

THE WARNOCKS' ESCAPADES

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UPDATE FROM SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa: In late January of this year, I returned to Cape Town to continue the process of equipping the local churches within The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) with Disaster Response Plans to better enable them to respond to natural and civil disasters. *As many of you may recall, I originally came to South Africa to assist the MCSA in preparing for the civil and economic disaster associated with the xenophobia attacks.* In this regard, I have met with the local Bishop and his team of leaders, and subsequently with local lay leaders at the church level. The process of implementing local Disaster Response Plans for each has now started. With the continued church implementation of disaster response plans we are confident that our collective efforts will show each community how we can serve and respond to human suffering.

My trip to this region has several other stated (and not stated) objectives in addition to disaster response training. Let me share one update with you.

SHADE - Sojourner, Help, Advocacy, Development, Education: During the first week here, I attended the 10 year anniversary of this organization that has a Vision and Mission of: empowering women to educate their communities about HIV/Aids; to link women across political and social boundaries, thereby creating supportive networks to understand themselves and the areas they serve in relation to HIV/AIDS; and to expand a network of African women involved with HIV/AIDS awareness training and caring for these people. Their mission or vision is only the beginning of this organization. To accomplish these goals they have implemented the following programs: Sister to Sister, Children's Programs, Pilot Jamboree, Disaster Awareness, and Nutrition - all at the same time trying to comprehend a mission that now extends into 16 African countries. This is the simple explanation of what SHADE does and how some of your Advance funding supports this organization. I would encourage you to find out more about this organization by linking to <http://www.shade.org.za>

SHADE Training: During the first day, many of the volunteer leaders shared how they had experienced xenophobia. Some of the stories were vivid accounts of tragedies that occurred in their home country. These stories were all quite graphic and even with the passage of time; they were vivid reminders of how cruel some people can be.

One story told by a person whose name I will withhold for confidential reasons, as she is still fearful of potential consequences of that may occur should her name be made public, shared the following story. I will share it with you as I was equally moved by the follow-up to it.

"Janet", had moved to South Africa from the Congo nearly 11 years ago. Her fears of the repressed government of Congo had prompted her to leave Congo for a better life. For the better part of 11 years, she had coped with life in South Africa. All that came to an end this past summer when xenophobia attacks became painfully real. A group of South Africans came into her settlement and

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pulled one her neighbors into the walkway between their houses. She and her child were inside her house hiding. Looking out at the attack, she watched in horror as the crowd beat the person to death in front of her home. She felt helpless and wanted to respond. However, she also feared for the safety of her child. Helpless and alone, she watched the man die a horrible death in front of her home. Next, the group began shouting at her to come out. She would not. They chanted her - "come out, we won't hurt you". Fear gripped her. With her child, they hid in the corner of their home until the crowd left. Later that evening, she found a long-time neighbor and South African friend who agreed to take and hold her child as she escaped into the streets of greater Johannesburg, South Africa.

It has been nearly 10 months since her escape from the violence that erupted in her community that afternoon and yet, she feels as though it was yesterday. For her, nothing has changed.

On the 3rd day of SHADE's training, I was asked to prepare a brief presentation on Disaster Response and I chose, as part of the topic, to reflect upon the various stages of a disaster and the multiplying calculations that are used as guides to estimate the relief and recovery efforts. The only item that "Janet" heard was my statement that given the relief efforts that were made, the country could expect Recovery to last at least two years. At the end of the day, "Janet" stopped me to ask if we could talk - no specific topic - just talk. We agreed to meet the next morning.

The next morning, "Janet" began with the following. "I was so pleased to know that the Recovery (from xenophobia) is not over. I have been having so much difficulty dealing with a lot of issues". Asking her to explain, she responded by telling me that her son was still living in the settlement (without her) where she fled, and that she was afraid to even go back there. She told me her friend told her it was ok, but yet, her fear stops her from even making an attempt. She explained to me that she is having difficulties trying to know what to say when members of her church ask her how she is doing. She told me she does not want to talk with them because every time they ask, memories of seeing a person being killed outside her home, and virtually abandoning her son instantly surface. During nearly every question that followed she asked "what should I do, what can you suggest?" There were many more questions and many more pleas that followed over the course of an hour with this special victim, serving SHADE, and wondering how to cope.

It is not important to tell you the specifics of how I responded to her. I do believe that I took the necessary steps to guide her to seek the assistance of persons more qualified than I in this area. Still, in this situation, I might suggest that if you had listened to her story, heard her pleas for help, what advice might you have given? What words of comfort might you have offered? Could you even find a way to comprehend the isolation that is part of her daily life? I know I have been blessed and lead a life that many view as privileged. For "Janet", I only hope that the words I shared with her that day were enough.

Xenophobia - a fear of foreigners. One might wonder who fears whom?

