

Makeni Ecumenical Centre Newsletter

January – March 2009



In this quarterly newsletter of MEC, we have covered some important events which have taken place between January and March 2009 and we have included interesting stories of events that took place in the later part of 2008. The year 2009 started with a lot of enthusiasm and determination, with the first three months being quite eventful for most departments.

Staff Development - the way forward

Our Personnel and Administration Manager, Mr Joe Silwenga, was away for six weeks at the summer school of the Copperbelt University completing the third year of his five years Bachelor of Business Administration. We are happy at his determination to complete this course in spite of his heavy work load. It is a step in the right direction for MEC to have better qualified staff who are able to cope with local as well as international demands. The course Mr Silwenga is taking costs around K6.3m (Euro. 1000), which he pays for himself since MEC is at the moment unable to assist those who desire to upgrade their academic and professional qualifications. Our two very able bookkeepers, Mr Jacob Nyirenda and Binwell Sinkala, are also pursuing their part-time studies in accountancy and are also paying themselves for their studies.

Mr Nyirenda and Mr Sinkala have done a wonderful job getting the accounting system up to date with the help of some kind friends of MEC and our auditors. The work which has been done has been commended by our auditors.

Basic School – Mixed blessings and spirit of excellence

The Basic School was very busy in the last quarter of 2008 and the first of 2009. Towards the end of last year we had a visiting Mathematics and Science teacher from the Netherlands, Mr Jan Kars. He made some valuable contributions and assessments of performance both of pupils and teachers and highlighted areas of weakness, which are now being addressed. We thank Mr Kars for his hard work and goodwill to MEC.

The pupils of MEC Basic School recently won a second prize and a beautiful trophy at a provincial Anti-drugs Debate. Congratulations to our leaders and pupils!

An Art Club has been started with the help of a retired art teacher and a key member of the Friends of Makeni – Mr Jan Veldkamp. The Art Club is being run by Mrs Mavis Simanansa Shamakole and meets every week on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The club provides an opportunity for the school to discover artistic talent in the school so that it can be fostered and developed. We thank Mr Veldkamp for finding and repairing, in a most ingenious manner, an old discarded steel cupboard for the use of the club and storage of art materials.

The school now also has Chongololo and Chipembere (Rhino) Nature Clubs, which also meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The clubs, which are under the oversight of Mr Charles Mbale, have plans to go on a Saturday morning bush walk around Lilayi lodge in May. This will be great fun for the children to see a bit of wild life. They have been to Munda Wanga ("My Garden") Botanical Garden and Zoo. We express our sincere thanks to Dr Pierre and Lee Ann Dil of Canada for their financial contribution towards this club.

Carpentry – Production Unit gaining momentum.



The carpentry department has had a wonderful injection of well-timed financial help from the Church in Barendrecht in Holland to extend the Workshop and became operational early last year. A three-phase electrical power installation was connected to the workshop to enable the new industrial wood-working machines to be used. We are pleased that upon installation, everything functioned quite perfectly. We say a great thank you to our supporters at Barendrecht in Holland.

Despite a low intake of students due to various challenges, the department has been working with determination to become self-sufficient. A summer tent inherited from the Dutch Biogas team has been put to excellent use, and has become a show room on the Basketball court for the department. The finished items like beds, cupboards, tables, stools and doors are on display and for sale. In this way, the department has been daily advertising its course and is hopefully well on its way to becoming self sufficient and increasing its student enrolment.



Orphanage – Farewell to Ambuya Judy Passmore

At the end of December 2008, our dear Ambuya Judy Passmore bade farewell to MEC and to the children of St. Nicholas Orphanage. Mrs Passmore retired due to ill health. She was the house mother just after the inception of the orphanage in 2000 and was especially good with the children when they were sick and in negotiating a pathway through the doctors at the University Teaching hospital in the shortest possible time. We will greatly miss her.

In Mrs Passmore's place we now have Mrs Irene Simwale Chinyama. Mrs Chinyama holds an Advanced Certificate in Social Development and is currently studying with Mulungushi University by extension for a Diploma in the same course. She previously worked for "Rainbow Project" for Street Children, an Irish-based non governmental organization. She also worked with the Child Care and Adoption Society for some years as a volunteer. Mrs Chinyama is settling down well and enjoying the work of being with the children. The children at the orphanage are also very happy with her.

Special baby Nicholas



We have a special baby Nicholas now, aged seven months. Nicholas came to the orphanage when he was one month old, when his mother died of AIDS. Nicholas is HIV positive and is on Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART). Under normal circumstances he would not have been expected to survive and it was necessary to hire a special Aunt exclusively for him. Mrs Elizabeth Makuwa has done a great job looking after Nicholas day and night. He is growing nicely, but still very small at only 6.5 kg. Nicholas is a cheerful baby with a ready smile and everyone loves him.

Visitors from Belgium

The month of March was busy for the orphanage, with visitors from our Friends of Makeni in Holland, Truus and Jan Veldkamp, and also for energetic Ambuyas (grandmothers) from Friends of Holland in Belgium.

The visit of Friends of Flanders came about because of Mrs Mieke Claus who was a volunteer at MEC in the 1970s. She was an inspirational worker in the tailoring and the production unit at that time. Mrs Claus had kept in touch after their departure to Belgium in 1977. She and her friend An Hofkens continued to be Friends of Makeni, travelling from Belgium to Holland for Friends of Makeni meetings. The three who came to visit with Mrs Claus were An Hofkens, Mieke de Bats and Arlette Andries.

These four ladies swept through our lives like a whirlwind during their two short weeks stay at MEC. They bought materials for bedding and skirts for girls and organised the cutting and sewing of the same. They also bought underclothes and shoes for the children. During their stay they visited the Settlement villages run by MEC to see for themselves how small-hold farmers in these settlement villages live.

We are thankful for everything these ladies did for MEC in general and for the children at the orphanage in particular. We hope they will visit again.

During the visit in March, Truus and Jan Veldkamp spent an action-packed month at MEC involving themselves not only in the orphanage but in many aspects of the life of the Centre. Truus, who herself is a trained Social Welfare Officer and Worker, spent a lot of time at the orphanage, especially with our new house mother Mrs Chinyama and Aunties, encouraging them to give their best in terms of their abilities. Jan worked with the Art Club and in other areas that needed his expertise. The couple brought various items for the orphanage and for MEC in general. The Friends of MEC in Holland is currently one of MEC's major supporters. We say a sincere thanks to Truus and Jan and all the hard working friends in Holland.

Help in mathematics and creative Works

Earlier we had other volunteers who also helped at the school and orphanage. These were Yvonne and Jan Kars. This was their second visit MEC. As a volunteer, Yvonne did a wonderful job at the orphanage, helping the children who were having difficulties in their school work and teaching the children craft work and painting. Some of these works have been displayed in the library. We are trying to ensure continuity of such activities. Jan helped in teaching mathematics in the basic school. He came at the time there was a need for a mathematics teacher. Thank you Yvonne and Jan.

School upgrade



Construction of a new three-classroom block is progressing steadily. The work started early March and is to upgrade our school from Basic to High School by the addition of Grades 10, 11 and 12. It is part of the community service to Makeni residents since there is no high school in the area.

In order to have the Grades 10,11 and 12 we also needed a science laboratory. After examining all our resources, we took the advice of renovating our electronic workroom to be a

multi-purpose room to be used for both electronics students and pupils in secondary education.

The funds to construct the three classroom blocks are coming from the Friends of Makeni (FOM). In 2008 the FOM assisted us in transforming the electronics workroom into the workshop and laboratory.

The Grade 10 class started on 17th February with 15 pupils and we have engaged two more teachers in science and mathematics.

We are very grateful to all our friends in the Netherlands and are pleased that Mr Albert Meems will be visiting MEC again in July so that he will be able to see the buildings.



Boxes of goodies from Canada

In the last week of March we received a batch of boxes from Lee Ann and Dr Pierre who live on Vancouver Island in Canada. We thank all who donated the items and especially Lee Ann and Pierre for their hard work of collecting and packaging the items and getting them to the containers. We also sincerely thank Mr and Mrs Mann of Namuyanga for their generosity in giving us space in their containers.

The boxes which were sent contained bed sheets, towels, face towels, soap and other toiletries and a lot of other assorted items. It is wonderful that each child has his or her own face towel and bath towel. They are now able to change their bed sheets instead of waiting for the washing to dry, which is not easy in rainy season.

Things are certainly looking good at the orphanage with almost every child having its own bed, bed linen and a new mattress.

Tuckshop Revival

Those with long memories will recall that in its early days MEC's "Kitchen" functioned as a tuck-shop. Now that this building has been vacated by the neighbourhood watch, and has been renovated, MEC once again has a tuck-shop, which is now managed by Stella Mvula. It has functioned well during the past three months and serves both the school children and all visitors and patients to the clinic within the walls of MEC.



The tuck-shop is popular on hot days for cool drinks, water and ice lollies. It also stocks other basic household items. We started with a modest stock, but we have been able to break even.

The tuck-shop project was funded by Mr Ton Linthorst of PUM organization in Holland. Apart from providing the funds, Mr Linthorst also donated a refrigerator, a deep freezer and some steel shelving. The aim of this project is to enable the Centre to have a permanent outlet for pork and other meat products.

Mr Linthorst was at the centre in August 2008 to conduct a course on sausage and polony making, and smoking of meat products.

Villages get training in sausage making



A highlight of Mr Linthorst's visit was when he was accompanied by the Centre's staff to Chisamba Settlement Village to conduct a sausage-making session using goat meat, which ended in sampling the finished product at an impromptu "braai" (barbecue)! It was an unforgettable day for the villagers!

Mr Nol Nieuwenhuis of the same organization also visited MEC. We are most grateful to these two kind people and to the PUM organization.

Gifts from South Africa



We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Rotary Club of Claremont for once again including MEC on their donations list of 2009.

We received ZAR 5,000 (ZK 2.5million) and a further ZAR 2,000 (ZK 1million) from our contact Mr George Muller and wife Moonyeen.

Most of the money has been used to construct a shelter



over the outside laundry place of our St Nicholas Orphanage. The remainder of the money has been used in the Agriculture Settlement Project on the Pass-On Goat Project for Kalwelwe Settlement Village. The Goat Pass-On Project also covers Chisamba and Mwomboshi and is funded by the Colonies of the Benevolent through Mr Dimitri Knobbe of the Netherlands.

Thank you to the Rotary Club and to the Mullers!

Support for higher education for orphanage girls

We are happy to report that Bertha Kabwe, one of our first group of children at the orphanage, has been accepted for tertiary education at Solwezi Teachers Training College. We are extremely proud of Bertha and that we have been able over the past eight and half years to nurture her to this point in her life. Her sister Audrey Kabwe is now in grade 12 at Chipembi Girls High School and is also doing well.

Two more of our girls from the orphanage have been accepted at good secondary schools in Zambia. They are Elizabeth Mwamba, who has gone to Mwenzo Girls High School in Northern Province; and Esther Chisenga, who has gone to Njase Girls High School in Southern Province. Both schools belong to the United Church of Zambia and have an excellent record in terms of discipline and academic achievements.

What a great difference we can make when enabling people to work together. Our grateful thanks go to all our donors, supporters and partners and to the Almighty God who is ultimately the source of all goodness for the exciting and rewarding first three months of 2009.