

Feeding the Hungry in Namitembo, Malawi

February, 2009

Dear Seattle "cousins,"

It's been an amazing few days around here, thanks to all those who contributed to the fund for feeding Namitembo and to Fr. Owen and Fr. Phillip's wonderful organization. Owen had purchased more than 250 bags of maize in December and January and had them stored in the youth center here. By February, it was too late to get a truck down here. I can attest to the way these muddy roads can put an end to forward progress! Representatives of the 8 churches of the parish met a couple of weeks ago and decided to distribute the money directly and let people buy maize themselves. Names of recipients of maize or money, chosen by each church, were written on pink tickets and announced in church last Sunday.

On Thursday, 66 people per church, or 528, came with their pink tickets to get 1/2 bag of maize each. They brought extra bags so they could divide it up right there. It was amazing to see folks hoisting those 50 kg. bags onto their heads. The maize mill next door did more business that day than it has done in months.

Today, 1160 people or 145 per church, were expected to collect 2000 *kwacha*. That is about \$14.80 each. Only 2000 *kwacha* remained at the end of the morning. Owen doesn't think the bank made a mistake, so one person must have lost their ticket, or something. They'll probably be along later.

The bag of 2,320,000 *kwacha*, in 500 kw notes, weighted 6 kg! Its presence last night required two armed policemen, hired from a nearby village, to spend the night. I was expecting they'd park a police car outside the gate, but I'd clearly forgotten where I am. They arrived on bicycles, one with an AK-47 strapped to his handle bars and the other with a vintage rifle (loaded) on the back fender of his bike. Those of us who live here haven't decided if the presence of the guns made us feel more or less safe. However, Fr. Phillip emphasized that having them here had been necessary, especially during the night, since everyone would have known that all that money was on the premises. This morning they stood next to the two entrances to the youth center as people entered, one by one.

The atmosphere was a bit like a church picnic or a county fair as people waited in line or sat under trees waiting for those who were in line. Things began about 9. By 11:30 it was pretty hot. Lots of colorful umbrellas went up to make pools of shade. It was all finished by a little past 12.

Owen says most of the money will be spent for maize because people are hungry. Maize, made into *nsima*, is definitely the staple here.

I feel humbled at having been here these two days. **If anybody in Seattle ever wonders if their money is put to good use when it is sent here, I will be a witness for the fact that it is.** I took lots of pictures. I'll send them as fast as g-mail will allow.

Ann Nachtigal

Feeding the Hungry...

It's not so easy, or straight-forward! First you have to buy and store the maize...



Then someone has to make all the coupons by hand (so they can't be copied) ...



Meanwhile representatives of the 8 churches that comprise Namitembo decide who is most in need ... then the coupons are given out ...

But there will not be enough maize! There are no longer any large supplies to be found anywhere for hundreds of miles! And anyway, the rains have made the roads into a river of mud, impassible for any further heavy loads. So a decision is made to distribute kwacha (money) to those still in need, so they can buy whatever might be available to eat, even it is not so good as maize... at least that will break the hunger.



And the people come!





There are even two armed guards, just in case... but there is no trouble. And the people receive the maize at last, or money to purchase whatever they can. Depicted in these pictures are two distributions. On a Thursday, 66 households per church, or 528 in all, come to receive 1/2 bag of maize each — about 50 lbs. The following Saturday, 145 per church, or 1160 households altogether, collect 2000 kwacha... about \$14.80 each. A third distribution will take place in March.

