



Morning Star Children's Centre

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Dear Friends,

*"Look carefully then how you walk,
not as unwise but as wise,
making the best use of the time,
because the days are evil."
Ephesians 5: 15-16.*

Greetings to you all.

Welkom is enjoying a typical South African autumn day today. The sun is shining, the sky is clear and the outside temperature reading is 24 degrees centigrade. It tends to cool down quite a bit once the sun has set, but not significantly so, yet! The month of May in South Africa is definitely my favorite; it's neither too hot nor too cold.

Joshua and I are safely back in South Africa, after a successful, meaningful UK trip. We thank and praise God for journeying mercies all the way and for giving us the strength and stamina needed to keep going. It's always an adjustment, moving from my 'other' life back to normality here in South Africa; from being completely on the receiving end to having to cook and clean house etc. once again. To those concerned, a big thank you for your wonderful hospitality and for making Joshua, Nicole Correia and me feel so welcome in your homes and churches. I'm sorry we couldn't visit all of you but a big thank you to those of you who managed to attend scheduled meetings within driving distance of your homes. We truly appreciate the effort you made to meet with us and listen to our 2024 presentation.

We've returned home with our hearts full and praising God for His love and faithfulness:

- For safe travelling for well over a 1000 miles (we did get a low emissions and speeding fine, unfortunately.)
- For Stephen Allmand-Smith's smart BMW car loaned to us once again.
- For our Lord's protecting hand when a huge deer collided with our vehicle on the way to Sandbach.
- For the opportunity to share the Morning Star story 20 times at different churches/ private meetings.
- For the sponsoring out of 12 new children
- For generous financial gifts, freely given.
- For the loving hospitality enjoyed with dear friends.
- For the new contacts we made. (3 churches were visited for the first time.)

But we also returned home greatly saddened by two recent, tragic events; the death of 19-year-old Neo Matlakeng and the terrible rape of 8-year-old Tshepang.



2021



2022



2024

Neo aborted her anti-retroviral treatment regime for the second time towards the end of 2023 and although she improved sufficiently to be discharged from hospital, was just too weak to recover fully. She died on 11th April, in the midst of Joshua's and my round trip of England/Wales. We were as devastated as her family, the Morning Star staff and her friends back home. Neo was one of the little children we nursed and nurtured in early childhood, prior to the role-out of ARVs in South Africa. She thrived, went on to excel at school and was still a healthy, happy teenager in 2021. Sadly she stopped taking her treatment in 2022 for the first time and nearly died then. God heard the cry of our hearts

and healed her and she promised she'd never do such a silly thing again. So, why she secretly did so last October is still somewhat of a mystery. What she did tell us was that the tablets were too big to swallow and made her vomit.....! If only she'd shared this with us long ago so that we could've stepped in and counselled and encouraged her before it was too late.

8-year-old Tshepang from Kutlwanong Township was raped by two 17-year-old boys living in the same street as him. He was badly injured and had to receive medical attention for the damage done. Although his mum reported the case to the police, no action has been taken yet. They've neither visited the scene of the crime nor arrested the two young men responsible. Personally, I'd like to castrate them both, I'm so livid.

Our younger Morning Star children are generally doing well health-wise. We do, however, have 7-year-old Nakhane Ngantweni in hospital in Bloemfontein right now. He underwent a procedure on the 19th April to have his colostomy fistula closed but, unfortunately, had it reinserted 24 hours later as a result of resulting complications. This is truly a blow for him and his mum.



Children in early years

Our recent trip to the UK caused us reflect on how significantly different things are at Morning Star nowadays compared to our traumatic, early years as an organization. Instead of dozens of extremely ill children, many close to death upon admission and dying from the symptoms associated with HIV/AIDS, we now, generally, admit healthy little ones who can enjoy normal childhoods.

Yes, they still come from impoverished homes and yes, their parents still suffer from the disease themselves but up to 97,5% of babies born to HIV positive mothers nowadays are born free of the disease themselves. We look forward to the day when NO babies are born with HIV/AIDS in South Africa. It's achievable – provided ALL pregnant mothers attend the community clinics, are tested for the disease and whose babies receive anti-retroviral therapy in utero.



Kutlwanong Pre-schoolers at play

Our most vulnerable group of children these days are our teenagers and young adults. They are the ones who were born with HIV/AIDS through no fault of their own. They're either suffering from the symptoms of their condition and the side effects of their anti-retroviral drugs or from social isolation, rejection and stigmatization. Many, sadly, were adversely affected cognitively in early childhood too, resulting in underachievement academically and with the inability to successfully finish their schooling. They lose hope, abort their anti-retroviral treatment regimes, can't find employment and often join gangs and start taking drugs.

Previously we were unable to visit the many teens and young adults we didn't see at Morning Star on a regular basis but now that we have three youth care workers out in the field we are beginning to see a gradual change-around. In addition to the Gospel going out more purposefully, we're also slowly determining which of them have aborted their treatment regimes, which don't even know why they're taking anti-retroviral drugs each day and who of them are not coping at school and are way beyond school-going age anyway. Slowly but surely more of them are attending the monthly Bible Studies and opening up and sharing their struggles with our youth care workers, Revival, Shedreck and Zwide. And, bit-by-bit we are assisting those who have dropped out of school with basic skills training at Thabiso Skills Development Centre here in Welkom. This is an exciting development and one we can thank a UK couple for. They've been specifically funding this venture for several years already and encouraged us to fine-tune our selection process and institute more accountability from the successful candidates. They now all need to volunteer at Morning Star for 3 months prior to beginning the various courses on offer (plumbing, carpentry, electrical, welding, catering etc.) so that we can assess their punctuality and work ethic. Once they've successfully completed the 10 -12 week course of choice, we're endeavouring to get them local work experience and also help them find jobs. A few of them – only a handful thus far, have found permanent employment and are now financially independent and able to stand on their own two feet.

Coupled with the above is what our new professional nurse is doing in her specific field of expertise – HIV and TB. Sister Mamorena worked closely with local doctors in the midst of the AIDS pandemic 15 -25 years ago and knew many of our young adults when they were our extremely ill, little children. She's now back in their lives and determined to walk a road with them, to point out the dangers of aborting their treatment regimens and to gently and lovingly counsel those of them who are seemingly still clueless about their HIV conditions. They all need to understand that they were born with an incurable disease and, until a cure is found, will have to take their anti-retroviral drugs every single day of their lives.

Praise God, now that the Covid pandemic is a thing of the past, we're beginning to see an increase of overseas volunteers visit Morning Star again. We have Judie Turner from Australia in our midst at present and are looking forward to hosting AJ Johnstone and team from Woodgreen Evangelical Church in July, followed by that of Tayo Oyeniyi from Bexley Heath Baptist Church in August. We're also looking forward to the visit of several members of our Morning Star UK Support Group in November. We love having volunteers at Morning Star and encourage more of you to come out and experience our organization in action. Being exposed to a different culture and way of life is truly a life-changing and enriching venture.

And last, but not least, we are still looking for a replacement General Manager at Morning Star. Do make this a matter of urgent prayer and also put the word out; perhaps there's someone/a couple you know of who would love to serve in this capacity and who would jump at the opportunity of a unique adventure in a challenging environment.

PRAYER ISSUES:

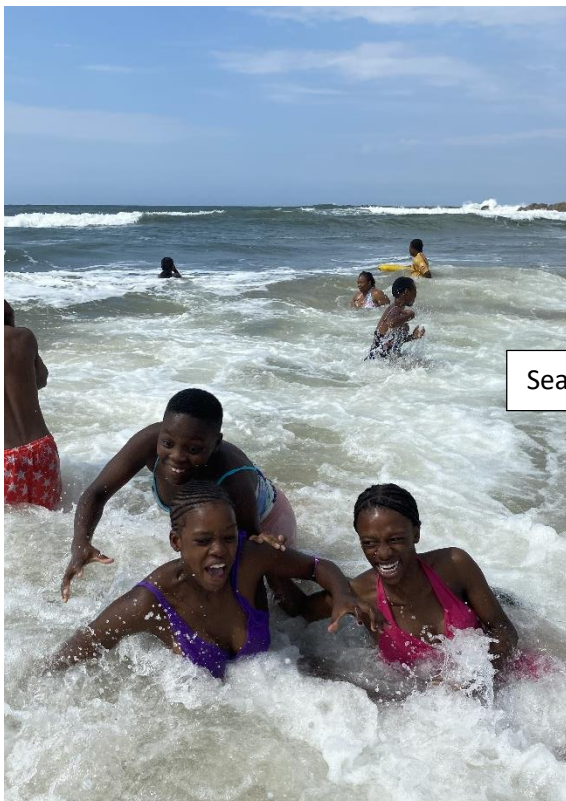
Praise and thanks for:

- A successful fundraising trip of the UK and journeying mercies all the way.
- For the wonderful sea trip for 31 of our teenagers recently, for God's protection all the way and for the opportunity to hear the Gospel clearly explained.
- For our present sound financial position.

Please pray for:

- Neo Matlakeng's mum and sisters as they come to terms with their deep loss.
- For complete healing for our 8 year old boy recently raped and for the two perpetrators to be brought to book.
- For Nakhane as he recovers from his surgical procedure and that the day will soon come when his colostomy can be permanently closed.
- For a new General Manager for Morning Star.
- For Elizabeth vd Westhuizen, acting General Manager, as she 'holds the fort' until a new GM is employed. Pray for stamina and good health and for Godly wisdom in all the decisions needing to be taken.
- For Revival, Zwide and Shedreck as they visit and counsel our teens and young adults and that they'll be successful in plugging many of them into sound, evangelical churches.
- For Godly wisdom for Sister Mamorena as she leads and educates our children's parents/carers at our monthly Support Group Meetings as well as when she counsels our teenagers and young adults, both individually and jointly.
- Our upcoming Teens' Meeting on 25th May.
- For our Board Meeting scheduled for Thursday 23rd May – for clarity of mind and unity as we set about planning for the future of Morning Star.
- For South Africa's General Elections on 29th May; pray that it'll be a safe and fair election and that God would put leaders into positions of power who will allow us to lead "peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."

*"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
though the waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah."
Psalm 46:1-3*



Sea Trip 2024

