

# Letter from South Africa

Dear Emmaus House Family & Community,

I greet you all and wish a Merry Christmas. I hope you and your families have remained safe amidst the global Covid-19 pandemic. The world news keep us updated about the status of the pandemic globally and we can only hope that your families are not directly affected. We are saddened by the numbers of those whose lives the virus claimed and pray that God will comfort them in these times of great sorrow and uncertainty. Last night our President [Ramaphosa] cautioned us to be extra cautious as the second wave is predicted., especially with the festive season on us. We wish each one of you safety.

I am sure some of you are aware that we lost our mom [Gogo Celestine Zondi] on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2020 -- when the country was on high alert for COVID-19. We are grateful that after spending almost three weeks in hospital she returned home COVID-19 free. She passed away a week after being discharged. Sad as we were, we thank God for the 86 years she had on this planet where she dedicated her life to the welfare of the people of KwaNdebeqheke. The community loved our mom even during the last two years of her life which were not easy. They visited her, came to pray and eat with her, and made her feel good amidst her physical ailments. We feel blessed to have shared our dear mother with a lot of people.

I wish to share one joke that happened on the day of my mom's "final send-off". After leaving the graveyard, which is at our home premises, I met this little girl (about 6 years of age) behind one of our houses. She was crying and looked like it had been quite a while by the look of her face. I wondered why nobody had paid attention to her. I asked her what the problem was and she explained that two older kids had told her they would not have a Christmas Party at our homestead on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December because Gogo Zondi was gone forever.

I comforted her and promised her it will happen. In any case, for the last two years mom was no longer involved in these events. Rather, I took over and delegated my son, Nhloso and his cousins to be involved. It's amazing how it has become fun for our children as well to bring joy to these kids. While initially it benefitted the kids from the Imbalenhle Day Care (our mom's initiative), we see that older Emmaus House scholars also join in and are happy with whatever little gift they receive. Therefore, I look forward to hosting the "First Annual Gogo Zondi Children's Christmas Party" on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2020.

## KwaNdebeqheke during Covid-19

The coronavirus context demonstrated beyond any doubt the gross inequalities that exist in our country. High profile government officials are suspended for stealing COVID-19 funds meant for the poor which they are said to have preyed on for their self-enrichment. These funds have not reached remote parts of the province, which KwaNdebeqheke is part of. KwaNdebeqheke has never benefitted from any government relief funds, hence in the first place my mom's (and my) involvement in helping out in small ways.

When lockdown was declared from March 26, all forms of schooling came to a standstill. Some KwaNdebeqheke

breadwinners (most of whom do not have education) were laid off from work. They suffered from hunger on a daily basis: some were not even able to afford one meal a day.

People who could afford to drop some noon perishables at my home did so because they knew that the two women, who were my mother's caregivers, would prepare some soup and bread for those who needed food the most. We managed to put together to feed those who needed food the most. The helpers felt they were useful since reaching out kept them busy. We have a big yard at home, so they have been growing vegetables, which they share with those in need. We continue keeping mom's caregivers until we know the way forward. They have families that depend on them which would starve if they lost the income they receive. So, we will just wait and see. They did a wonderful job caring for our mother with such dignity and respect and love.

On the positive side, nobody in our village has suffered or died from Covid-19 related symptoms. When the disease began, I asked colleagues in my department to translate some literature into isiZulu which is our vernacular. I arranged for the pamphlets to be photocopied and sent to KwaNdebeqheke, thanks to my faculty which supported the initiative by paying for the courier costs. Young people, especially those who have benefitted from Emmaus House Scholarships, volunteered to go door to door to educate the community, especially those who cannot read or write. They taught them how to protect themselves and prevent it from killing the villagers, especially those with comorbidities and the elderly. My university also helped with buying materials to sew cloth mask and supplied soap. Young people emphasised the importance of washing hands regularly. There was no way we could provide sanitisers, as they are just too expensive.

As an update, here are the scholars that were supported by Emmaus House in 2020

## 2020 Emmaus House Scholars

5. Mithalane Bukhulu Grade 12
6. Mshengu Minenhle Grade 11
7. Mshengu Phila Grade 10
8. Mbhele Siboniso Grade 7

(I am not sure either that the other children will move to the next grades due to Covid-19 non-schooling)

Let me take this opportunity to wish each one of you a better and Happy New Year in 2021.

Kind regards to you and family,



Mpume Zondi, South Africa

**Editors' note:** Emmaus House is collecting backpacks to ship to the village of KwaNdebeqheke for all children (young and old) for their new school year (which begins in January). Please drop off your backpack donations to Emmaus House (or have them shipped to us at):

**Emmaus House (Albany Catholic Worker)**

45 Trinity Place, Albany, N.Y. 12202

(518) 482-4966 - Thanks!