

Clothing drive helps nutrition needs in south Africa

By Dave Pedersen

When members of Zion Lutheran Church in Arlington and others were recently packing the truck with donated clothes, there was one observer in particular who fully realized the importance.

The night of the clothing drive pickup happened to be the same night when Zion hosted the meeting of the area companionship ministry that pairs congregations in southwestern Minnesota with congregations in southern Africa.

A special guest was Skhumbuzo Mntambo, the new partnership chairperson of the Southeastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. He was visiting all 10 Conferences in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

After Mntambo watched people like Zion members Dave Battcher and Joyce Bening, plus Pastor Katherine Rood from Christ Lutheran in Glencoe throw bags of clothes on to the truck, he said he was humbled.

“It touched me to see the love for a brother in another country,” said Mntambo when viewing the loving task of work done with the clothes drive. “Whatever we receive from their work, I saw how people are sweating because they love us.”

Zion is in the Minnesota Valley Conference that is paired with the Vryheid Circuit in southern Africa. This partnership is about walking together, each recognizing and celebrating what God has given them, utilizing identified resources and assets on both sides.

The terms of companionship and partnership are used to describe the church-wide global missions program that paired the synods of the ELCA with other Lutherans in the world.

What evolved was the creation of a deeper lasting relationship and understanding of the culture, politics and visions for hope. In the past few years there have been visits by people to and from Africa, making the ministry more personal.



Photo: Skhumbuzo Mntambo (right) from south Africa, was on hand at Zion Lutheran Church in Arlington when Oather Martin picked up many bags of clothing used as a fundraiser to send nutritional meals to Lutheran congregations in Africa.

Agreed upon project areas include agriculture, education, pastoral leadership and HIV/AIDS. Nutrition is a key weapon in the fight against HIV/AIDS. That is why a clothing drive was conducted to raise funds to provide nutritional meals in the Vryheid Circuit.

Zion has been the leader in the amount of donated clothing, shoes, belts, hats and any material. It is collected by the Disabled Veterans Chapter 37 in Hutchinson and marketed through the Savers outlet stores.

This is the third year for the clothing drive program that sent 26,000 meals packed in 28 boxes to the Vryheid Circuit, one of the poorer areas in the Diocese. Meals are bean and rice based with high protein added. They are packaged in Tanzania and sent to Johannesburg for pickup. The program is Feed My Starving Children.

Gail Nuessmeier from Zion said her church has embraced the partnership ministry. The children of Zion have supported funding of school uniforms for the children of Vryheid. The women have donated funds from their Marktplatz bazaar held every November. The congregation has been very generous every year for the clothing collection.

The clothing drive this fall resulted in the collection of 11,906 pounds. Savers pays so much per pound. The total cost of the meals project is \$5,200. The total was reached all three years.

Oather Martin from Grace Lutheran in Brownton is chair of the Minnesota Valley Conference and Commander of the Hutchinson DAV. He coordinates the clothing drive for the MVC and often does most of the pickup and delivery. He said his DAV chapter delivers a load of clothes from the five-country area every week, generating \$98,000 per year. The meals project is separate.

“This is the only income for the chapter,” said Martin about serving Renville, Meeker, McLeod, Sibley and Carver counties. “We are all volunteers and 77 percent of the money goes support veterans. There are costs for insurance, fuel and the construction of drop boxes.”



The next meeting of the Minnesota Valley partnership ministry is 6 p.m. Jan. 8 at St. Paul's Lutheran in Hector. The event starts with a meal involving a free will offering.

Photo: Helping Oather Martin load the truck with clothes from Zion Lutheran in Arlington included from left- Dave Battcher and Joyce Bening from Zion and Pastor Kathryn Rood from Glencoe.