KHOTHATSONG AIDS COMMITTEE

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2011

IMAGINE:

A world full of sadness, pain and sin. There is fighting, divorce, cheating, death, neglect, disease, abuse, fear, cancer, war, persecution, denial, weeping, contempt, malnutrition, infant death, robbery, cruelty, coldness, shame, despondency, loss and AIDS.

IMAGINE:

God does not exist.
No Jesus. No forgiveness. Utter dependency on people. No comfort. No future. Eternal tears. Eternal darkness.

The first scenario is true. We know this well. Often those afflicted with AIDS know it even better. We meet them. They lie neglected on the living room floor, or on a mattress in an out-building. Sometimes they lie in a beautiful bed, but are terribly ill. Friends don't want to visit them any longer. Relatives are embarrassed about them. Pain and fear. Joblessness. Tuberculosis. Sores on the skin. Mixed up. Thin as a rail. Or maybe they remain healthy for now, but with the knowledge that they won't live as long as they would like.

What would we do if scenario two would also be true?
What would we do then with all that misery? What would we say to those lying in their beds so ill, or to those beginning to feel better with medication and healthy eating? We would be able to help them with fruits, vegetables, medication and love. But beyond those things?

One day Jesus asked Peter if he would also leave Him, like the others. But Peter answered: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6: 68).

Fortunately, scenario two is not true!
We have Someone to go to. Who can this be other than the Lord Jesus? He lives and gives eternal life. We can all speak of Him, in all sorts of different ways. Our careworkers in F4 don't only bring tomatoes, carrots and apples, but also the comfort of the Lord. Not only medicine but also prayer. They don't just wash the patients; they also point towards Jesus' love. Jan, the spiritual caregiver, handyman and gardener, spends time and laughs together with the patients; he gets to know them and reads them the Bible on his visits. On Saturdays, young people from the various congregations visit patients with the aim of encouraging them with the comfort only the Lord can give. Those of our people searching for a space to build a home for orphans, continue to search, even as it has already taken more than 18 months. Because they know they can offer the children more than only housing: Jesus.

When you hear that you are HIV+, you might think it means the end of the world. But the truth is that this world is not the end. No eternal tears and eternal darkness. For those who believe in Jesus, there is forgiveness and eternal love. This is true for the care workers, for the young volunteers in our congregations, for the patients in F4 and for the board members of Khothatsong. That is why we are able to do our work!

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AWARENESS

Workshop for Pastors and Missionaries

In August we finally held a workshop for pastors and missionaries. Approximately 15 men and women were present. It was an instructive day held in a positive spirit. I briefly provided some facts regarding AIDS. Not too many, because the workshop's goal was more to consider the churches' role regarding people who are HIV+. How might pastoral care best be provided at different stages of the disease; should you "force" people who are planning to marry to take an HIV-test?; should you advise young people in the church who are already sexually active, but not yet married, to use condoms? (The pastors' answer to the last question was a very clear 'no'.) The topic of AIDS stigma in the churches was also considered.

In addition, we watched a DVD about Rev. Gideon Byamugisha from Uganda. He was the first HIV+ pastor to also disclose his status to those around him. Later he carried out an enormous amount of work with the aim of improving the church's stance towards HIV+ patients.

If you would like to read more about this workshop and about Gideon, who is a wonderful instrument of God, you can read the report on Rev. T. de Boer's webpage: http://morutideboer.web-log.nl/volg_de_boeren_in_zuidafr/2010/08/gideon-en-zn-bende-1.html.

Young People XX

The 1st of December was World AIDS Day. On that day the young people of the Free Reformed Church in Soshanguve (XX) wanted to organize something special in their area. Accordingly, they invited those living in the surrounding area on Saturday the 27th of November. They received posters and brochures from the Department of Health, provided snacks, and invited an HIV+ speaker. Khothatsong was also invited to hold a workshop.

I began the workshop by giving a description of three imagined AIDS-patients: a domestic worker, a nurse, and a homosexual. I went on to say that the government had discovered a new medicine against AIDS. With this medicine, a patient would be able to live 8 to 10 years longer. However, the government only had enough money for one research subject. The participants then had to choose who of the three patients had the greatest right to the medicine. Most of the participants chose the nurse.

Following this, they received more information regarding the three persons. The gay man was never in a relationship; he is a surgeon and was infected by one of his patients. The nurse is infected because she was engaged in a sexual relationship and works at an escort agency. The domestic worker's husband died of tuberculosis (possibly AIDS) and she discovered her HIV+ status by accident, when she made an application for a home loan.

After receiving this information, the young people were asked to vote again. The result was quite different from the first time. This time around the gay man received a number of votes, and the nurse a good amount less.

The goal of this type of exercise is to demonstrate that we are sometimes very quick to judge HIV+ people. Everyone has his or her own history. In South Africa more than 60% of HIV+ women have had a sexual relationship with only one man! They did not know their husbands were already HIV+ when they got married.

We must beware that we do not look upon every HIV+ person with contempt. When we meet such a person, the principal point is not how they became infected; it is rather that that person needs God's help as well as ours.

Following this introduction we discussed stigma, what the church can do for HIV+ people and Biblical directives regarding sex. I noticed that quite a number of young people took notes. This is good! Hopefully they will keep thinking about what they learned that day.

Camp

Just like last year, we held a camp about AIDS. This time the young people aged 16 to 18 were the target group. Yet when we looked closely at the participant list, we saw that the ages ranged from 15 to 25. However, this did not matter; all were welcome!

There were six leaders and 22 young people. Each leader was responsible for a small group. With this group the leader led Bible study each morning and evening.

A good number of topics were addressed. Information regarding how AIDS can and cannot be transmitted, how the HI-Virus operates, God's forgiveness, God's goal with your life, making choices, etc. Thus the camp was not only about AIDS, but went much broader. How can you, in everything that you do, serve the Lord?

The atmosphere was good; participants listened well and asked many questions. The pool was of course a great source of attraction and many also enjoyed the rock climbing.

In April we hope to have a follow-up day.

Spiritual Care

2011 is the year of elevation. We thank the Lord for the youth in Soshanguve who took action in accepting the calling of becoming Spiritual Carers in 2011. The group will, with the help of the Holy Spirit in 2011 to help those in need of spiritual food to nourish their souls. We will continue with the house visits and the target will be mostly in F4, Soshanguve, where God identified a great need of hungry souls. Jeremiah 30: 17:"I WILL RESTORE YOU TO HEALTH AND HEAL YOUR WOUNDS, DECLARES THE LORD".

The Spiritual Carers will lay God's foundation to the youth and families by praying and praising God with the word of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will join together to know God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Theme for Spiritual Care 2011: LAYING GOD'S FOUNDATION. Ezekiel 34:16 says: "I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak".

HOME BASED CARE F4

In the past year and a half, the work of the carers in the community of F4 has made a great impact on the inhabitants. We began to introduce ourselves by visiting each house. Now everyone knows very well who the Khothatsong carers are and the sort of help they offer. The carers are now told by people on the street where the ill people are. The people also know where the office is located. Currently there are many sick people. Not only from AIDS and TB but also people with strokes, diabetes and other chronic illnesses. The carers were even called in to help with a delivery because the woman's contractions had already started. Normally women go to a special clinic or hospital.

There have been quite a number of changes in the team. In August two carers left for better paid jobs, and one carer was not able to keep up with the tasks at hand due to illness. Two new carers were appointed and we are still searching for another candidate. One of the carers spends her mornings with a 'child-headed' family, providing leadership to a 17-year-old girl who is taking care of her two younger brothers and her own two children. In the afternoon this carer works in the Home Based Care project.

A meeting was held bringing together the seven organisations that work as NGOs (Non-Government Organisations) in the area of New Eersterus. A forum was established and a discussion held regarding boundaries where each organisation will focus their work. The following organisations and focus areas were agreed:

1. Obageng: Old age home
2. Vukani: Orphanage, Home Based Care and training for Home Based Care
3. Rapelego: Drop-in centre
4. Leshad: Home for disabled persons
5. Ikageng: Home Based Care, working in a section of F3
6. Iterileng: Home Based Care, working in a section of F3 and a section of F4
7. Khothatsong was asked to hand over part of F4 to Iterileng and to also begin working in F2. It was a good meeting wherein all organisations agreed to prioritize working together. From now on a meeting will be held each month to ensure that healthcare in New Eersterus functions as best as possible.

WORLD AIDS DAY

(taken from the web at http://koning_korrel.wordpress.com)

The inhabitants of F4 have been invited to a get-together on World AIDS Day. Everything is ready: the chairs are neatly arranged; the sandwiches are buttered and packed neatly in beautiful bowls on the long tables at the back of the hall. In between there are packets of chips and peanuts for the children, and here and there a plant to brighten the table.

The people are welcomed, and John Mahlangu, a pastor in training, opens the event with prayer, scripture reading and a short message, inviting us to come to the Lord with all our worries.

"Come to me, all you who are
weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls."
(Matthew 11: 28-29)

Rinette Boersma's speech adds beautifully to this message. She knows how to grips people's attention. There is still so much misunderstanding and ignorance about AIDS and HIV. Still so often people—even doctors—think there is nothing to be done when a person is HIV-positive. Is that true? Definitely not! No cure is possible in the sense that the disease is gone forever, but with treatment and responsible, healthy eating, people can have a much better life than merely suffering a slow and painful death on a small mattress in an impoverished little hut.
People are also often excluded. Often, fear is their only counsellor. The person already in a difficult situation feels lonely and rejected.
Does God also reject us? Are you worthless in His eyes?

Rinette takes two 10-Rand bills out of her pocket, the one brand-new, the other wrinkled and torn. Which one is the nicest? Well, the new nice smooth one of course! Which one is worth the most? Hey, both are worth the same!
This is also how we are before God. Whether you are beautiful and young and healthy or utterly crumpled, to Him we are worth the same. You may go to Him, be His and He will take care of you.

A room full of attendees

Rinette gives a talk

Nellie introduces the workers

In the meantime the number of visitors has grown to about 100, as people continue to drop in. The workers of Khothatsong are introduced to the people.

Support group

The support group comes to the front as well: the people who are HIV-positive, who regularly come together in a sort of discussion group in order to support and encourage each other and to share their experiences. We need each other; we need to help each other.

Encouraging, but also brave, because some in the support group are wearing t-shirts that say 'HIV-positive', even as HIV/AIDS remains a taboo topic for many…

WORLD AIDS DAY IN A WORLD FULL OF AIDS!

INDEED, THAT COMES VERY CLOSE

LORD HAVE MERCY

Eating and talking afterwards

GARDEN PROJECT

F4 is a rural area, the properties are large, noticeably clean and almost all are neatly swept. There is more than enough space to start a vegetable garden. Fresh vegetables from one's own garden… but unfortunately the people are not used to that. That is why Khothatsong decided to teach people how to begin a vegetable garden in this dry area. Jan, the 'handyman', is now teaching himself how to grow vegetables using the eco-circle method. With this method one only needs very little water. When it works, the inhabitants can start vegetable gardens at their own houses as well. In the meantime he has been helping a number of patients with the construction of their gardens. The method is as follows: one places a 2-liter bottle amidst the vegetables. To do this, one first digs a hole, filling it again layer by layer with compost, soil, compost, soil. One then uses a needle to punch small holes in the bottle, at the bottom and in the middle. At the top one also punches one or more holes, for air. To water the vegetables, water is poured into the two litre bottle and reaches the roots immediately. In this way no water is lost to evaporation by the hot sun.

Jan Makinta proudly presents his test garden.

Rural, neat and enough space for a vegetable garden.

(Until here from the web)

Due to the abundant rains in December and January many gardens were washed away and vegetables rotted. Also the trial garden needs to be reconstructed. From this we learn that we cannot work out of our own strength but only in dependence on our heavenly Father.

FOSTER CARE

For the Foster Care Board, the year 2010 was a challenging year. We started the year with much hope in searching for a property in the New Eersterust area, where the mission congregation Soshanguve-F4 is also located. Our aim was to purchase a property and build a foster care home (possibly two) there. Initially there were quite a number of properties for sale, which we researched. But one after the other possibility fell away, because the owners did not have the required papers. This was partially due to the fact that until now this area has been considered 'traditional property.' However, the area is currently in the process of being registered.

For a long-term project such as a foster care home, we cannot take the chance of purchasing a property without having proof on paper that this is truly 'our' property. After having experienced the same disappointment with a good number of properties, at the end of 2010 we decided to consider other options as well. This brought us to Block VV, in the southern part of Soshanguve. It became clear that the Mission Board is willing to make a part of the church property available for a foster care home. The plan is that a segment of the church property (larger than 5000 square meters) will be sold for no profit. The mission actually purchased this property a few years back from the AIDS Committee for a very fair price!

In 2011 we hope to be able to give you more news concerning the building process, the selection of foster parents, and the foster children. We pray that the Lord will allow the realisation of this project in 2011!

THANK YOU!

We give thanks to the Lord our God for the many possibilities He provided in the carrying out the various projects. For all the STRENGTH, PATIENCE, WISDOM and ESPECIALLY LOVE and DEDICATION. This goes for our workers in the field, the carers, our hardworking gardener, the young ones who conduct Bible studies with the people, and also for the members of the board.

As a board we could also meet again with Christa van den Berg of DE VERRE NAASTE; many thanks for your care and encouragement. It was a good experience for us to be able to work with you. It is a pity that her contract with DVN ends in April. This year we may also count again on the financial support of DVN. Wonderful! Furthermore we were able to meet with Carla Rozema, a fundraiser at De Verre Naaste. It was nice that you could also make time to visit the different projects, to experience first-hand what they involve.

Many thanks also to the women's society of Western Australia, who held a collection for the Garden Project on their League Day. Fantastic!!!

A final word of thanks to all our faithful donors who continue to provide for us on a monthly basis. We appreciate your care!

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