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Dear Friends

What a month this has been! Winter is definitely on its way. The other day Alistair came in from a meeting and as I greeted him, I asked 'what is the weather like outside?' 'Much the same as it is inside!' he answered, which wasn't what I wanted to hear as the rain was streaming steadily down in three places in the house and had been for three days solid. We had to get up in the middle of the night to empty the baby bath that was collecting the torrent, so that it didn't overflow onto the floor. We have a lovely house here in South Africa, but it is what UK estate agents would call, 'full of character and potential'. We have a corrugated iron roof which leaks like a sieve in the rain. Hopefully we will be able to get some repairs done to it soon, but getting anyone to look at it has been a difficult job. It is also getting very cold again at night. This is also made worse by the fact that we can't run heaters. We are not only facing power cuts three mornings a week but are also counting the number of Watts of electricity that we are using. As the cold continues to creep in, we will probably face yet more power load shedding. Two sub stations blew up this week because of the surge in power after one of the periods of load shedding. We also had problems with our own electricity when the power came back on one day this week and had to call out an electrician to sort it out for us.

Last Saturday, we had been taking a new missionary, who is with Mission to the World (the PCA mission organization), around the museum in East London as part of her induction to amaXhosa life. After leaving there we went for a coffee, to find that we were offered the 'blackout' menu because that part of town was without power. We could not pay with our card, so Alistair went to withdraw money from the cash machine. As the money was being counted out, the power came on and the machine reset, swallowing Alistair's card and money. The card had to be stopped. Exactly the same thing happened two days later too. At the bank, Alistair was told that this is happening now every few days. The power crisis is causing so many problems. Shop assistants are sitting behind locked doors three mornings a week, paid to do nothing. Because of looting, many shops won't stay open during the load shedding and others can only accept cash as payment. Many hospitals can only accept emergency cases and driving is even more chaotic than usual as the traffic lights don't work.

We are looking into ways that Dumisani can function during these periods of load shedding. We will probably have to invest in some more laptops – partly because they can run without power for a limited time and also use much less electricity. We are also investigating investing in a generator or solar power panel. These will cost a significant amount of money, but it will be years before the power problems in Southern Africa will be resolved.

As I mentioned, we have had a girl, Susan Newkirk, living near us for a few weeks. She is a new missionary to South Africa from America. She has been placed with one of our Free Church pastors to give her a period of immersion in rural African culture. We have had her to stay a couple of times as we have shown her other aspects of life here. She has now left us to start her work in Cape Town. Please pray for her as she seeks to work among the refugees from other African countries who come to Cape Town looking for work or asylum.

We have had our first Dumisani wedding this month! Phinda, one of our clerical workers, came back to work after the holidays looking very different. She was wearing a traditional amaGermani print skirt, a towel tied around her waist and a scarf covering her head. "You look so beautiful, Phinda!" I exclaimed as she came in, wondering why she was wearing the clothes of a married lady. "I got married during the holidays to one of the students," she told me. They had kept that one a big secret! The wedding party will take place soon. The student that she married is called Graeme Mshweshwe, who is one of our Free Church in Southern Africa ministry students. He is a delightful man.



We are delighted for them both. Pinda, 'inherited' two children last year after the death of her brother and sister-in-law. It will be so nice for her to have some help in raising these two children and for them to be a more complete family with a father figure around. According to Xhosa tradition she now has a new name which is Lilitha which means the rays of sun just after the dawn. Isn't that beautiful?! The picture is of Lilitha opening some of her presents at her 'kitchen party'.

One of our cleaners came to us last year with a problem with her twelve-year-old daughter. The daughter's school felt that they could not teach her any longer because of her learning difficulties. If you don't have money to pay the higher fees of a town school, there is no other option for a child like that, than to keep her at home. We arranged for her to get a psychological assessment and she was accepted into a local school, which takes children with severe learning difficulties. Norman Reid has been able to provide some money from a fund set up by friends in Ireland for her fees, transport costs, uniforms etc, but if anyone would be willing to help sponsor her, we would be grateful. Her name is Mhlahli Mkuku. She is a delightful girl and so excited with her new uniform, which is a green tartan tunic, green blazer etc. After Christmas she will transfer to a secondary school in East London, where they will teach her a trade. She will have to stay in the school hostel then. They will keep her for three years and when she leaves she should have a certificate in her chosen career. They teach subjects such as dress making, hairdressing, beauty therapy, mechanics, woodwork, computers etc. She is getting an opportunity that very few children in her village will ever get and will hopefully have the means in the future to earn a living. I have been to the school a couple of times to see her and she just can't stop smiling as she tells me what exciting new things she is experiencing. It would be lovely to be able to offer this opportunity to our other staff's children but even from all the extras that we are having to pay for, for Mhlahli, we realize that this is not possible. It is a big change for her as she is having to make so many changes from going to an inside toilet to possessing her own pair of scissors.

We are now getting ready to go to Australia for a deputation tour to raise people's awareness of Dumisani. There are also quite a lot of interested people in Australia, and we hope to spread the word and encourage more people to support the work here. We will be away for three weeks and during that time will be touring a lot of the Eastern part of Australia and also Tasmania. The children will be staying with Deon and Shelley Lombard. I don't think when they agreed to join the team in Dumisani that they realized that part of the job description was looking after our children while we were away. It is, however, a two-way swap. We had their daughter Tara with us in the UK and she is also staying with us just now for a few weeks while they are on leave before joining the Dumisani team. Please pray for the children. We have never left them for more than a week before. It is possible that Deon and Shelley need the most prayers having to cope with them – especially getting Stephen up just after 5am in time for the school bus.

We are also becoming increasingly aware that the time leading up to Ronnie and Morag Christie's departure is shrinking. They are due to return to the UK in July. They will leave such a big gap in terms of their presence and the work that they do. They will be missed by so many people, not least the Xhosa church. The Bible women and women's organization will find it hard to say farewell to Morag as she has been such a big part of their lives for so long.

We are also looking forward to the arrival of John and Elizabeth if everything goes according to plan. Please pray that their work permits and visa are granted. We are looking forward so much to their arrival and having the work-load spread across more people. We recently heard that one of our part-time lecturers, Dr De Wet Saaiman, is moving to Durban at the end of this semester to take up another church appointment. We will be sad to say good bye to him too.

Some time ago, Dumisani applied to be able to offer an honours degree through North West University and we have now been told that we may. This will make a big difference to the more eager and able students who up until now have had to leave and go elsewhere if they wish to do further studies, though it will of course have implications of increased work-load for the academic staff. But as they say, there is no gain without pain!

When we came back to Dumisani after the Easter break, one thing that struck me was the amount of mail that was waiting, which had a stamp on the back which said, 'Correctional services'. That is what the prison service in South Africa is called. These were the correspondence courses which were being sent back for correction by some of the one hundred and more prisoners who are currently enrolled in the courses. It is not a very high profile part of Dumisani's work and yet a very important part of what is done. Ronnie Christie has been spending time recently upgrading these courses. Please continue to pray for the prisoners who work through these correspondence courses that God's word will penetrate their hearts, to rebuke, correct, to teach and to train in righteousness.

Prayer points:

- That John's work permit and Elizabeth's visa will be granted
- Pray for those studying the correspondence courses – especially those in prison
- Pray for safety and useful meetings in Australia
- Pray for Mhlahi as she makes this big adjustment in her schooling

Love to you all and many thanks for your continued prayer support.

Alistair, Jenny, Rachel, Bethany and Stephen Wilson