

This is a sample of a recent mailing to Sponsor-A-Student donors!

St. Bridget Parish
4900 NE 50th St.
Seattle, WA 98105

August 1st, 2011

Principal Kathi Hand
Assumption-St. Bridget School

Dear Kathi, and all the faculty,

I've just recently returned from an African visit to our friends in Namitembo, along with our seven teens and four other adults. There were twelve of us -- the largest delegation from St. Bridget in our 14-year history. I hope you were able to read one or more of the notes that I wrote up for the bulletin while I was gone, and I hope I was able to convey our enthusiasm for the trip.

Over the next two months leading up to the Elephant Stampede (at Magnuson park on Sunday September 18th), we hope to say a lot more about the trip. Toward the end of August we'll distribute brochures for the Stampede, and in early September I hope to publish a much more comprehensive report covering all that Namitembo has accomplished over the years of our partnership, with our help. Finally, on the weekend before the Stampede our youth will speak at all of our weekend Masses, to share their experiences. As we begin to plan these efforts, we will hold an open meeting of the Friends of Namitembo on next Wednesday evening, August 3rd, at 7:00 p.m. in the Fireside Room. You're of course welcome to attend, and I hope you can. To entice you to come, I'll even put together desserts and beverages for the gathering.

In addition, we have finished our Sponsor-A-Student year, and on this visit I gathered information on the Trade School and the students we sponsored, so that I would be able to report to you and to the others who together sponsored so many of these young men and women. Those results are included with this mailing.

This was the first year for the SAS effort. Our goal is to meet the operating deficit of the school, and do it in a way that creates closer, more personal connections between students there and individual contributors here. With that in mind, our approach is to identify one particular student for each sponsoring family, so that our sponsors can follow a particular student. Last year, unfortunately, that proved to be beyond our ability, as communications with the school were too difficult. I hope you will excuse this, and will instead allow me to give a more general report for this year. During this summer's visit, I was able to establish the kind of working relationship that should make more individual information available in the future, in a timely way. This mailing does include, in addition to the results from the year-end testing, a one-page financial report for the Trade School and its year-end recommendations. I also have a full 16-page report available on request.

I am very happy to report to you that the school is thriving! During this visit to Namitembo, I met with every student and faculty member, and with the faculty as a group. I also met extensively with the Trade School Administrator, Mr. Robert Kapinda. In addition, all of the adults on our trip joined me in meeting with Mr. Kapinda, Fr. Owen, and Bishop Thomas Msusa, touring all the buildings of the school and then gathering together afterwards in a general discussion about the school and its future. On the very day that we met with the bishop about the school, we were all pleased to learn that World Vision was sending 37 new students to the school, providing them tuition scholarships and paying their fees for testing at the end of the term. *This pushes the number of registered students over 100 for the first time in its history!* The school also has just hired new teachers in bricklaying and tailoring -- and wound up hiring well-qualified alumni from the Namitembo area for both positions. Clearly, we are accomplishing the goal of providing skills that will provide opportunities to have a better life.

The school is also developing a better capacity to “follow its students” – i.e., to track the subsequent job paths of its graduates. I can say with confidence right now, however, that in each of the four trades there are abundant opportunities for jobs, and we know many graduates who have found employment. In bricklaying and carpentry, there are job openings with companies in the cities or towns, as construction jobs in Malawi are currently plentiful. (Though very poor, Malawi’s economy has grown at a 7-8 percent annual rate in the last few years.) In computers, successful students would likewise find openings fairly quickly, working in an office in one of the cities. In tailoring, there is work available right in the rural villages, as long as the graduating student owns or is able to have access to a sewing machine. (Perhaps in the future the school will be able to offer incentives to its top graduates, in the form of a basic tool set or a used sewing machine!)

This brings up one very important thing about the Trade School that I would like to point out, not just for you but for everyone in our parish and anyone outside our parish that may be interested in this project. *The Trade School is not financially self-sufficient, and it is not likely to become self-sufficient in the near future.* Without help from us, the school’s operating deficit currently would run around \$30,000 per year. My opinion is that the only way this might change substantially would be through an endowment fund of some kind.

However, I would like immediately to point out that ***the vast majority of schools of any kind, in any country, are not self-sufficient.*** Tuition alone does not fully fund Villa or Assumption-St. Bridget school (or Laurelhurst Elementary); nor does tuition alone fund Prep or Blanchet (or Roosevelt); nor does it fully fund Seattle University (or the University of Washington). Schools in the U.S. are funded by government support, parish support, and/or fundraising of various kinds. There is some support from the Malawian government to supply funds for teacher salaries for its elementary and secondary schools. But the Malawian government does not provide funding for the Trade School, nor is there any likely private source in Malawi which could do so. Our Sponsor-A-Student program was begun as an effort to provide that source of support.

So, I bring to you first-hand knowledge that our SAS program is off to a great start. We have begun to have more of a personal relationship with the Malawian young men and women students to positively impact their lives and the lives of their community. My hope and plea is that you and others will continue to support the young men and women in our Trade School – not just so that they may acquire these skills, but that we might help provide the hopeful future that these skills represent. And I thank you most sincerely for your support.

Blessings to you and your family,

Deacon Denny Duffell