

UPDATES FROM LESOTHO

If you have been wondering what has been happening in Lesotho over the past few months, here is an update.

IN THE COUNTRY

Lesotho began a coronavirus lockdown on 31st March, initially until 21st April but it was extended until May 5th. The government has announced that the lockdown will end in Lesotho. The country has no recorded cases of Covid19 – but it needs to be acknowledged that it does not have testing capacity for which it relies on South Africa. Along with other African countries it was perceived that the impact on those already living in poverty would be even more detrimental than the virus itself. *We pray that the people of Lesotho will be spared the effects of the pandemic.*

Whilst this has been happening there has been considerable political upheaval which has led to intervention by South Africa. Parliament wants to prevent the current practice of a prime minister being able to ask the King to dissolve parliament and hold new elections whenever he loses a vote of no confidence. This is proving costly, divisive, and destabilising. The Prime Minister is refusing to leave office despite considerable scandal attaching to his premiership. *We pray for a swift resolution to this ongoing political crisis.*

IN THE LINK

During the lockdown two of the LINK staff lived on site, acting as security guards and doing maintenance around the property. We have been able to pay all staff full salaries for the first month and half salaries the following month. It is hoped that all the staff will be able to return to work and that bookings for accommodation (crucial to the LINK's income) will recommence soon. The



On site staff repairing the centre

visit to Durham by Joseph Morenammele (Executive Officer in Lesotho) and Martin Habaka (head of programmes) planned for this month has had to be postponed until a future date. However, the LINK trustees in Durham were able to have a very fruitful and constructive meeting via Zoom with Joseph which was really helpful and may lead to new ways of incorporating input from Joseph on a more regular basis. Sadly, a planned visit by Ian Ramsey Academy later this year will not now be happening, and further visits by Rock UK are in some doubt. *We pray for all those at both ends of the LINK who will be disappointed and frustrated by this development.*

IN THE DIOCESE

It had been anticipated that this edition of e-Moho would bring news of the appointment of the new Bishop of Lesotho. Yet another victim of the virus! The electoral assembly has not met so a new appointment has not been made. An additional pressure on the church is that the vast majority of church collections are on the plate. With services cancelled many parishes have been unable to pay their quota and clergy stipends are in doubt. *We pray for the church and its leaders in Lesotho, for wisdom, faithfulness and grace.*

LIPHAPANG STEVEN MOLOKENG: 26th July, 1926 - 19th March, 2020

Supporters of the LINK, especially those engaged in its early years, will be sad to learn that the LINK's first executive officer, Steven Molokeng, died on 19th March 2020, at the age of 93 at his home in Butha-Buthe in the north of Lesotho. Steven (who rarely used his Sesotho name, Liphapang) was born in the winter on 26th July 1926 growing up in the Orange Free State of South Africa with his brother and two sisters: Steven was the youngest. Both his parents were illiterate but Steven, who was especially close to his mother, (she was of Zulu origin) recognised that he was powerfully influenced by her strong moral principles. In his young most formative years his two older sisters, Lena and Lizzie, set a firm foundation for his future excellent command of English teaching him Sesotho and English rhymes; Steven recognised this was also a firm foundation for his outstanding success in school. He first went to school when he was nine years old but it seems the delay, by modern standards, did him little harm as he learned five languages and a love of reading: he once said, "reading to me is as essential as having a meal". Steven's Secondary education was no less successful than his Primary school days; he eventually graduated in South Africa as a qualified teacher when he was 21 but his developing interest in politics, in what was then apartheid South Africa, attracted the attention of government officials so in January 1955 he sought refuge in Lesotho where he continued work as a teacher eventually becoming headteacher of Teyateyaneng Primary School then a tutor in the National Teacher Training College before being appointed as Educational Secretary of the Anglican Church Schools.

It was from there that he moved to become a very active worker for the LINK and was a "wise counsellor" and loyal friend. The strength of the LINK in Lesotho owes much to Steven; in difficult situations his was the first advice I sought and that was a firm foundation to our excellent working relationship. As his school record implies he was a highly intelligent person who never failed to be an effective cultural bridge between the Basotho and the English tempered by his keen sense of humour (when suffering from frequent pain in his right hip he kept a large onion in the right-hand pocket of his jacket or trousers which, with great amusement, he would reveal to close friends whilst maintaining it was the best relief available)! I knew his first wife Fabia well but only once met his second wife Mary. Fabia was a great friend of the LINK providing many workers, particularly those involved with the construction of Mohatlane Community Education Centre, with frequent refreshment and was lauded for serving many litres of her home-made brand of 'ginger-beer'! It was a sad day when she died on 16th March, 1993 but when, on the morning after her funeral, I phoned Steven he responded to my condolences saying: "Thank you Peter, we all accept she has now fully recovered". She and Steven were strong supporters of St Agnes Church at Teyateyaneng.

Just occasionally Steven's fluent command of modern-day English regressed: I asked him once how many times he had visited the LINK's clinic at Ha Popa to which he replied: "at least thrice". Another occasion was when I was irritated that a participant had not arrived on time for a training session: "but Peter he's late" said Steven; "yes, I know he should have been here ten minutes ago" I replied; "but Peter, he's late, he died last night"! At other times he was able to correct, in a kindly manner, inappropriate or wrong comments. Travelling together to Ha Sefako to establish a woodland site we drove past a British Government Overseas Development woodland site with all the trees standing in straight lines and each tree exactly two metres apart; "look at that Peter; planted by an Englishman"! Later we were overtaken by heavy rain clouds and I remarked (thinking of the rough track ahead) "Steven, that looks very threatening" which prompted the rejoinder: (thinking of planting trees in a period of drought) "Peter, that looks very promising"! Steven was a very patient man with an outstanding ability to bargain with chiefs when we required land for our projects and, more importantly, their support for our projects. When we were tired and weary his sense of humour would often lighten the burden of an onerous task.

The LINK was so very fortunate in having Steven at its helm in Lesotho from 1990 to 1994 a period of intense activity when he assisted in the preliminary research for the Ha Mohatlane Community Education Centre feasibility study which was strongly influential in securing European Community and British Government support. Even though he was instrumental in launching that particular project he made no secret of the fact that it was the Woodland Projects that captured his strongest interest. He once wrote: "Community plantations were started by the LINK in the Quthing and Qacha's Nek Districts. It is such a pleasure to see these woodlands and plantations adorning the landscape wherever they have been tended". He much preferred "to be in front of tree than behind a desk" and led much of the work by example. He visited Durham three times in the course of his work for the LINK.

I acknowledge with thanks the kind help of Steven's daughter Palesa Pholosi and Tšepo Mokuku in the preparation of this obituary. I had known Stephen for 47 years since the start of my professional connection with Lesotho in 1973: although in recent years our contact was intermittent I shall, nevertheless, miss him greatly.

Peter Green,

'Nine Oaks'

TATTINGSTONE,

Suffolk.

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