

West Missouri Companion Diocese Committee Report

This has been an extremely busy year for our Companion Diocese Committee. Shortly after our annual gathering last year, a delegation of eight members of our committee set out on a journey to the country of Botswana on a mission to determine how best our diocese could partner with the Diocese of Botswana. As one can imagine it was a very long and tiring flight to our destination, Gaborone, Botswana. Botswana is a country about the size of the state of Texas. It has a population of approximately 1.9 million people. They were never a colony but a protectorate under the protection of the United Kingdom. They were released from this protection in 1966. In 1967 diamonds were discovered which allowed them to become more financially independent. However, there are many areas of need and concern in this small country. One of these areas is the high concentration of HIV. The current status is between 30 and 34% of the population is HIV positive. This has created a high number of orphans and vulnerable children.

Upon our arrival in Gaborone, we were met by Bishop Musonda Trevor Mwamba, Fr. James Amanze and Fr. Ben Moleko. We had a wonderful late evening getting to know each and sharing a great meal. We were then taken to our perspective host families. We had just of late been made aware of our itinerary for the ten days we would be here. Needless to say, there was not much time given to R/R. We hit the road running. We went from south to north and points between. We visited several parishes and meet with parishioners regarding the needs of their various parishes. We meet with Holy Cross Hospice to better understand their needs. A few of us flew to Maun (northern Botswana) to attend a NETS FOR LIFE ceremony. This program gives nets to families in areas that have a high exposure to malaria. After one of our visits to one of the parishes, we were taken to visit a woman in Palapye who was caring for a number of orphans. This woman's name is Joana Mokandla. She has taken it upon herself to provide care for many children who are orphaned or vulnerable. She has very limited resources but is determined to make a difference in these children's lives. Needless to say, we were all impressed by her generosity and the great need that existed in this situation. There was no water, no toilets, and there was hardly any food. They were also living in surplus tents. A lot the children had no shoes and were very dirty. You could feel the need that existed in that community.

After our return home, this situation weighed heavily on our thoughts and in our hearts. Our committee decided this was where we needed to place our focus. Joana and her children. We did not have much information to make proper decisions on how to assist her or even what assistance was really needed. For several months, the committee met and decided in was very important to secure additional information surrounding Joana's situation. It was determined we needed to have someone return to Botswana on a fact finding mission. Two of the committee members volunteered to return to Botswana to collect the necessary information needed in order to move ahead with this project. This time they would be in Botswana for three weeks. They departed for Botswana on August 18, 2009. This ended up being a two day of travel for them. Their itinerary was very full. Again the journey took them from Tshabong in the Kalahari Desert to Serowe in the north. They were well hosted as was the previous delegation. There was a great deal of information that needed to be collected and understood, as there were many cultural differences. They met with other nonprofit organizations and made visits to their sites that housed orphaned and vulnerable children. They visited several day care facilities as well as Holy Cross Hospice again. With each visit came a great source of information that would be needed going forward. One of the most important visits was with Joana and her children. Several days were spent bonding with the children and collecting the well needed information. All in all, a great deal of information was collected. They met with the Botswana Link committee in a debriefing session and reviewed all of their findings. The committee was very impressed and appreciative of their hard work

and efforts. There were recommendations made by the delegates resulting in short term and intermediate goals as well as establishing three phases of development. The Botswana Link Committee is very excited about getting things rolling and being involved with this project.

Shortly after the travelers returned home, the Botswana Companion Diocese Committee met and went over the information with the two committee delegates and was very pleased to see their accomplishments. There was a great deal of enthusiasm for the programs and ventures that will be forthcoming. We will be able to assist with needs that exist with these children in Palapye. Most of all we will be helping the greater community at large. There is a lot of work yet to be done. However, the committee is up to the challenge and is off and running.

Submitted by,
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Chair