

South Africa 2018 - A journey

The journey was something we all embarked on as individuals, to become one group. A journey with a common goal to serve God. A journey that saw 21 young people, who may not have normally come together, come together in a truly wonderful way. From their first taste of what now or now now truly meant in South Africa, when we waited an hour for the mini buses to arrive, to serving God in the community.

The first morning at the cathedral started us on a message which I know a few people took as their guide for the trip. The message was simple "not me, but Him". We were here to serve not for ourselves, but to show God's love. I don't do things for my glory, I do it for God's.

Us just being at the cathedral did just that, as the church warden was overwhelmed that we'd all turned up for the 7:30 am service, with surprisingly smiley faces despite the time and cold weather. The cathedral services were similar to our service, following the book of common prayer, the first service with out hymns and the second with. It was lovely to see the cathedral full of smoke from the incense and hear songs in Sotho at the family service.

The young people joined straight in with helping in the service and talking to everyone, over one of the strangest breakfast you can imagine. Although I was more than happy to eat cake for breakfast.

Mosamaria aids ministry is a charity that works with people in the township that have aids or TB. Mosamaria holds kids clubs each day after school for about 100 children, here they get something to eat, like a peanut butter sandwich or soup. For some this can be their only meal of the day. The children can join in with a sports club, where they are taught not only the skills of the game but also social skills. Mosamaria offers these children some hope and gives them people they can talk to. When we were there we were surrounded by smiling faces, so happy to see us and to teach us games and songs. We split into two groups, to work on two projects. While one group went of to build a shack from scratch, the group I had went to extend a shack. We were extending a shack which was about the size of my kitchen and housed 5 people. Our aim was to give them more space and include windows. This was very important as it added ventilation to the shack, in the hope of stopping the spread of TB among them. The family was a mum and her 4 children. Armed with two spades, a pitch fork and some hammers we set to work. The first task was clearing the ground and digging the holes for the poles to go in. Once this was done we could start putting up the zinc

sheets and windows in place. The young people never once complained while working, in fact they showed determination and jumped at the chance to try and solve problems. One such problem was the fact that we couldn't get the door we had put in to shut, but with determination and team work they managed it. As leaders we were proud of the work they had achieved and the spirit in which they had done so. Taking turns to tag in or out, singing while they worked and encouraging each other.

After two days of hard work, we had managed to help put together a use able shack and three vegetable plots. We were thankful of the locals who had helped, who knew you can cut zinc with just a spade. They all now had a bed to sleep on, a cooker to use and some food. The joy from the family was clear to see and the older girl was overwhelmed by how much we had helped. It was also a joy for us to see that Mosamaria had managed to get her a uniform so she could go back to school, after caring for her mum.

The staff at Mosamaria were so happy to welcome us back and to show what they were now doing. When I first visited Mosamaria 9 years ago, they met just once a week with the children and were lucky if they could give them food. At the moment they can now do this 5 days a week. Although they struggle daily with funding the determination of Trudy and her staff never fails to inspire you, they try their hardest for the families they support. Some of the

workers had taken a significant pay cut, just so the projects could keep going.

Other projects we visited included sunflower house a children's hospice and towers of hope.

At sunflower house we could interact with the children, stickers, bubbles and balls were a big hit. Some of the young people also helped to feed the children there lunch.

For me it was nice to see how one of the children I had met two years ago was nearly ready to go home. This was great news as when she had first arrived at the hospice, having been involved in a car accident, they thought she would die. Although Angel will never walk again it was nice to see her interacting with the young people and feeding herself.

We were able to help the hospice with some of the things they needed at that moment such as nappies, bath soap and tinned food. As well as the children in their care they also help families in the community. Sunflower house was set up 20 years ago as a place for children with HIV/aids to go to die, how far it has come in helping children to live their lives, today is amazing. The walls of the hospice is covered in sunflowers, containing a plaque with the names of those who have died in their care.

Towers of hope is a charity run by the Dutch united reform church. Here our task was to sort out the clothes that had been donated. Who knew how much fun could be had throwing clothes around a balcony and trying a few out. Again the young people got stuck in, with the help of a little music and we had soon sorted through two rows of clothes and found the pews buried underneath. The previous group had helped in their soup kitchen, giving food out to 75 homeless people. Some of the young people saw these people again when we helped out with the cathedral soup kitchen, on a different day.

A visit to a school in Botshabelo, saw us running a session with different classes about the passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 12 "Just as a body, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ." The young people had put together the session themselves, from explaining the passage, to a game, craft and prayer. They also overcame the challenge of the younger classes who didn't speak English. This was a joy to see the young people working together in small groups and helping each other to lead their sections.

We also went to visit St Mathews church in Botshabelo. This was a church I first visited in 2009. Back then it was a shack and they were starting to build a brick building. 9 years later they were

inside and using the building, although it still needed some bits, such as flooring, pews and electricity.

The young people also had a taste of South Africa on a game drive, visiting a market, cheetah experience, Boer war museum (which makes you come out feeling sorry for being British, after hearing that we invited concentration camps) and the apartheid museum. We also visited Naval hill in Bloemfontein, which is home to many animals and a highlight was seeing a herd of Zebras run across the road in front of us. It also gave us a chance to see the whole of Bloem and work out where we'd been that morning.

Other things I shall not forget is walking into a mall and everyone instantly getting their phones out to get on the wifi and finding them in the same place an hour later. Unless we'd crashed the wifi by then. And whenever I hear the words Ladies and gentlemen I wait for a chorus of "this is the moment you've waited for" From the greatest showman. The smiles on the faces of everyone we met and those we helped, for just us being there. For their smiles of joy at the things we take for granted.

It's been one fantastic journey, which I hope isn't over yet. 4 trips to our link diocese. The diocese of the free state is about the size of England and faces many challenges. Currently it is the first time there has been a black bishop and dean of the cathedral at the same time. A link that has been going for 54 years and is the oldest Anglican link. A link that has seen friendships form and grow, across generations. A link that grows in strength not through us but Him. A link I am proud to be part of and support, not for my glory but Gods. A link that every time I visit teaches me something new, It's not me, it's Him.