaiting visit. May we all have the courage to receive the Gospel from them and finally rush to the hill country that God has pointed to each one of us.

In the heart of God, Monica and Heidi

