

SOUTH AFRICAN TORCH

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." --Psalms 119:105



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Church Services

It is good to be back in South Africa and we have had several opportunities to worship with the Christians here once again.

We have attended the Umzumbe church services and Michael has preached several times. Attendance at Umzumbe has been in the mid 20's. We are pleased to report that several younger people are attending on a more regular basis. Continue to pray for the congregation. The Sunday School is intermittent, but there is a lady who has taken some responsibility for teaching the children.



When Duane Stanley was in South Africa in January he preached at the Umzumbe church. George Jaxa interpreted the message for the congregation.



Brother Nxumalo (3rd from left) has been attending the South African Bible Institute extension classes with Michael. He is an active church leader in the Gcilima circuit of churches.

We recently visited a small congregation which is under the Gcilima circuit. A member invited the church to have a service in her new home, which her children built for her. It is a lovely house in a deep rural area. We traveled on a long, steep, winding road to her home and then discovered she was quite close to the tar road, but the path between her house and that road was badly rutted and not easy to negotiate. About 25 of us gathered to give thanks for her house and worship together. We enjoyed a sumptuous meal after the service. It was good to see one of Michael's extension class students leading the service there.

American Visitors

On January 17 Duane, Michael's brother who is also our forwarding agent and a member of the Church of Christ Mission board in the United States, came to spend two weeks with us. Michael's other brother, Larry, and his wife, Marguerite, also arrived on January 17 to spend a month in South Africa. Since Debbie, their sister, and her husband, Lynton Neethling, live in South Africa it meant that all of the siblings were on the same side of the ocean - something that rarely occurs. James Nicholson, son of former missionary Alvin Nicholson and high school friend of Larry, and James' wife, Marla, also came to South Africa in January. Our first special occasion was Debbie and Lynton's youngest daughter's wedding. Jaclyn and Hugh van Niekerk have now settled in England.



We thoroughly enjoyed our daily guided game drives with our very capable guide, Nkosi.



The baby elephant we saw when a herd of elephants passed in front and back of our vehicle was only a few days old.

The week after the wedding the nine of us enjoyed a 5 day safari vacation. We went to Tembe Elephant Park in Northern KwaZulu Natal. Our accommodation was luxury tents complete with cement floors, wooden doors and bathrooms. All of our food was provided and we were taken on 2 guided game drives each day. We had many wonderful experiences during the week. We saw giraffe, impala, nyala, Cape buffalo, wildebeest, warthog, elephants and lots of birds. However, the highlight had to be the herd of elephants that crossed the road in the front and back of our vehicle. They were so close that we could have reached out and touched them. The herd included a tiny baby of less than a week old! One very curious elephant sniffed the hood of our vehicle to try to figure out what we were! It was certainly a never-to-be-forgotten experience!

In the last few days of their visit we enjoyed some wonderful family times with the Stanley and Neethling children and grandchildren who live here. We also had an opportunity to tour the area and do a lot of reminiscing. It was a wonderful time and we certainly made a lot of memories.

Jethro Zobolo's Death



In late 2016 Jethro Zobolo (second from left) accompanied a group to visit the new church building at Langa.

On Sunday, January 21st Michael and one of the men from the Umzumbe Church went to the hospital to visit Jethro Zobolo, minister of the Gcilima Church of Christ. He had suffered a stroke several years ago and his health deteriorated over the years. When Michael saw him he was very ill. On Monday, January 22nd we got word that Brother Zobolo had passed away. His funeral was on January 28th. Jethro Zobolo's father, Enoch, and grandfather, John, were ministers at Gcilima before Jethro. In addition to his ministry, Jethro was a school teacher until strokes prevented him from continuing that work.

Family News

We are safely back in South Africa. We left Minneapolis (where the temperatures were well below zero) on December 29 and arrived in Cape Town (where it was very warm) on December 30. We stayed 2 nights with friends in Cape Town. They took us to church with them and then took us on a tour of the area. Then we flew to Durban where Dina met us. As we were loading our luggage into the car we discovered that one of our suitcases had been damaged on the last flight. We took it to an airline agent and about a month later it was returned to us. It had been repaired and we were pleasantly surprised to find it was done very well.

We found everything in order at our house and were glad to get settled in. Our housing area had been without water for most of the last four months of 2017. It seems that the cause was a dispute between the workers and the municipality. After we got back we had a few days when we had no water and we had to go to the communal tank to bring water to the house. We attended a community meeting where people voiced their frustration and anger over the lack of services. Finally the residents threatened court action. The press reported all of this and finally action was taken. We have had water most of the time since mid- January! However because of the uncertainty of our water supply we have installed a rain water tank at our house. It will hold over 1000 gallons of water. We had a couple of really good rains and it is now over half full.



The water tank is completely installed and over half full of rain water. This will help us to have a water supply when the municipal water is unavailable.

It has been great to be here where we can see our children, their spouses and our grandchildren! We celebrated Christmas with them shortly after we got back. We also restarted our weekly Grandparents' Day - providing some activities that the moms and dads don't often have time to do. Michael spends one afternoon with Matthew. They play with the electric train, shoot bow and arrow or do other projects. I spend one afternoon with Chayah, Erin and Seanna. We play outside, color, paint or do puzzles. I think we all look forward to our times together.



Michael and Caryl purchased a newer vehicle. The Toyota Hilux diesel pickup (2012) that we were driving was a very reliable workhorse but not the most comfortable. When the right circumstances came together we decided to do an upgrade. We had the opportunity to sell the old vehicle and a newer one which could meet our needs was available. We now own a 2016 Toyota Hilux diesel pickup which is considerably more comfortable and has air conditioning.

Day Care Center

The Sinothando Creche opened in mid-January. Stembele Zamisa returned as a teacher and she recruited Nomfundo Ngcobo as her helper. We have a regular attendance of about 15 children and four of them are still in diapers. We faced the usual problems while trying to register all of the children. Some parents are very slow to get all of the documents together.

When the parents meet we will plan for the year ahead. A new issue is the preparing of meals for the children. On the days when the Seniors meet they have agreed to cater for the children at the same time. For the first time we have a sponsor who has provided money for meals. Now we must find a suitable person to do the cooking which is a part time job. Slowly we are chipping away at the "To Do" list. This year that included replacing a broken window – the result of vandalism which we have seen far too often.

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Magog Senior Citizens Club

Caryl and I have been members of the Magog Senior Citizens Club ever since it started in 2012. From August through December we were overseas and so we missed the regular weekly meetings. When we arrived back in South Africa we resumed our relationship with the seniors. Those who attended still had a lot of enthusiasm for the meetings, but attendance was down. When we asked about this we learned that one man had moved away so that he could live with family who could care for him. This was repeated when another man moved away. Two men are only attending intermittently but we have not learned why.

The women who are by far the majority have been more regular in their attendance but health issues have prevented some of them from coming. In mid-February we were shocked to learn that Doreen Madlala was in hospital because she fell and broke her leg. Since she is in her late-80's recovery is likely to be a slow process. Even though she has returned home she is still not able to attend meetings. She has been one of the most faithful members of the seniors club so her absence has been a great loss.



The children line up and come to the dining room for a bowl of food on the days when the Magog Senior Citizens' Club meets.