

St. Bridget Parish, Elephant Stampede

September 21, 2008 12:00 noon

Our twelfth Elephant Stampede will be here in just two weeks! Day-of-event registration is \$30 and begins at 12:00 noon at Magnuson Park, with the picnic barbeque starting at 12:30 and the race itself starting at 1:00 p.m.. Pre-Registration (up through Sept. 14) is \$25 per adult, and you'll be guaranteed a free Elephant Stampede T-shirt. Please see details on the enclosed brochure and registration form.

Dear Parishioner of St. Bridget,

Back in 1997, St. Bridget's Pastoral Council elected to become a "sister parish" partner of Namitembo parish in southern Malawi, with the blessings of our pastor, Fr. Harold Quigg, and the pastor of Namitembo, Fr. Owen O'Donnell. Shortly afterward, St. Bridget initiated the "Elephant Stampede" as a festive fundraiser to help support Namitembo Mission and its works, which include seven "outchurches" along with the main church at Namitembo. Through their leaders on their Parish Council, the people of Namitembo identified education as their number one need; and St. Bridget went to work! We first helped build teacher housing, so that the schools could qualify for government teachers. After that, came additional school classrooms in each of the outchurch areas. Then, the high school at Namitembo was expanded, and a new one built named St. Bridget CDSS (Community Day Secondary School).

The people of Namitembo assisted with all of these elementary and high school projects by molding and firing the bricks for the construction. Delegations of parishioners from St. Bridget began visiting nearly every year, with visits from Fr. Owen and other native clergy at least every other year. The involvement and support began to branch out, as St. Bridget helped purchase food during two famines, and helped build a youth center and a community center. Principal Mike Foy visited two years ago, and had a vision that our help could eventually go beyond the buildings, to helping with the quality of education that went on inside the building. An irrigation pump project and a seed project were begun with the support of individual parishioners. And upon Mike's sudden death, funds from our parish auction were raised to build the Mike Foy Hall at St. Bridget CDSS.



Roof open, with Fr. Owen inspecting the work.



Nearly completed Hall



Dedication this summer

As work continued on many of these projects, conversations began six years ago with our Pastoral Council and with the leadership of Namitembo about still another project, related but more ambitious. The Namitembo Trade and Agricultural School (NAMTAS) was officially kicked off four years ago, as a partnership that included Bishop Thomas Msusa of the Diocese of Zomba. The concept was to build a center that could teach marketable skills to the people of the Namitembo area, providing alternatives beyond subsistence farming. Students were to be prepared to meet certification standards in their chosen trades. Agriculture was to be included as well, once the Trades courses were established.

The school began slowly, building two homes, for the Administrator and a tutor. A small existing parish building was renovated for the Computer lab, and offices in existing parish buildings used for Administration and Tailoring. A well was dug and water tower built, so the school would have water available. Other tutors were hired, and an existing building fixed up for classrooms for teaching carpentry and masonry. The continued popularity of the computer class prompted purchase of a satellite dish and better computers, bringing the internet to Namitembo!

Enrollment was still slow until this year, and it was initially difficult to convince potential students from the Namitembo area that this education would be worth the time and cost of tuition. However, students from outside the area saw this opportunity as a good thing, and outside groups, including World Vision, provided some scholarships. This past year student enrollment rose to the mid-70's in number, including students from the Namitembo area.



Aerial shots of classrooms (left) and duplexes (right) Anderson Rajab, carpentry tutor, and a workshop desk

In response, a new Administrator was hired, and Fr. Owen has increased the pace of construction. Four duplexes were finished, to accommodate projected staff. The carpentry and masonry workshops were completed and a storeroom built for their materials. The new tailoring classroom was completed, and a regular computer classroom begun. Plans have moved ahead with space for four new trades: electricity, plumbing, welding, and mechanics. To coincide with our efforts, a Malawian women's foundation has also provided scholarships for women to learn the trades, and is now providing funding to build a Nursery and Child Care center on the NAMTAS campus, which will begin in a few days! This will enable women with babies or small children to still attend the school. Along with this, there are plans for dormitories for men and women, an administrative block, and even an "internet café" (using donated hardware).

To keep a long story short, Fr. Owen has estimated that it will cost approximately \$135,000 to finish the TRADES portion of NAMTAS. The parish just sent the last \$25,000 of the money that has been raised for Namitembo to date. A parish family has pledged to contribute \$55,000 -- half of the remaining amount -- if the rest of our parish can raise the rest.

Can we meet the challenge?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Duffee".