



## **Kwasa College, Daggafontein, Springs, South Africa**

The Kwasa Centre began in 2003 after the Rev Sharron Dinnie was appointed Rector of the parish of St. Peter and St. Paul in Springs, Johannesburg. She became aware of the plight of children in the Informal Settlement of Daggafontein, a 'shantytown' with deplorable living conditions in a suburb of Springs. Daggafontein has approximately 2200 shacks and over 15000 residents, most of whom are unemployed and poorly educated. There is a high crime rate and many people are living with HIV/AIDS.

Kwasa began as an outreach project on the site of an old mine with dilapidated buildings, no electricity and no funding. It started with 53 pre-school children and, thanks to the commitment of many individuals and organisations, has now developed into Kwasa College, consisting of a Pre-Primary school with 126 children and a Primary School with Grades 1-6 and over 150 children.

'Kwasa' is a Zulu word used to describe the light and peace that comes after darkness. It is the first morning light or the moment after a violent storm, when the clouds part and the sun begins to shine.

The story of Holy Trinity and St. Mary's connection with Kwasa began in 2001, through encounters with Bishop David Beetge, then Bishop of the Diocese of the Highveld. The parish started to give prayerful and financial support to the Diocese of the Highveld. Robert Cotton first visited the Diocese in 2003, and Bishop David, Lynne Coull (Highveld Diocese's HIV support worker) and Grace Sibeko (a leader of one of the diocesan projects) visited HTSM between 2003 and 2008. In 2008, a group, largely of adults, from HTSM visited various projects in the Diocese of the Highveld. Whilst there, the HTSM group visited the Kwasa Centre. Sadly, later in 2008 Bishop David Beetge died suddenly. Most of the projects from 2008 are no longer running. However, Kwasa continued to grow and, from 2010, HTSM's financial support was directed to Kwasa. In 2010 Sharron visited HTSM with her husband, Don Dinnie, and four of the Kwasa children, and Robert has made trips to Kwasa every 18 months or so.

In 2013, there was a youth trip from HTSM to Kwasa. We want to be a parish community that welcomes, grows and challenges young people to explore their skills and discover how best they can serve; the opportunity to visit Kwasa gave them an opportunity to learn to serve, whilst also strengthening our links with Kwasa. Many months of planning went into preparing for the visit. The estimated cost per head was £1400. Participants and their families were asked to pay a minimum of £500 and as much as possible towards the total cost. This left a potential shortfall of £8000 to be raised as a combined effort by the group. We entered into a big fundraising programme towards the cost of the visit, including the young people selling cakes after the morning service every Sunday, 'Coins for Kwasa' (jam jars for people to take home and fill with loose change to donate), a Quiz evening and two concerts in Holy Trinity, "Africa!" with the Surrey County Percussion Ensemble with participants from local schools, and "Percussion Pizazz" with the BBC Young Musician 2012 percussion winner Hyungi Lee and drummer Jas Kayser.

The fund raising in relation to Kwasa 13 was so successful that it far exceeded the amount necessary to send the young people on the visit and we were to send a contribution of over £13,000 (including our outward giving contribution for that year).

13 young people travelled to South Africa for 'Kwasa 13': Clare Antcliff, Nick Brown, Amelia Cheek, Seb Cheek, Fergal Doran, Lizzie Harris, James Hedgecock, Robert Honey, Katharine Lovatt, Laura Palles-Clark, Esme Poole, Marcus Pratley and Natalie Sharpin, accompanied by 5 responsible adults: Rev Jane Vlach, Theresa Ricketts, Claire Palles-Clark, Cecily Poole and Rev Robert Cotton. They stayed for a week in the parish of St. Peter and St. Paul, in the home of Charlotte and Peter Miller, doing morning activities with the pre-Primary children at Kwasa, helping with After Care Children in the afternoons and running a Sports Day on one of the days. They also visited the Apartheid Museum and finished by staying two nights at the Kwa Maritane Lodge in the Pilanesburg National Park, giving them a chance to reflect on their time at Kwasa and to give them a broader picture of life in South Africa.

In 2017, we planned a second youth visit, this time jointly with the parish of All Saints in Witley, where Rev Jane Vlach was now rector. Some of the young people who had been to Kwasa before 2013 now went as young leaders (Michael Cotton, Lizzie Harris, Robert Honey, Laura Palles-Clark, Esme Poole and Marcus Pratley, together with Laura Gill and Seb Cheek from Witley), with other new young people joining them (Jeremy Honey, Isabelle Humphreys, Hannah Koci, Jamie McKenzie, Grace Palles-Clark, Esme Poole, Solomon Poole and Alice Twigger-Ross from Holy Trinity, and Sophie Bacon, Caitlin Farrell, Oscar Farrell, Lewis Fraser and Matt Gill from Witley) and 4 responsible adults, "the oldies" (Robert Cotton, Claire Palles-Clark, Cecily Poole and Jane Vlach). This time the young leaders stayed with Sharron's son, Michael-Jon, and the younger ones with the Millers. The pattern of the visit was very similar to Kwasa 13. Fund-raising activities towards this trip included a quiz, a plant and book sale and cake sales. Ian Henderson, a member of our congregation living in Abbot's Hospital devised a MAD scheme, donating £5 to each participant and challenging them to make it grow. There were also some very generous donations from parishioners towards funding the visit and towards a new reading scheme for Kwasa.

The entry requirements to South Africa when travelling with children under 18 were much stricter in 2017 than they had been in 2013. Each child had to carry their unabridged birth certificate and also a Parental Consent Affidavit which had to be sworn in front of a solicitor, together with certified copies of the passports of any parents who were not travelling. We were very grateful to Stevens and Bolton, a firm of solicitors in Guildford, who produced all the necessary paperwork and carried out the swearing and certification pro bono.

In 2018, a group of 21 HTSM adults went out to Kwasa. They covered their own costs and raised money for Kwasa by sales of cakes, knitted tea cosies and rainbow scarves. A plant and book sale raised £400 and a further £1200 was raised from running a barbecue at the Trinity Folk Festival.

The group worked with the Kwasa children and carried out practical tasks including creation of a new outdoor classroom and building storage in the chapel. They helped with a sports day on the coldest, windiest day of the visit! This trip was particularly useful for finding out first-hand about the support Kwasa needs from our parish.

Since the 2018 a new HTSM Kwasa Group has been formed to keep our parish's relationship with Kwasa active and mutually beneficial. We have invited Sharron Dinnie to visit Guildford and another youth visit to Kwasa is being planned for 2020.

Jane Hedgecock, June 2019

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