

A Letter from Michelle

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Though the dread of night overwhelms my soul

He is here with me, I am not alone.

O His love is sure, and he knows my name

For my God is, the Ancient of Days.

Ancient of Days by City Alight

Dear Friends

The song above is a favourite of mine at the moment, in fact I had a hard time deciding which verse to use for this letter. I was listening to it recently as my car ground to a halt and could not be persuaded to move again. It was good to be reminded that God was with me as I sat by the side of the road waiting to be towed back to Mukinge. The car has since been taken to Solwezi (180km away) and fixed. In a world where there is a pandemic, natural disasters, wars and unrest a broken-down car is not such a big deal but it is comforting to know that whatever we are struggling with and wherever we may be, we are not alone God is with us.



The construction of our new operating theatre and ICU is almost finished. The last major thing to be done for now is the solar power and this should be installed soon. The plan is to move in in January. We hope that in time we will be able to raise enough money to install a piped oxygen system. In preparation for the opening we have been doing some extra training for the nurses who will be working in the ICU. I led a couple of sessions including one on paediatric resuscitation.



The future Intensive Care Unit

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How is the COVID situation in Zambia? Probably the most frequent question I get asked, at the moment, and the answer is not simple. Compared to many countries our numbers are low as is the mortality rate. However, the numbers are slowly rising and we have had our first patients test positive at Mukinge. So far most of these patients have not been admitted with typical COVID symptoms but were found to be positive on random testing. The results take a couple of weeks to get back to us, so by the time we realise that the child with diabetes or the man with hypertension was also was COVID positive they have been discharged and gone home. This makes the task of contact tracing and testing difficult as the team has to find people and track their contacts in sometimes distant villages weeks after they left the hospital.

All over Zambia schools, colleges and universities opened up again in September and students of all ages are required to wear masks. Our own Nurses Training College has resumed classes and we have over 600 students back studying and trying to make up months of lost study with evening lectures and classes on Saturdays.



COVID has meant many changes to the lives of people all over the world and Mukinge is no exception.

Wearing a mask in the hospital has become the new normal and no one is allowed in without one. The 24th October is Zambia's Independence Day. There may not be the usual big celebrations this year, but I am ready for the day with my mask in the colours of the Zambian flag!

With the return of students our isolation centre had to be relocated as it was originally in one of their classrooms. The only place that was free and had everything we needed to set up an isolation ward was our chapel. So, our Chapel is now a ward and our morning devotions are held outside.

Not all effects of COVID have been negative, I was able to "attend" my Goddaughter's wedding on line due to the restrictions on gatherings in the UK.

Zambia relies on tourism for a big part of its income but this year with travel restrictions, no flights and two weeks isolation required on arrival the industry has been hit hard. Some places, to encourage visitors, have done special deals for Zambian residents. For me this meant a holiday in Kafue National Park staying at places that normally would be beyond my budget. It was the most amazing week. We saw so many animals and birds on our game drives, relaxed by the river and ate way too much!



Thank you for taking the time to read my news, I would love to hear your news too.

Love

Michelle

