

Report from the Huruma Centre during the COVID-19 Outbreak

I have been in contact with Huruma Centre Director, Pastor Joyce Ngandango, several times since the advent of the COVID-19 epidemic. Here is a report about conditions at the Centre. Photos provided by Pastor Joyce accompany this report and can be found on page 2.

On March 17, all students at Iringa Diocese secondary boarding school were sent home. With that decision, 24 secondary school students returned to the Huruma Centre. In addition, students in post-secondary and vocational programs also returned to the Centre. Altogether, 29 students have returned and, with the children already in residence, a total of 76 are sheltering in place at the Huruma Centre. That nearly doubles the number of children who are usually full-time residents of the Centre.

Local government social service leaders came to the Centre soon after students returned. They instructed the children and staff about the Corona Virus, about proper hand-washing techniques, and about the importance of remaining at a distance from anyone not sheltering in place at the Centre. These government leaders also provided at minimal cost several handwashing stations for the Centre. Staff members are often in place at the Centre for several days at a time, leaving only for essential needs. For example, Centre staff recently purchased needed basic medical supplies to restock the Centre dispensary.

The children are not permitted to leave the walled compound of the Huruma Centre. As always, a guard is stationed at the Centre gate 24 hours a day. Few guests may enter the compound. When a visit is necessary, after proper handwashing, the guest is escorted directly to the Director's office and may meet only with Pastor Joyce or with Rahabu Gaville, and then they sit more than two meters apart. All at the Centre are aware that social distancing is virtually impossible for those staying within the compound walls. For that reason, they are being especially vigilant to minimize or eliminate contact with guests.

Pastor Joyce says that she, the staff, and the children have been praying for us during the crisis and they ask for our prayers for them. She also has indicated that, with the additional children now sheltering in place at the Centre, operational costs have increased with the purchase of additional food and other supplies. Friends of Huruma is providing additional funding and invites you to consider a gift to help support the Centre during an unusually stressful time.

Pastor Joyce also reminded me that the wet season this year has been unusually challenging. Many roads and bridges have been washed out, and there is concern that many crop fields have been flooded out and crops will be in short supply later this year. The maize fields the children planted on the Centre property this year have been flooded and the crop, usually 40+ 100 kilo bags of maize, is expected to be minimal. With additional funding, the Huruma Centre has made extra purchases to make sure additional food basics are in place.

The Centre has responded well to the COVID-19 epidemic. They have received good training, there is minimal contact with those outside the walls of the Centre compound, and staff are working hard to make sure the large number of children in residence are well cared for and are continuing healthy practices. Please keep them in your prayers. We can all look forward to future opportunities to visit the Huruma Centre once again.

Pastor Chris Smith, Friends of Huruma Coordinator

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Centre children carefully washing their hands before entering the newly completed dining hall

The few guests who are permitted inside the Huruma Centre compound are escorted from the front gate to a hand-washing station and are reminded to have no contact with the children in residence at Centre. They may meet only with Pastor Joyce or Rahabu, and then only with proper social distancing.

