

ST CYPRIAN'S CHURCH, LANGA, SOUTH AFRICA

Late afternoon. An old woman is cooking sheep's heads in a cauldron at the side of the road. A toddler runs past sucking water from a quarter-size Smirnoff bottle. Children play football beside a run-down block of flats, their feet sending up sprays of vivid red dust from the unmade road. This is Langa, a township on the outskirts of Cape Town, home to 55,000 people.

We first visited Langa in 2005 when our guide was a young man called Thembalakhe Batwa. He was wearing a T-shirt with "St. Cyprian's Church Health Run" written across it and it transpired that he had visited York in 2003. *"I sang in the minster and spoke with the archbishop"*, he told us proudly. He showed us the best of Langa and the worst - and the worst was very bad indeed, particularly in the shanty town. We are all aware of poverty in our own country, especially at this present time, but here was poverty on a level we had never seen before with no welfare state to ease the pain.

Over the next few weeks we discussed with our friends at home what we could do to help. St Cyprian's seemed a good place to start.

Some months later we were finally put in touch with Zandile Mcutshenga, a lay minister at St Cyprian's church and so the Middleton Benefice set about raising funds. First of all we bought them a computer to help with their parish work. What next? Zandile explained about their Phathisanani community outreach programme. Health is their chosen project and since hunger is related to poor health they run a soup kitchen twice a week but it was difficult to fund. Could we help?

The Langa soup kitchen has been our Middleton benefice mission for the past ten years. Money is raised in a variety of ways and we are able to send about £2,500 annually.

The kitchen, run from two shipping containers because they can't afford a church hall, is open twice a week for soup on Mondays and meat and vegetables on Fridays. Three hundred meals are provided each week, including to school children whose only meal it is. St Cyprian's is the last soup kitchen to remain open in the Township. We are told that without our help this too would close. St Cyprian's gives what it can but with unemployment running at 70% in Langa the parishioners are very impoverished and local charities overwhelmed by requests for help. So we, in the Middleton benefice, simply have to keep things going.

Zandile and her friend Bulie stayed with us for two weeks in August and left us all in no doubt about the vital importance of our support. It is very humbling to realise that, although separated by 6000 miles, we are able to make a difference, if only in a very modest way, to the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Please pray for the good people of St Cyprian's.

To ensure the long term future of the Soup Kitchen, it is important that we continue in the Middleton and Kirby Misperton Benefices to commit ourselves to raising awareness of the needs of St Cyprian's, organising fund raising activities and motivating others to support these events.

In the best of worlds, it would be beneficial to St Cyprian's for support for the Soup Kitchen to become a Deanery commitment.

Please consider carefully and prayerfully whether you could be one of the people in our Deanery to take on this vital work to help our brothers and sisters in Langa. If you believe this is for you and you would like to pursue this particular line of Christian service, please have a word with one of us. We shall be delighted to tell you more about what is involved.

Ann and Adrian Bishop

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