

Opportunities for Support in South Africa

As I have gotten more settled in South Africa, I have been able to prioritize my needs both for personal maintenance and also for engaging in ministry here at JL Zwane. There have been some interesting expenses that I did not expect, particularly those which are direct requirements for ministry within the context of the Guguletu community. Communication in South Africa is extremely expensive. At the church, we are only able to make phone calls to other land lines, and not to cell phones. Unfortunately, though, most of the people in Guguletu don't have land line phones because either they are too expensive or their "house" is part of an informal settlement where installing a phone line is impossible. Instead they have cell phones which can receive incoming phone calls for free, but often they do not have money to call out to other phones. Most times, I will get a text message that says, "call me," so I can call them when they don't have any airtime. Getting used to the phone system has been extremely challenging... those of you who remember how much I talked on my cell phone while in the US can imagine how difficult it has been to adjust to only making phone calls when it is absolutely necessary. There is no budget at the church for things like making phone calls to members of the church or community nor is there a budget for purchasing supplies for programs or teachings which are a part of the church.

Now that I am at the JL Zwane, I am responsible for the Orphan Program. We have about 70 children under our care, and I work with a woman named Milly who is a member of another Presbyterian church in our Presbytery. She has an amazing ability to find resources but as one might imagine, need exists beyond her capacity. On a weekly basis we are continuing to assess the needs of the children. Each week something new comes up. There are children who need medicine to dress a wound or children that need books for school. Students are responsible for all of their education costs in South Africa, even children who have no parents and no jobs. They are even responsible for their transportation to and from school which often requires them to take a train, a bus, and a taxi just to get to school. Because this is a growing problem, I am extending the opportunity for you to contribute to an education scholarship fund. There are opportunities to sponsor individual children for school or to donate to a general fund which will be used to deal with the weekly issues that come up.

As you consider the Christmas season and perhaps alternative giving, please know that a little bit, even five dollars goes a long way in this community. If you are interested in helping with some of the programs, teaching, and supplies that we need, you may send funds to the Presbytery of Florida (P. O. Box 7, Chipley, Florida 32428) and designate them for the "**Mel Baars Benevolence Fund.**" If you are interested in making a contribution to the general education fund, you may also write a check to the Presbytery of Florida and designate them for the "**Mel Baars general education fund.**" If you are interested in sponsoring a child for school, please contact me directly at mel.baars@gmail.com. Below is a more comprehensive list of my personal needs each month.

Basic Monthly Expenses:

Housing- \$300

Food- \$350

Car Maintenance/insurance- \$80

Utilities/Communication- \$135

Petrol/Local Travel- \$150

Monthly Total- \$1015