

WOMEN IN Namibia

Fall 1994

Namibia in 1994

By June Kjome

What a joy it was to visit Namibia again, to see the changes that have taken place since independence four years ago. "How wonderful it is not to be afraid of the police or have the military hovering around," said one person I talked to. "To go where we like, to speak our minds and not be afraid." People seemed to be more self-assured and relaxed, going about their work with purpose and enthusiasm. I was proud of the contributions that women were making to their church and communities. Let me share their stories with you.

The Rev. Wilhemina Shikomba was my hostess, guide and interpreter when I was a Woman to Woman visitor to Namibia in 1986. In 1992 she was one of four women ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia in the north. She was pastor of a large congregation but is now studying theology at the University of Namibia in Windhoek.

Pastor Magdalena yaShalongo is in charge of the women's desk at Ongwedive. She was so thrilled that the van (called a "combi"), a gift of Women of the ELCA, had arrived. It will enable her to travel to rural areas to visit the women and hold workshops. Leadership courses are offered each year. This year they studied Matthew's gospel and had sessions on peer counselling about family problems. They also studied the church constitution to learn what it said about the role of women in the church. The annual women's conference will focus on AIDS education and suicide, both of which are serious problems in Namibian society.

Other projects women are involved in include gardening, knitting, using a knit-



ting machine and sewing. These are useful skills that help the women's families and bring needed income. Future plans are to initiate a project to care for the many abandoned street children.

Nashilongo Elago Shivute works in the office of President Sam Njoma in the Women's Affairs Department. Nashilongo is a graduate of Wittenburg College in Ohio and active in the local Lutheran congregation. She said women have identified these concerns:

- changing laws to give women rights and privileges denied them under tradition and western cultures
- health and reproductive rights
- safe motherhood with proper care
- maternity leaves
- child care for working mothers
- gaining positions of leadership and authority (women are in government and 12% of parliament members are

women, but only a few are in top decision-making positions)

- education and training (many women are illiterate, with isolated rural women having the greatest need).

Nashilongo was hopeful about the future. "The church prepared us to lead the country, and the churches still support and assist us in our work." Even if things change slowly, "every community in Namibia has one service they didn't before independence. Change has come, even if it is small."

Selma Shejavali was Woman to Woman visitor to Wisconsin prior to 1988 and is known to many of our ELCA women. She began the Peoples' Primary School that has grown to have seven grades and a pre-primary division. There are 1379 students with 300 students in residence. Recently Selma has taken on a new challenge, to work at the Council of Churches in Namibia (CNN) to organize and supervise an early education course for kindergarten, pre-school teachers, and daycare mothers. This is just one of many fine educational courses offered under the auspices of the CNN.

Michela Huebschle is a white woman, of German descent, whom I met in 1986. At that time, she was actively supporting the blacks in the struggle for independence. Because of this, she was threatened and placed under police surveillance, and her children were harassed. In 1990 she was elected to parliament as a member of the SWAPO party. Recently she was chosen party whip. She is dedicated to making democracy work and seeing that justice is done for the poor of Namibia.

Many other white people in Namibia,

See "Namibia," page 8

Pentecost came early to South Africa

By June Kjome

It was an exciting time to be back in South Africa. The first ever multi-racial elections were over. Signs of the campaign were everywhere, with billboards, posters, flags and graffiti urging people to vote. People were visibly thankful and joyful that the election was peaceful and the results acceptable. Finally the government was beginning to take shape.

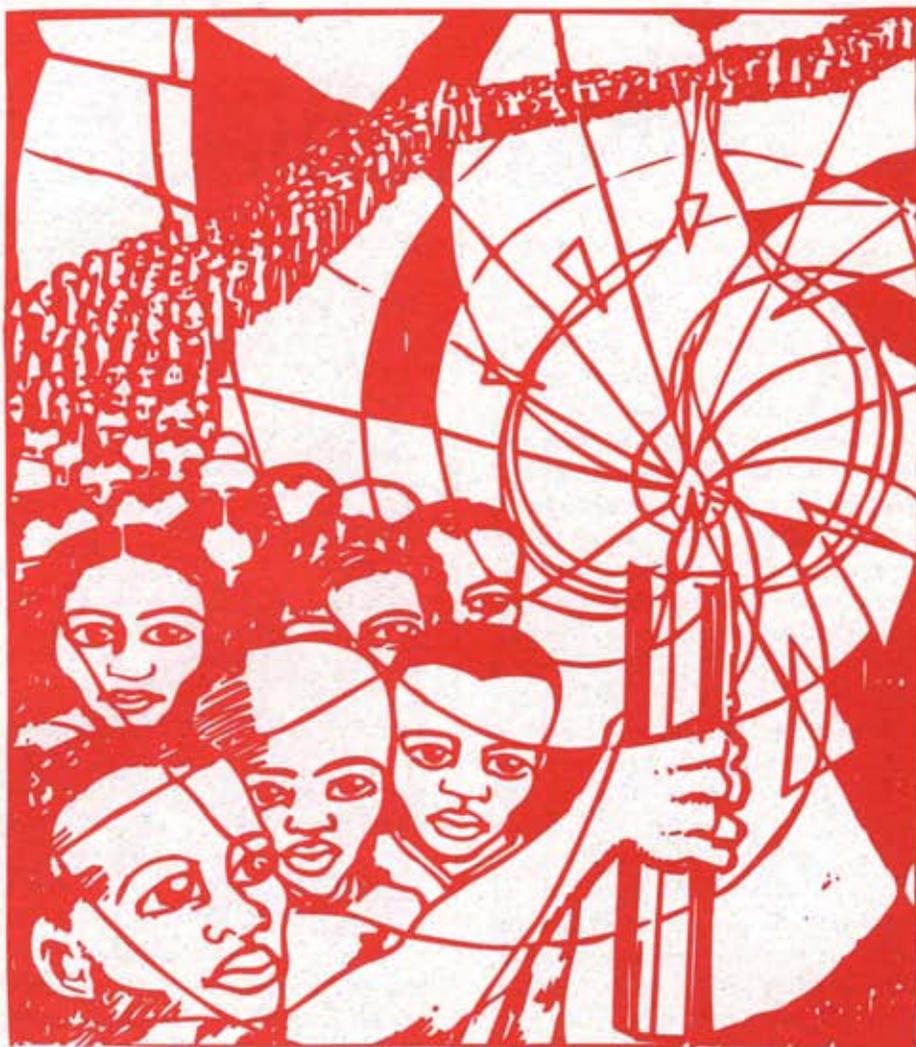
I heard comments like, "It's a miracle! Our prayers were answered." I never thought I'd live to see this day!" "Pentecost came early for us--God's Spirit moved among us," one woman said. "During the election process people of all races waited patiently together. A sense of community was evident that we had not seen before." Old Zulu women told me that they did not mind waiting long hours to vote. "We had waited years for this opportunity, so a few hours more did not matter."

Students at the Morris Isaccson School in Soweto (who initiated a protest in 1976) said they expected better schools, libraries and opportunities to get a good job. The older Soweto women shared their stories of life under apartheid and said their strength and hope came from their faith in God and their support of one another. I was impressed by the lack of bitterness or rancor that their lives had been so difficult.

There was an energy and enthusiasm that I had not seen before. People were involved in local projects like cleaning up the environment, forming adult literacy programs, working with street kids, planning for better housing and services for blacks, and beginning self-help projects for women.

Leaders told us that now that South Africa has achieved political freedom, they must now work together to secure a multi-racial democracy.

Church leaders identified the role of the church in the new South Africa as continuing to stand for truth and justice, fostering peace and reconciliation be-



tween races, monitoring the government, being a prophetic voice in speaking out when the truth of the Gospel is violated, helping alleviate poverty, and healing the scars of apartheid.

Now that South Africa is free, people in Namibia expressed a concern that most overseas aid, investment and development will flow to South Africa, which has a good transportation and public utility infrastructure that bordering states like Namibia lack. These states, who also have limited resources and industries, must import considerable amounts of food and goods from South Africa. What happens in South Africa affects them tremendously. President Mandela said in a speech soon after his inauguration that

South Africa must guard against becoming a giant at the expense of its neighbors in southern Africa.

It was no easy road to freedom for the oppressed people of the old South Africa. It will be an arduous and on-going task for people of diverse races and cultures to live and work together in the new South Africa. But signs of hope were everywhere when violence subsided and people began to talk to each other, work on common goals and accept responsibility for making their dreams a reality.

From "Doing Mission" to "Being in Mission"

Dan Olson, Director of ELCA's Division for Global Mission Southern Africa Program, prepared this reflection on mission following a study leave in southern Africa.

What do they have in common—a Lutheran congregation in Johannesburg, South Africa, and a Lutheran congregation in Chicago? A congregation in Karibib, Namibia and a congregation in Cedar Rapids? A mission committee in Soweto and in Denver? A seminary in Umphumulo and in Philadelphia?

Continents and oceans, languages and traditions, separate the churches of southern Africa from those of northern America. Some of the struggles and issues of Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (ELCSA), for example, are different from those of ELCA. One is a church of the marginalized; the other predominantly privileged. One is mostly black; the other mostly white.

Yet, two months of learning and listening in southern Africa prompt me to say we have much in common!

In southern Africa I addressed the questions: What is partnership? What are viable and faithful models of partnership? How can the people of ELCA be helped in relationship with the people of ELCSA and other southern Africa churches?

Partly by design, partly by budget cuts we have decreased the traditional "M & M's" (Money and Missionaries). How do we now move forward in mutuality? We who have developed within a problem-solving, linear-thinking culture begin asking, "What can we DO?" Before we DO mission we must BE in mission. The commonality of northern American and southern African Christians will grow as we ARE in mission in our own contexts.

To BE in mission means we struggle together, Africans and Americans, with issues we have in common. To DO mission allows distance; to BE in mission demands closeness. To DO mission allows security; to BE in mission requires vulnerability.

So, what do we have in common? What faith issues do we both face? My journal is full of many examples. One is noted here:

We both struggle with the legacy of racism.

Apartheid, the institutionalized form of racism in southern Africa, lingers as an ugly legacy for the people of Zimbabwe 14 years after independence, continues for the people of Namibia 4 years after becoming a free nation, and apartheid will haunt South Africa long after the people first taste the sweet fruit of democracy this year. Every person of every racial group has been infected by the disease of apartheid.

We in northern America also live with insidious individual and institutional racism that breeds its destructive hate and fear. All of our lives, all of our structures, are infected. Racism is an affront to the gospel and a hindrance to mission.

Being in mutual mission with southern African Christians will develop when we openly and honestly say to each other: "We have this sin amongst us; how can we address it together? How can we learn from the experiences of each other in fac-

ing the same evil?"

We must leave behind the superiority, which has sometimes passed for compassion, that says, "We have moved farther ahead than you. We are willing to share our knowledge. We have progressed through our Civil Rights Movement. We will help you." To be in mission is to ask, "Since we are both mired, how can we work together for release and freedom?"

There is a paternalistic arrogance that sees the apartheid in the neighbor without noting the racism in the self. We honor our southern African brothers and sisters when we ask for their assistance in addressing our racism. We move in mutuality when we ask how we can work together, really work together, on tough issues.

We do have much in common: One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.

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Artist: John Muehlenberg, Namibia

PIONEERS AMONG US

Sarti Mwatilifange

By Debra Illingworth Greene

Sarti Mwatilifange hasn't been home since 1987. When she finally goes back to her native land at the end of this year, she'll be reunited with the people, food and culture she loves. She also will become one of the first black female dentists in Namibia.

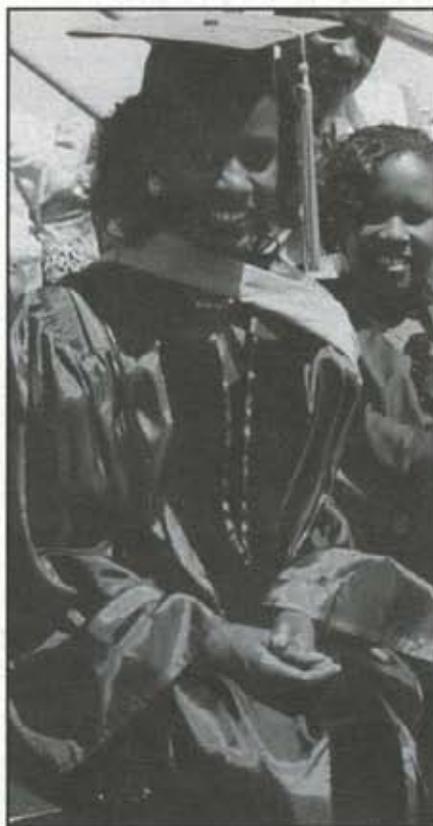
"I'm happy, I'm proud," Sarti said of the honor. Only a few other black women practice dentistry in Namibia, and they were trained in England and South Africa. Sarti is the first to receive training in the United States—training that came about despite many obstacles.

Sarti grew up in Ogimbwa, Namibia, close to the Angolan border. About 600 people live in the small village, Sarti said. As a teenager she attended Oshigambo High School, a Lutheran boarding school in the North of Namibia. When Sarti graduated in 1983, Namibia was still under South African rule and had no university of its own.

"It was hard to get into South African universities," Sarti said. So she applied to St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville, Virginia, where a friend was studying. She was accepted, and Sarti's parents—a now-retired school principal and a school teacher—paid her first year's tuition. After that, Sarti secured a United Nations scholarship to pay for the rest of her undergraduate studies. She graduated in 1988 with a biology degree.

Sarti said her college days "were the worst four years of my life." The people she met were not knowledgeable about Africa. "People asked if we wore clothes in Africa or swung from trees," she said. A lifelong Lutheran, Sarti said her faith sustained her through those difficult times. Going to church every Sunday and singing in choir really helped, she said. Sarti grew up singing in church. "With eight sisters, we had a choir," she said.

Sarti's next challenge was funding her graduate studies. After working on a master's degree for one year at George Washington University in Washington D.C., she transferred to Howard University's dental school. "By then the



Sarti said her college days "were the worst four years of my life." The people she met were not knowledgeable about Africa. "People asked if we wore clothes in Africa or swung from trees,"

United Nations said tuition was too high," Sarti said. Howard paid for her first year, but after that she was on her own.

"It was hard to get money from home because the exchange rate was so bad," Sarti said. So, along with money earned at a part-time job, gifts from groups in-

cluding the Women of the ELCA and a scholarship from the World Health Organization paid for her studies.

A member of Augustana Lutheran Church, Washington, D.C., Sarti graduated from dental school this May. Before she returns to Namibia in December, she wants to be certified as a dentist in Washington, D.C. "I still have to take the South African boards when I get back, but I want to have both [certifications]," she said. After a year's internship in Namibia, the country's minister of health will decide where Sarti will serve as a dentist.

Sarti's future might also include marriage. "It's not official," she said, but Sarti and her German boyfriend have talked about it. He is heading for Namibia at the end of the year to teach at the University of Namibia.

Sarti is eager to get home. She said she is counting the months and wishes she could have returned to Namibia with her parents, who were in Washington, D.C. during May for Sarti's graduation. Sarti's last trip home in 1987 preceded Namibia's independence. She said she doesn't know what it will be like to live in a free Namibia. She had to watch celebrations of the country's independence in 1990 on television. "It was really hard," Sarti said. "I wanted to go."

Sarti said she's wanted to be a dentist since she first came to the United States. "It's a lot of work, but it's fun," she said. Sarti also always planned to return to Namibia. She misses "the people, the food, the closeness of the people."

And Namibia needs professionals like Sarti as it builds a new nation. With her love of Namibia and dentistry, Sarti should be quite an asset to her country.

Debra Illingworth Greene, a former Lutheran magazine staffer, is a free-lance writer and expectant mother.

PIONEERS AMONG US

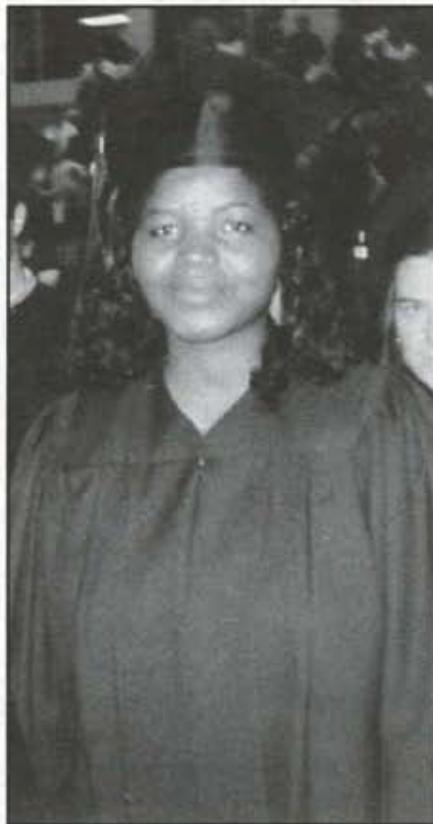
Marianne Amwaalwa

By Naomi Linnel

Marianna Ndilimeke Amwaalwa came to the United States as a student nominated by The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) to participate in the Higher Education and Namibia Program, a program that provided Namibian students with a full scholarship to study for the baccalaureate degree. Her application listed her proposed program of study as "to follow a program leading to a degree in dentistry." As she reported later, "My aim after high school was to continue to study and become a dentist in Namibia; but as a matter of fact, I had to study biology and earn a bachelor of science degree in order to continue my education at a dental school. My first scholarship ended with college graduation." Admitted to dental school, the struggle now became finding the financial resources to complete her dental studies. But this was only one more hurdle for a determined Marianne to confront.

Growing up in a time when her part of Namibia was occupied by South African Defense forces, she had spent her life surrounded by the terrors of those times: curfew at sundown, landmines, harassing soldiers, death of friends and family and all that it means to not have freedom. Her education under apartheid could not prepare her adequately for the demands of an American college and especially for a major in science. She also was living under a regime that forbade the speaking or teaching of English. Her Lutheran high school Oshigambo, where she studied for two years (completing her studies in 1988) did teach courses in English but by a faculty where English was a second language. In spite of her lack of academic preparation, Marianna graduated from Augustana College in South Dakota with a major in biology and a 3.29 grade point average.

Leaving her hometown in Northern Namibia to face the realities of a different world took considerable courage. To live for four years in an environment where no one spoke her language,



... she had spent her life surrounded by the terrors of those times: curfew at sundown, landmines, harassing soldiers, death of friends and family and all that it means to not have freedom.

Ndonga, where no one from her area lived must have provided many lonely hours.

Her application to dental school was assisted by admiring professors who believed in her and were determined that she would have a fair chance to take the next step. Once admitted to dental school at Creighton University in Omaha, Ne-

braska a generous family agreed to fund her first year of study. Women of the ELCA has pledged funds to assist with her second year of study.

Meanwhile Bishop Kleopas Dumeni wrote "I have no hesitation in recommending her for an educational opportunity that may be offered to her, because I know that we have a great need of dentists in the Lutheran Medical Mission, and in Namibia at large. We have a post as well as equipment, but no dentist yet. Therefore her services will be of a great help to our nation as a whole. I trust she is able to fulfill the tasks entrusted to her. Therefore I recommend her for receiving help."

What kept her on a steady course? First, her dream of becoming a dentist, the dream that she was translating into a commitment and second, her determination to return to Namibia. "My goal after I finish dental school is to return to Namibia because the country has a great need for dentists. I would like to practice dentistry in Northern Namibia where the need for dentists is greatest. I think that is a good career." And again, "I pray every night that God will grant me strength and ability to fulfill what I have set out to do."

As a practicing dentist, Marianna Amwaalwa would serve as a mentor and model for the women of Namibia. To leave to become a professional woman and then to return to serve her church and her country in her home area is indeed a worthy sense of vocation and calling.

Naomi Linnel—Assistant Director for Colleges and Universities, Division for Higher Education and Schools, ELCA

Does independence mean emancipation?

By Heike Becker

Just before Namibia finally gained political independence in 1990 after a century of German and South African colonialism, the editors of the then newly-founded *Sister Namibia* magazine wrote:

Here in Namibia, which will soon be independent, it is very important for us to make sure that women are included in the independence and freedom of the land. Women's efforts and energy which they used in the struggle for freedom must not be overlooked when the fight is over. In other countries women have been expected to go back to a position of inferiority after a war has been won—we must not allow this to happen here!" (*Sister Namibia*, Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1989)

Women in this south-west African country, thousands of whom were just returning home after many years of exile and armed struggle, were rightly aware that independence would not automatically include women's emancipation or gender equality. They could draw on women's experiences in numerous countries that had earlier gone through a prolonged struggle for national liberation, some of them being Namibia's neighbors in the southern African region: Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola.

In many instances women participated actively in liberation struggles, including actual combat. Female fighters often enjoyed a certain equality with their male counterparts during the struggle. However, the contributions of these heroines were hardly ever recognized. Worse, women were often re-confined to "the hearth." At the end of the liberation struggle their position and power in the society as women improved little as the "new" era dawned.

During the 1980s, when the apartheid regime still held a strong grip on South Africa and its colony Namibia, women

Perspectives on women's liberation in southern Africa

followed two different views on their role in the liberation struggle. The first one focused on equal participation of women in the struggle. Although this view acknowledged special discrimination against women on the grounds of gender, tackling the "woman question" was postponed to the future.

The second strand of women activists also saw national liberation as a prerequisite to women's liberation but pointed out that, while women under apartheid had indeed political interest in common with men, people did not share struggles as natural subjects but as gendered beings. That is, how women (and men) got involved in which actions also depended on their gender-differentiated roles and experiences in the family and community.

All over southern Africa feminism has until very recently been considered a foreign importation which has no relevance for Africa. Many people, including women, have been suspicious of feminism as yet another form of cultural imperialism. In the South African and Namibian apartheid context, the hostility against feminism has intensified because it has been seen not only as a Western but also very much a "white" concept. Black women activists and scholars who emphasized women's struggles were often accused of "having become white" and being "anti-men." These problems were aggravated by the fact that it was indeed first white South Africans who identified themselves as feminists. The most significant feminist organization in south Africa, the Rape Crisis counseling groups, for instance started off in Cape Town in 1976 as an almost exclusively "white" venture.

However, the reality as well as the perception of feminism is changing in post-

apartheid southern Africa. Women political activists and scholars alike strive for the recognition of feminism as a legitimate concept to improve the situation of women in the region.

The changes in southern Africa, widely perceived as irreversible by now, have given space for women in the region to define their own priorities, once the aim of national liberation has been achieved. It has also fostered opportunities to have a closer look into the dynamics which determine the deplorable situation of women. Earlier analytical efforts often put the blame mainly on the effects of colonialism and apartheid and sometimes romanticized a supposedly gender-egalitarian pre-colonial past. This nationalist feminist "myth of a progressive tradition and a backward modernity" has now come under attack. Many contemporary feminists see that the oppression of African women also results from the "backwardness" and "primitiveness" of African cultures and social values.

The agenda of feminist movements now includes a broad range of issues which affect the situation of women under concrete circumstances. The different strands of the women's movement in independent Namibia, for instance, clearly focus on women's gender-based interests.

Women's rights are enshrined in the Namibian Constitution in an exemplary manner. Even though gender discrimination is alive and well in the country's communities and in Namibian politics, opportunities have been created for the women's movement to put forward gender-based claims. On the other hand, the government has not initiated much change itself, but has waited for women's representatives to present and push for their demands.

The overall aim of the post-independent women's movement's is to translate Namibia's anti-sexist supreme law into practice. Women therefore demand their share in decision-making processes in all sectors of public life. They furthermore

strive for a more just socioeconomic development. Various strands of the women's movement have also begun to target patriarchal structures in interpersonal relations. Major fields of activities include economic self-help projects, law reform, self-empowerment in politics and society, and efforts to combat violence against women.

While many organizations and individuals still eschew the feminist label, empowerment of women is the first and foremost aim of today's women's efforts in Namibia as elsewhere in the region. Based on an earlier analysis of women's interest in Sandinista Nicaragua, a conceptual framework has been developed within the southern African context that combines the practical and strategic needs of women. Practical needs are those that assist women in meeting their basic needs and interests, such as need for food, shelter and water. Strategic needs are those that empower women to take control over their own needs through providing them with the space and flexibility to make decisions on issues affecting themselves and society.

In South Africa as elsewhere in the developing world, real improvement of the situation of the majority of women will hardly result from gender-specific

measures alone. If the empowerment of women is to be more than black and white elite women's equality with their male counterparts, the general direction of development will be of utmost importance for the improvement of the lot of women in southern Africa.

Heike Becker is a member of Sister Collective, a long-time, mostly black African women's organization based in Windhoek,

Namibia. Heike has lived in Namibia for ten years and recently completed her doctorate thesis on the women's movement in Namibia.

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A bus for the Women of ELCIN (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia)



"God bless Women of the ELCA!" A grant from Women of the ELCA enabled Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia to purchase a small bus. The new vehicle will allow women to visit more parishes and greatly enhance their ministry. Pastor yaShalongo is standing next to the bus, third from left.

In 1990 Women of the ELCA gave funds so that the women of ELCRN (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia) headquartered in Windhoek could purchase a bus for women's work. To the church in the north (ELCIN) we gave funds for an oral history project. In January of 1994 we sent with Dan Olson, area secretary for Southern Africa, Division for Global Mission, a check for the purchase of a bus for women's work in ELCIN.

The Rev. Magdalena Naahule yaShalongo, Director of Women's Office in ELCIN wrote: "The letter was like a diamond in our hands. The day which we received this check is recorded as an historical day in the ELCIN women's office. And we sing, 'God bless women in the ELCA.'"

In April Rev. yaShalongo wrote again to say that the minibus was ordered. They hope to be able to visit 20 more parishes than last year.



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No status quo for Namibian women

In March 1995, Namibia will celebrate the fifth anniversary of independence. Mrs. Johanna Frederik reflects on changes for women in her country: "Women are working hard . . . they don't want to accept the status quo. . . and they know they have something to contribute." Women of Namibia are organizing themselves to address the issues of AIDS and abortion. There is eagerness for education and leadership in this new country. Women want to help themselves and to help those in the background who think they must be treated badly; those who have no power of their own. "My daughter is now outspoken, joining in the work of the CCN (Council of Churches in Namibia). [Women have learned] we can speak to someone of our problems."

Mrs. Johanna Frederick is the wife of the Rev. Hendrick Frederik, the former bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) and former president of the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN). While on sabbatical in the U.S. from February to mid-August at Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, IA, Johanna studied English.

As she tells her story, it is clear that prayer and supporting others are the gifts that Mrs. Frederik shares in her daily life. During the years of struggle for Namibia's independence, it was prayer that gave Johanna courage. "The nights were the most frightening time . . . it was hard because if my husband was gone to speak or called away to help someone, I did not know if he would come back alive."

The struggle for independence left marks on every Namibian family. Children of leaders, like the Frederiks, often faced discrimination at school and in search for jobs. As the Frederiks noted, if the people who hated you could not reach you, they went after your children. The family experienced the tragic murder of an eighteen-year-old son in 1982, at a time of intense hatred. With her quiet voice she says of the perpetrator, "We forgave him. Yes, we forgave him."

When asked how one deals with such

Reflections of a bishop's wife

tragedies, Mrs. Frederik expresses her faith and hope. She says, "I have accepted the struggle from the beginning. I do not look back, but look ahead . . . We have lost many active people in the Church, but we kept believing that God's hand was also there in the midst; for us, and also for our children."

Mrs. Frederik's courage and support to others is her gift of leadership in the Church. She is a leader in her congregation and has worked since 1988 to orga-

nize conferences for pastors' spouses. "We think about the young pastors' [spouses] . . . and we invite the widows . . . we gather to pray and to talk . . . to learn how to help the [pastors] and to be alive in prayer."

With hopeful eyes looking ahead, Mrs. Frederik encourages women to continue to gather together and to be partners with women throughout the world. There is a need to share information and to pray with one another.

The Rev. Sandra Kennedy, a recent Wartburg Seminary graduate, is a pastor in Pennsylvania.

Namibia *continued from page 1*

however, have "opted out" and do not see the present government as theirs. They are putting their energies into the private sector instead of working alongside the blacks to make necessary changes that will make life tolerable for all Namibian citizens.

Gisella is another friend from my previous visit. She is director of the Women's Solidarity Project, a non-profit organization of women engaged in counselling/support, education and research on issues of violence against women. Seventeen volunteers work with her. Rape, battering and sexual assaults are very common and one of the problems I heard a lot about from women in all walks of life.

I also had the opportunity to visit northern Namibia, which was occupied by the South African army in 1986. At that time there was a curfew and people lived in fear. They were beaten and put in detention camps. Their crops were damaged and their leaders intimidated. Now there is peace and only a few signs of the former army camps remain. People move about freely, doing their work, knowing they will not be harassed or intimidated. Some are frustrated that changes are taking so long, and for many life is still a daily struggle to survive. But there is pride in

their government and leadership. Folks relish the peace and freedom they enjoy and look forward to better days to come.

June Kjome of La Crosse, Wisconsin traveled to South Africa in May with a Center for Global Education trip. She then continued on to Namibia. From 1945-64 June was a nurse-midwife at primary health clinics in rural Zululand (now KwaZulu/Natal) as a missionary for a predecessor church body. She was a Woman to Woman visitor to Namibia in 1986.

Books for Namibia

Women from North Carolina, Ohio, Minnesota and Wisconsin have notified the office that books were sent to Namibia in the last few months. If your group is interested in such a project, consult the first Women In Namibia newsletter with the Fall 1993 dateline for complete instructions. If you cannot locate your copy, call Marlene Narbert at 1-800-638-3522, extension 2747.