

July 10, 2016

Dumela (Hello) –

We are back safe and sound from Botswana, and we wanted to take a moment and say thank you for your support of our trip. We were so honored to travel to Africa this summer and be part of God's amazing work. We count it an absolute privilege to inform you of the incredible work God is doing through Global Equipping Ministries, Gabriel's House, and Branch Ministries. Below is detailed information about each of these ministries and how we partnered with them.

Also, toward the end of the letter, are Nicole's and A.J.'s thoughts about the trip (I know some of you want to skip down to their sections right away!) And if you are looking for a quick pictorial overview of our trip (instead of reading the epistle below ☺), please visit <http://www.northgatecc.org/2016-missions.html>, which has a video and Powerpoint presentation of our two weeks in Botswana.



The Location

Botswana is roughly the same size of Texas. Its population is approximately 2 million people. We were there during the winter season when temperatures were in the low 40s during the morning and evening, and in the high 70s during the afternoons. Here is a picture of us at the marker for the Tropic of Capricorn,

which runs directly through the country.



The Need

- 33% of population is 15 or under
- 57% of population in certain cities are HIV positive
- Life expectancy increased from 38 years to 53 years in the last five years
- Education rate drops 33% once students reach secondary education
- Very high malnourishment rate
- High toxic pollution in certain areas
- Family unit is broken in most areas
- Strong influence of witchcraft in most village life



The Hope – Jesus Christ

In the midst of all of this need, we were honored to partner with two different ministries that are proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and valiantly serving the people of Botswana. We worked with the ministry of Scott and Alanna Jennings who pioneered both Global Equipping Ministries and Gabrielle's House. These ministries are based out of the town of Mahalapye, which is approximately 40,000 people. Our last two days of the trip, we worked with the Rob and Mary Grindley, who pioneered Branch Ministries. Branch Ministries is based out of Phikwe, a town of approximately 50,000 people.



Global Equipping Ministries (GEM)

The Jennings have worked with the people of Botswana to raise up leaders from within their own country. Pastor “Tex” Kiti, and his wife Joyce, have been trained to lead a church called Christ the Rock in Mahalapye. They are an extremely hard-working couple who have diligently served the people of their town by meeting both spiritual and physical needs of the people. Just recently, the church, which was based out of their home, began to rent a new facility for the people to meet in. This has been a huge blessing to the people and to the Kiti family.



GEM is also actively training several students in Christian doctrine and church life for the purpose of raising up more leaders. The students have just recently graduated from their first year of school and will be completing a second-year curriculum in the new year.

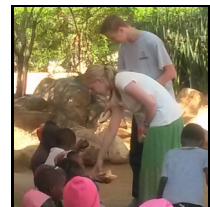


One of these students, Boyce, has begun to pastor a small church in a nearby village called Mogoditshane. We travelled an hour to visit this church, and we were extremely blessed by the people there. Their worship was so heart-felt, despite the fact that they have barely any electricity or running water. The Spirit of the Lord moved mightily, freeing people from the struggles of unforgiveness, unconfessed sin, and witchcraft. It was out here, in the “African bush,” that we also experienced the “glory of God” as we gazed out in the night sky. We were in awe of the night’s splendor. The stars and the Milky Way shone like we had never seen before, and our hearts were worshipful at the sight.



Gabrielle’s House

Each of the students of GEM are required to apply their faith through a work-study project, which is Gabrielle’s House. This ministry is specifically targeted to the children of Mahalapye, and it includes games, Bible lessons, and a feeding program. We were an active part of this ministry every day, performing skits about forgiveness, playing soccer and “link tag” with the children, singing songs, and feeding the children bologna sandwiches, apples, and drinks. Each of the children were so thankful for every piece of food they received as well as the special gifts that we brought them.



We also were able to visit homes. One lady, MaKeleke, was a very ill elderly woman. She was covered in bedsores, sleeping on a urine-soaked mattress on a dirt floor. The conditions were terrible, but God was gracious. Tim had brought his guitar, and besides bringing their family food and cleaning supplies, we were also able to sing praises to God with her. She was so thrilled to see a guitar, and she weakly raised her hands to clap and praise God with us. It was an honor to give her some joy during her last few days on earth. She went home to be with the Lord less than a week later.



The Schools

We had a chance to visit the primary schools in both Mahalapye and Phikwe. Pastor Tex is able to give a weekly exhortation at Flower Hill School each week. This elementary school has 906 students and works with very little material. The students were orderly and sang praises to God, even though this was a public school. It was very refreshing to see that even in a public school, although the curriculum may not be Christian, there is no squashing of Christian influence. We were able to bless the school with a new computer and early phonics supplies. Alanna and I (Deb) were able to meet with the entire staff and show them the materials, and I quickly recognized how desperate they were for materials. They were so appreciative, especially of the new Dr. Seuss books that I brought them. I don't think they ever were given a brand new book to use, and not once did we see a child with a book. Many of the classes were outdoors, and their only supply was a chalkboard and chalk. (And sometimes they don't even have the chalk ... they wet their fingers and "write" out the problems that way.)



We went with Rob Grindley to one of the local schools in Phikwe as well. That school has had tremendous success due to the influence of Christ that the Grindleys have brought there. It had been ranked 11th out of 11 in the district ... but as they welcomed Rob into the system, they have climbed to 3rd (and in some categories 2nd) in the district, and have received numerous awards. The headmistress could not shower enough praise on Pastor Grindley and his positive influence in the school, and she attributes their turn around to his consistent influence. He meets with the teachers and the students, and visits the families of students who might be exhibiting discipline problems. It is very encouraging to see how the influence of prayer and Christ-like character can turn a school around. (America could take a few lessons from Botswana on this!) Tim also shared an exhortation to the students. They were absolutely enthralled with the fact that he was an engineer that worked with NASA to make telescopes and advance space technology. What a blessing to be part of such a great company like Genesis, which helped to provide a bigger perspective of the world for these students and teachers.



Branch Ministries

Beyond visiting the local school with the Grindleys, we were also able to see many aspects of their ministry, called Branch Ministries. This ministry includes two churches, an orphan house, a sports and feeding program, and an AIDS awareness program. While we did not have enough time to visit and serve in all the different aspects of their ministry, we have detailed below some of the highlights of what we did experience.



Children of Promise Orphan Center

Children of Promise Orphan Center is in the process of being built, and is a life-long dream of the Grindleys. They have a fantastic vision for blessing the orphans, and are gratefully seeing this vision come to pass as they patiently build this center. Some of the homes have been completed, and they are working to complete the remaining houses as the finances come in to support their vision. They are truly building the orphan center with excellence! It does not look like anything else we saw in Botswana. The kitchens, bedrooms, and bathrooms were all so clean and well-equipped. The Director's House was so comfortable and well furnished. They have a playground and devotional area outside, and they are producing an incredible garden, full of vegetables and fruit trees to aid in the self-sufficiency of the orphan center. What stood out the most is that their vision is to hire married couples (both in Botswana and outside of the country) to care for the orphans in each house. This is very counter-cultural in Botswana. Most families are broken, and rarely would we see a whole family together at a church service. The Grindleys are working to restore God's beautiful plan for marriage in their area and are also providing an avenue for the care of orphans. We were greatly blessed and encouraged to see the progress of this incredible vision.



Powerhouse Sports

After we saw the orphan house, we went with Rob to visit and minister at Powerhouse Sports. This ministry is providing after-school sports for the kids, as well as a meal and a Bible lesson. Students who were once part of the program are now the counselors for the program. The kids would play in bare feet on sand and dirt fields, some of which had broken glass. Still, they had joyful hearts and played with great enthusiasm. We quickly realized what a gift sneakers are in our society, and also how our younger generation always needs the best "shoes" for sports. Yet these kids were playing in bare feet. It's the simple things!

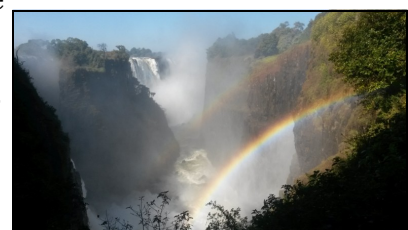


Our whole family participated in the sports with the kids, playing a new game called "Net Ball" (which only the girls played), soccer, American football, and elbow tag. We also performed a skit, and Tim gave an exhortation to the students. We then helped serve a healthy meal to the students. We saw the value of this program, as it gave the kids an organized healthy outlet to occupy their time in the afternoons after school, as well as opportunity to hear and apply the Gospel.



Sightseeing

We did get to do a little bit of sightseeing on the trip as well. We were blessed to see such a wide variety of animals of God's creation. The diversity is truly awe-inspiring. Beyond that, we also saw the splendor and power of Victoria's Falls. What an incredible display of God's majesty. The kids especially enjoyed the thrill of ziplining from Zambia to Zimbabwe over the Zambezi River (while Mom and Dad prayed they'd make it over to the other side!)



Nicole's Highlights

My family and I thank you so much for your support of our trip to Botswana. I had the time of a lifetime from this trip, and learned many different things.

My favorite part of the trip was visiting the children's orphanage in Phikwe. (There are some more pics earlier in this letter and online.) When I was about seven years old, I wanted to become a missionary when I grew up. Part of the things I would do along with preaching the Gospel was to build an orphanage for homeless and orphaned kids. I shared this dream with my cousin, Christopher, who at the time wanted to be a chef and cook for the kids. So seeing this orphanage being built in Botswana was like seeing my childhood dream coming true. The people leading this project, the Grindleys, are building several homes that house ten to twelve kids and a married couple to watch over the kids that will stay there. I am very happy to say that the homes are in amazing condition for the kids' needs: Pillows and blankets in each bed, two bathrooms, an incredible kitchen, and a room for the couple to stay in. The Grindley's have also built a director's home for a director and his/her family to take the responsibility of the orphanage. Additionally, the orphanage has a great garden to teach the kids about agriculture and gardening and a playground with swings, a see-saw, a mini jungle-gym, and other things. They also had a beautiful area for kids to have quiet time outside with God or just by themselves.

My second favorite part was feeding and giving out food and treats to the children of Gabrielle's House. It was adorable to see the joy especially in the little kids' faces when they received their sandwich and drink. They did a little curtsy with their hands cupped and faced up. There were so many kids each day, that one time we didn't have enough food to feed all of them! Multiple times we had to go back to Pastor Tex's house and make more bags full of treats and bring more sandwiches back with us.

My third favorite part was seeing the stars and the Milky Way against a completely black sky out in the town of Mogoditshane. It amazed me to see so many stars twinkling and planets shining. I had never seen so many stars before in my life, because the electricity had been turned off. As I was looking at the stars, I wondered how people couldn't believe in God, or even a Creator, for that matter. The stars just made it so clear to me that we were created.

Well, this all was supposed to be one short paragraph, but oh well! I could go on and on, because I loved the whole trip. Thank you for all of your contributions to our trip. I had a great time, and I hope to return to Botswana to help feed more children sometime soon.



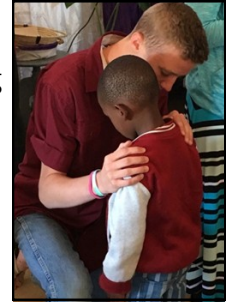
AJ's Highlights

Hey it's the coolest guy in the fam again. I am here to say some of the things that stood out to me.

The first one is obviously that the kids in Botswana love soccer and games. I really enjoyed laughing and playing elbow/link tag with the older kids at Gabrielle's house. I also noticed that the kids were very thankful for every little thing we gave them, whether a sandwich, an apple, or a small toy.



The second thing that stood out to me was the singing. The Botswana kids all could just come together and not really know each other and sing an entire song. It was just part of their culture and it was really cool. We taught them the song about Zaccheus, and I had to act it out each time we sang it. I had to climb a tree about six times in a row, but it was fun to see the kids laugh.



The third was the people's love for GOD. Every church service was EXTREMELY powerful. The worship was awesome, the testimonies were incredible, and throughout the entire service they poured out their hearts to God. There was one service when I was totally filled with the Holy Spirit for the first time. THAT FEELING IS AWESOME.



We also went to Powerhouse Sports and played more soccer. At each ministry, we performed skits that show that God forgives. Even though I know you all want to hear more from me; I can't say everything. Just know the whole trip was awesome and we are so thankful for your support.

Thank You

Your generous support not only provided opportunity for the Gospel to be preached, but it also helped feed and provide gifts for over 500 children. Beyond that, we were able to give a special donation to Branch Ministries. And finally, we were able to provide enough finances to ensure the church venue for Christ the Rock for another year!

It has been such a blessing to be involved with local, grass-roots ministries, where we can be confident that every dollar was being used to help the people and advance the kingdom of Christ. Our family is committed to continually support these ministries, and it is so fulfilling to have faces and experiences to make that support more real and pertinent. If you would like to continue to support either of these ministries, you may visit these links below. They are both very fruitful, and we are confident of the work that they are doing for Christ.



- **Gabrielle's House:** <http://readythesaints.org/index.php/gem-africa/gabrielle-s-house>
- **Branch Ministries:** <http://www.branchministriesbotswana.org/>

May the Lord richly bless you for your prayers and financial support. They have truly impacted the nation of Botswana and our own family. It was so fulfilling to obey Christ's command to "go" as a family. And that never could have happened without your willing and generous support.

In Christ,
The Switzers