

LETTERS FROM SOUTHERN AFRICA
'I learned from, advocated with, and walked beside'
August 15, 2010

Dear Friends, Family, and Supporting Congregations,

With all good intentions, I failed to get a letter sent prior to leaving South Africa. The time went so fast and I continued to work pretty much up until the day of departure.

There is the saying "Nothing is consistent except change" and even when we know it is coming, it is never easy (even the good changes) as there are always adjustments to make in our lives. I ask God to help me remember, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven" Ecclesiastes 3:1

I have experienced and learned so much from so many people and saying good-bye to friends and extended family was really hard.

- From LUCSA I have learned true team work and team building from my colleagues, that what one is experiencing, the rest of us do too. To be effective in reaching goals, it takes a team working as one. The African concept of Ubuntu, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu explained, is that one can't exist as a human being in isolation and that we are all interconnected and what each of us does individually affects the whole world. "A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed." "I am because you are."
- I've learned listening. That the beautiful music I hear in Africa comes not from reading the music but the harmony from really Listening to each other's voices. Listening to God's voice through others.
- I've learned that family in the African context is not 'mother, father, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, cousins' but that my auntie is also my mother that my cousin is really my brother, and we give to each other as if living under one roof.
- I've learned true faith. That in times of HIV, sickness, hardships, death, extreme poverty and loss of jobs, that many people are like Job, continuing to praise God, thanking him for what they have, even if it is only bread for that day. I've learned to put more trust in God, that he will guide us and provide for tomorrow.

News from LUCSA

I have spoken to my former supervisor several times since arriving home. The first week in July, a workshop was held in Johannesburg for the new Malaria Initiative and was attended by the Malaria Field Officers from Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi. This initiative is integrated into the LUCSA AIDS Action Programme as a response to the concerns voiced by member church communities during the HIV-AIDS 2008 3 year evaluation.

Malaria is a major cause of morbidity and mortality in the sub-region. Many people in Southern Africa live in malaria mosquito infested areas and children under-five and pregnant women are at greatest risk of contracting the disease. The Field Officers were trained on developing strategies, preparing action plans and budgets for their respective churches to respond, filling in the gaps and supporting the country strategic plans.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church Betseranai Advocacy Choir from Zimbabwe was invited to attend the International AIDS Conference in Vienna, Austria in July. This group of 20 persons living with HIV is devoted to advocating for non-discrimination of people living with HIV and AIDS. Their music has encouraged many people in Zimbabwe to respond

positively to voluntary counseling and testing (VCT). The choir then proceeded to Stuttgart, Germany to attend the Lutheran World Federation's 11th Assembly.

The InfoHut (computer and HIV program) is being supported to start in the rural areas of Zimbabwe to continue in mitigating the spread of HIV-AIDS among youth.

News from Home

I had a wonderful welcome home with close friends meeting me at the airport, phone calls and a lot of catching up.

After a week of a minor health issue, I called in plumbers to deal with a 5-6 month old slow leaky drain which ended up in the room where I had things boxed up and stored.

Fortunately, the wall and carpet were the worst damaged as I had old family pictures, etc. in plastic containers. A friend just finished repairing and plastering the ceiling and wall and now I'm painting. Now, I will be looking for transportation and a job. There are opportunities opening up and if I keep knocking at doors, God will lead me in the direction he wants me to go.

I flew back to Missouri July 11th to see my sister and pick up her car they offered for me to use as they are traveling. I arrived back in Colorado on the 22nd and left for Chicago on the 25th for the ELCA Mission Conference. The re-integration part of the program was attended by 3 couples and 3 singles ending their Global Mission contracts with ELCA. Some had been in service 12-14 years. It was a time where, under the guidance of a psychologist, we could talk, cry, laugh and share our experiences of leaving one culture and re-entering a "new" one. We were also able to be with those returning to their countries, some individuals I met 4 years ago.

There are opportunities opening up and if I keep knocking at doors, God will lead me in the direction he wants me to go.

I humbly thank ELCA for the opportunity to serve and walk beside LUCSA these last 4 years, for the supporting Lutheran congregations with their prayers, letters, and financing, and of course, I am grateful for the support of my friends and family. I know the economy has been strained in the U.S. and many people are without jobs and are having to make sacrifices. Upon my return I'm seeing people relying more on each other, trading services and going out of their way to help each other. This is not a bad change. It is Ubuntu. It is the way of our Lord.

To our supporting congregations, please continue to include ELCA Global Mission service support in the future. ELCA has a large impact on people's lives in assisting with schools, medical clinics, food distribution and other areas of need identified by the local churches. Go to www.elca.org web site to learn more about LUCSA's HIV-AIDS Program and the Malaria Initiative.

In God's Love,
Paula

My son, Justin, learning how to
cook sudsa with Auntie
Beatrice

