



LOVEMUSTACT

Partnerships for Sustainable Education

*"Love Must Act as light must shine and fire must burn."
-Fr. James Otis Sargent Huntington, OHC*

“Siyahamba, ekukanyen' kwenkos'... We are marching in the light of God...”



Since returning from this year's Reading Camp, I don't think a day has gone by that I haven't at some point, felt the need to sing this song! Every evening, we entered and exited the chapel joyfully, singing this South African folk song, a personal favorite of mine that my students often sang in chapel when I was serving as a school chaplain. It is also a song that beautifully captures the experience of Reading Camp, where God's light was shining brightly.

In July 2009, while pursuing my M.Div. at The School of Theology at Sewanee, I was given the opportunity to study contextual theology at the College of the Transfiguration (COTT) in Grahamstown, South Africa. I had written about two of my heroes, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Father Trevor Huddleston, in my application essays, and it just so happened that one of the deans at the School of Theology at the time had served on Desmond Tutu's staff at St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town. He mentioned the possibility of me taking a course at COTT, and

eventually, that possibility became a reality. It felt like a “Holy Spirit thing.” To say my time in South Africa had a significant impact on me personally and my work as a priest would be a massive understatement. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it was life-changing.

Fast forward several years and following work primarily as a school and college chaplain, I am now serving as rector at St. George’s Episcopal Church in Griffin, Georgia...the same St. George’s where The Rt. Rev. Stacy Sauls once served. At the urging of several parishioners to reach out to Stacy, I finally did. And another “Holy Spirit thing” began to unfold. Not only did our conversation bring back wonderful memories of my time in South Africa, but I also realized that the Holy Cross School, which Love Must Act supported, was the same school I had visited in its early years while on retreat with the monks of Mariya uMama weThemba Monastery. At the same time, we at St. George’s were discerning what our next mission focus might be, and what kept coming up was education...locally and globally. Soon a partnership was in the works, and I, along with parishioner Toni Turner, would make the trip to volunteer at Reading Camp in hopes of laying the groundwork for future opportunities for members of St. George’s to serve at Holy Cross School.

I don’t think I can come up with enough positive adjectives to describe my experience with the Holy Cross School students, teachers, and staff, and our time together at Reading Camp. From the dedication, love, and care for the students that was shown by the teachers and staff to the focus and effort exhibited by the students, I was so impressed with the learning and teaching that took place. Every day was a joy. Helping out in the pleasure reading station, I will never forget laughing all the way through Dr. Seuss’s *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* with Lihame, the smile of Likuwe, or the way in which Ngcwele tried to capture the emotion of the characters in every book we read together. I will never forget the break time fun at the ping-pong and foosball tables, the singing (on the bus, in chapel, or almost anywhere!), or the wonder on the children’s faces as we encountered the wildlife on safari or during our afternoon at the beach.

Holy Cross Principal, Nicci Hayes, made a point of telling the students just how far those of us from America had come to be with them and that we had done so because we care so much about them. And while it is true that we crossed an ocean and endured a long flight...the greater truth is that our time together at Reading Camp illustrated that the distance between us, when illuminated by God’s light, is non-existent. We may come from different continents, live in different time zones, speak different native languages, and play different sports (I’m still trying to understand rugby!)...but we are all children of God, all members of God’s family, created in God’s image, and made to be in relationship with God and one another. Reading, playing, praying, and being together made that very clear. I’m already looking forward to returning and bringing more friends with me, so they can also experience the joy of Reading Camp!

“Siyahamba, ekukanyen' kwenkos'... We are marching in the light of God...”

The Rev. Kirk LaFon
St. George's, Griffin, Georgia
2023 Reading Camp Volunteer

LIFE-CHANGING; WORLD-CHANGING



*Let us remember: one book, one child, one teacher can change the world.
Malala Yousofza*

The summer of 2023 was officially the 12th Reading Camp at Holy Cross School in Makhanda, South Africa (formerly Grahamstown), and a welcome return to the life-changing program after a Covid-driven hiatus. Patterned after and mentored by the Reading Camp program of the Diocese of Lexington, which endeavored to address low literacy levels in some of the poorest parts of the United States, the South African staff continues to take the model and adapt it to their own needs and context. The path to the goal of reading English for comprehension travels the challenging roads of students who don't speak English at home, have limited to no books in the home, have never spent the night away from home, and all too often have reason to see the world as a fearful, if not abusive, place. It could be called Confidence Camp, says Kentuckian Mary Jane Amick, who has served as camp nurse for all of the 12 years. "To realize they are in a totally safe place, where they will not be hurt in any way—that the world is not necessarily dangerous—is an important foundation for learning and a really new experience," Amick emphasizes.

A highlight of this year's camp was an Alumni Luncheon, which welcomed eleven young adults who had been among the earliest cohorts of the 216 youngsters whose lives have been changed through Reading Camp—18 youngsters each year. The memories they carried with them included t-shirts, 'reading is a mountain of fun,' reading in bed during the afternoon rest period, and the never-before-experienced bedtime story read to them each night. These young adults, whose lives were transformed by their in-

camp experiences and the ownership of books given them in their take-home bags, are among the alumni now students at Rhodes University.

This year's students painted their own t-shirts: one other thing to be proud of. But as all who have experienced Reading Camp as volunteers will say, the lives of adults as well as children are changed. The ratio of South African counselors and volunteers is greater each year. Overheard from young interns at the end of camp: "Can I please come back?"

Nicci Hayes, former 7th-grade teacher and now the principal of Holy Cross School, was most impressed by the commitment, passion, and energy of the teachers, especially notable at the end-of-term holiday period, and of the leadership of "gifted educator" Joyce Teyise, the camp director. Systemic ripples already flow and will continue and increase as young student teachers and rising students see things they are unlikely to see anywhere else—people from the other side of the world traveling to South Africa to support Reading Camp, which in its small but important way is part of the antidote to a sad past.

Love Must Act

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