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We are one body in Christ Re 'mele o le mong ho Kreste

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## LINK RESPONDS TO COVID CRISIS

Life has been a struggle for many during the past few months, with real hardship and fears for an uncertain future. It is the reality in most parts of the world and Lesotho is no exception. During July the staff at the Durham Lesotho LINK conducted a survey in the communities around Ha Mohatlane, the result of which showed clearly that hunger is the main challenge to be addressed. The LINK has been working closely with 121 families in the area, (many of them child headed households) offering them mentoring and support where possible. The LINK staff wanted to show their concern for these specific families during the pandemic by providing them with essential supplies.



Despite the complete lack of response to an appeal for sponsorship from various business people, they were able to distribute food parcels, seeds and face masks to all the families. The package included 12.5kg maize meal, 2kg beans, 1kg salt, 2lts cooking oil, 1 bar of soap, 2 packets of seeds, each 100g, and sufficient face masks for each family member. The food was purchased relatively locally from two shops who arranged to deliver it to Ha Mohatlane, and the distribution was organised following WHO guidelines, by having four stations of thirty people to collect their packages. There had been concern about how people would get their heavy loads back home, but the people had organised this themselves.

Many of the recipients expressed their gratitude to the LINK for remembering them during these tough times. As covid takes its belated toll in Lesotho (currently 1000 infections and 30 deaths) the future remains very uncertain but the LINK will do all it can to maintain its care and support of these desperately vulnerable families.

### Lesotho just before lockdown - Stuart Bain Provost of Sunderland Minster

In 2014 I made my first visit to Lesotho with a party of young people from the Venerable Bede Church of England Academy in Sunderland. I returned in 2016, 18, 19 and would have gone with them in 2020 had the visit not clashed with Holy Week and I needed to be in Sunderland at the day job. So last year a visit was arranged around school visits at the beginning of March for myself and my wife - her first visit to Lesotho. Over the years I have built up a relationship with the ACL school secretary Ntate Mokoqo. Part of the plan was to explore the possibility of some school links here in Durham with two new schools Tikoe Primary School in Maseru and Lepekola High School near Botha Buthe in the north. Of course plans were made before the pandemic struck!

Once again it was great to be back, even if there were health checks as we crossed the border at Maseru Bridge. It was a joy to stay at the Link and the rendezvous for two weeks in lovely weather, and although anxiety was beginning to rise about infection Lesotho did not have a confirmed case for a good while after we left.

Our school visits began at St Catherine's High School in Maseru, the school with links to the Cathedral. This school also has a provision for the visually impaired and it was really impressive to meet the staff there and to talk to some of the students, as well as seeing how they were using technology to assist the learning. The Principal is also the priest at St John's Church in the centre of Maseru and surprise surprise I found myself preaching there the following Sunday. It's a church I first visited in 2016 and it was great to be welcomed back again.

So we headed north to Botha Buthe and then off the main road onto a truly awful road to Lepekola, we got there nursing the hire car carefully around the rocks and the holes. What a fantastic welcome! I had first met the principal at some training I had helped lead for headteachers at Maseru Cathedral in 2018 and we had kept in touch.

On the edge of the mountains the beauty of the setting for the school made up for the dreadful road. We had the joy of first meeting with the staff and sharing some thoughts about the vocation of teaching. My wife a teacher of almost 40 years, carried a certain kudos in this gathering. I found the staff impressive and their commitment to the young people shone through. Then to the young people and we were treated to some amazing singing and dancing - all in our honour it would seem.

The challenge for us is to see how a meaningful relationship can grow with schools of Dayspring Trust which I chair, sadly things are on hold as schools remain closed in Lesotho for the foreseeable future. The Principal has shared his concerns about the young people during this time as he fears many will go hungry because the main meal of the day is at school. Does that sound familiar, a deep condemnation of our own country, one of the richest in the world.

I first visited Tikoe Primary School in 2019, this is a large primary on the edge of Maseru in a rather poor area of the City. The main problem it faced were lack of resources and over-crowding. The school is in desperate need of more classrooms. Since I was last there another has been built with the children helping to carry stones from the hillside for the builders to use but it still has no roof. I am hoping that some support from churches back here, which I was able to leave, will put the roof on for when they eventually return.

The great joy was being able to spend time in the classroom and my wife rapidly dropped into teacher mode - once a teacher always a teacher. Again we were treated to fantastic singing and dancing and a reprise of a song I had taught them last year and which they still remembered - so I was able to lead over 1000 children in the worship of God, wow!



Once a teacher always .....

Children in Lesotho have lost so much education over the last year. There was a long teacher's strike in 2019, when the schools were closed. This was over terms and conditions and future pensions which had been changed without any consultation and now the affect of Covid 19 has closed them again. This is serious in any country but more so in a place like Lesotho, where education is so crucial to life chances, and where it often happens in really tough situations.

There were more schools and more preaching, this time in Maseru Cathedral - Oh and by the way we crossed back into South Africa the day before the border was closed, cut that one bit fine. I look forward to a return visit but who knows when that will be. Sadly the Venerable Bede visit did not happen this year.

### PRAYING FOR LESOTHO

With the many restrictions and changes Covid 19 has brought, difficult decisions have had to be made with the staffing situation at the LINK in Lesotho, so our prayers focus on the staff.

Remember in prayer those LINK staff members who, after being on half pay for five months, have now been made redundant, that they will find alternative employment or, in some cases, be able to rejoin the LINK once we start income generation again.

Please pray for those staff members who have retained their jobs ( still on half pay), that they might be a beacon of light and hope at this time, proactively looking for ways to reach out and serve.

Give thanks for those small groups of people who have been able to attend courses at the LINK, and for the domestic staff as they implement government safety regulations.

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