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14th December 2017

Our Dear Friends,

And so we've come to the end of another year! The children have all gone, our end-of-year-functions are over and there's only a skeleton staff still at Morning Star finishing off for the year. Where has the time gone? It seems just like yesterday that we ushered 2017 in and now we're about to bid it farewell. And, as I sit behind my desk in relative quietness, I'm deeply aware of my own frailty as a human being and my lack of qualification for my role as general manager of an organization that's grown into something much bigger than me! With all my heart I acknowledge that I can do nothing in my own strength. All glory goes to our Gracious Heavenly Father who has chosen 'cracked pots' to do His bidding here on earth. In every way God has gone before us and blessed us beyond what we deserve. He's met all our needs, He's raised up men and women amongst you all to come alongside us and share your skills and expertise with us and to help meet our financial and material needs and He's kept me well and strong enough for the task at hand! I'm truly humbled before a Holy God and can only cry "Lord, I'm not worthy to be your servant!"

Since I last 'wrote' to you in October it's just been 'go-go-go' at Morning Star – from morning to night! Christmas parties, Christmas parcels arriving, reports to write, more parcels arriving, monetary gifts transferred for sponsored children, giving out clothes and more clothes, feeding the hungry, more Christmas parcels arriving – all needing to be recorded, categorized, stored – and handed out.

Our recent end-of-year functions went off very well. We 'kicked-off' with our annual Gogos (Grandmothers') Christmas Party on 25th November and then our Graduation Ceremony/Market Day on 28th November. 32 of our 5-6 year olds "graduated" from our 2 Centre's Reception Classes, most of them leaving us to begin Grade 1 in the Township school closest to their home in the New Year. It was a happy day for our children and their families – but sad for us at Morning Star because we'll no longer have a daily impact upon their lives.



Our grandmothers enjoying their Christmas Party



Aquadome at Emerald City

Our children's Christmas parties were thoroughly enjoyed by those who attended, as was our special teenagers' outing to Emerald City's Aquadome Resort in Vereeniging on 30th November. Only 36 teens were selected to go – just those who had attended all 4 meetings held during the course of 2017. Emerald City consists of pools of varying temperatures, an exciting waterslide and lots of other fun things to do. A wonderful time was had by all and the staff who accompanied them reported that interacting with just 36 teens was more manageable and intimate than having to control the 70+ that we get at our usual get-togethers.

Close to 70 children attended our preschool/toddler party on 4th December. We had jumping castles for our little ones, carousel swings & big wheel and our local Wimpy Fast-food Franchise supplied beef burgers for all at lunchtime. Each child went home with a Christmas box, a packet of sweets and a big smile on their faces.



Fantastic fun was had at our 4th party on Wednesday 6th December for our Grade R's – Grade 3's. Although the rain threatened all day, it didn't fall until everyone had been safely transported home. These 120 children enjoyed a variety of jumping castles as well – including a rocket spaceship type, which resulted in squeals of delight all day, and our local Spur Steakhouse provided burgers, chips and cool drinks for all. Spur Steakhouse assists us with this Christmas party year-on-year and ever goes the extra mile in ensuring that our children have a fabulous day.

A very big thank you to Linda Gardiner and friends, Endemol Shine in the UK and Humpty Dumpty Nursery School in Johannesburg for ensuring that we received in excess of 200 shoe box gifts this Christmas to distribute to the children attending our 2 centres.

Our children, as you know, generally keep healthier now that so many of them are on antiretroviral treatment (ARVs). But we do have a few who are very frail and weak and who might not even survive into the New Year. Vincent Disenyane, now a young adult, is the worst of all. He is just skin and bone and hasn't been able to attend school since September. He lives with his older sister in Thabong Township and she's at her wits end as to how to help him on her limited income. Kgauhelo Monyake and Malesedi Mojake are both still very weak as well and their futures look bleak indeed. We've also just heard that Petrus Motshwa was admitted to hospital over the past weekend. He had an epileptic seizure all out of the blue, accompanied by vomiting last Friday and his distraught mum called the ambulance to

transport him to hospital. Not much by way of medical intervention is happening at our Bongani Regional Hospital these days. The Free State Department of Health is bankrupt and the few doctors still working there consult infrequently, so Petrus' mum has had to wait another whole week before she can meet with the doctor for an update/ diagnosis of his condition.

Another of our children really suffering this Christmas is 10 year-old Mbali Xaba. She's not unwell herself, but her mum had a stroke in October and was rushed to hospital. Mbali and her younger brother were left home alone, with nobody to care for them. By the time we got to hear of their dilemma, both children had been placed in Emmanuel Children's Home by the social worker.

Mum recovered enough to be discharged from hospital but returned home a week ago angry with Mbali for reporting their situation to her school teacher, angry with Morning Star for not intervening (we had no clue this was all going on) and angry with the social worker for putting her children into a place of safety! She was still so angry when the children were returned to her care last Friday that she pushed Mbali back into the social worker's arms and told her she didn't want her home at all! Poor little girl! She was returned to Emmanuel Children's Home in tears – and with a broken heart. We've met with mum in the interim but she's still too angry to seek forgiveness and make things right with her daughter and the social worker. I'll be going out to see Mbali before the end of this week and trust that my visit will cheer her up and that the lovely Christmas box we have for her will take the edge off her sadness. (Mbali is also one of our little girls who was raped in 2016.)

From the depths of our hearts, thank you so much for all your support and prayers over the past 12 months. None of us knows what tomorrow will hold, nor what 2018 will bring! But, if the Lord should spare us, we ask for your continued prayers for us and our ministry as we step into the New Year.

And, since Hebrews 13:8 is still true, since Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever, we can trust Him to continue being faithful to us in 2018 (A thought that challenged me from a missionary friend's recent prayer letter).

Love in Christ,
Joan

PRAYER NEEDS

Praise and thanks:

1. That all our needs have been met by our faithful God over the past 12 months (and 18 years).
2. The good health of the majority of our children this year and our Lord's keeping hand on the lives and well-being of our staff members.
3. For UK volunteer, Marilyn Tonge from Bolton, who was with us over the few weeks leading up to our Christmas functions and whose assistance in the midst of the chaos at Morning Star was invaluable.



Marilyn Tonge dancing with the Gogos.



Goodbye Sr. Puane Leeuw (R) & Happy Retirement

Please pray for:

1. Our frail and vulnerable children – Vincent Disenyane, Kgauhelo Monyake, Malesedi Mojake and Petrus Motshwa.
2. Pray for the safety of our children over the Christmas holidays and that parents/guardians won't neglect or abuse them. Many of our little ones are in homes where drunkenness and excessive partying takes precedence this time of the year and it's always the children who suffer most.
3. Pray for Mbali Xaba and Sihle Mdangi and others like them with pressing social issues and little recourse for solutions. Sihle's dermatitis continues to plague him and mum refuses to follow through with prescribed treatment at home. (We've recently heard that she takes Sihle to the witch doctor routinely and that this young boy is set to become a 'sangoma' when he turns 12-years-old.

May Christmas 2017 be truly meaningful to you as you consider the wonder of Jesus' Birth and His great gift of salvation.

And may God's blessing be upon you and your family in the year that lies ahead.

With our love and thanks for all your Wonderful support during 2017

Joan