

*Greetings from South Africa. I hope and pray you are all keeping well and safe in Belfast in these difficult days. I try to follow from a distance how things are back home in Ireland.*

*The situation here is pretty grim, but so is the whole world by most accounts. The global pandemic has really exposed our economic and governing systems as not being people friendly but to be pro business and large corporation.*

*South Africa was always known to have an extreme 'rich versus poor' problem, and now the pandemic has highlighted just how extreme this is. I am one of those people who doesn't agree with the now common phrase 'We're in this together!' because we are actually not! I have friends who have done well for themselves, good and decent and generous people, but they live a life whereby they can somehow cope with the suffocating lockdown, in larger than normal houses, with gardens etc. However, most people I know struggling in our local townships are not managing, and only God knows how they cope with being confined to a tin shack or having to share a very confined space, with no garden to speak of.*

*But this is the tip of the iceberg, with many having lost their means of income, and many children now permanently at home not eating adequate food because the only decent food they used to receive daily was at their school. It is quite heartbreaking.*

*However, we have been able to alleviate the suffering, more the hunger, of those we know of. What this pandemic has done is to unite disparate groups - and our area has mobilised, Muslims, Christian, Hindus and many others into a force of women and men, to focus on making sure as many people as possible do not go hungry. It is a mammoth task, but if we all pull together, it can be done - just about. A few weeks ago, a close friend with her family members and others donated over 3,000 food parcels to desperate families - I was able to make a contribution toward this effort from the donations from you in the St. Brigid's Third World Group.*

*At this stage of our lockdown, the government has begun a programme of giving the unemployed and most vulnerable access to a minimum benefit. However, this must be applied for, and can take quite a few weeks to process and finally access. Meanwhile, people can go hungry.*

*Thank God for your generous donations from the St. Brigid's Third World Group that I was able to assist with food where desperately needed, and cash to support where needed. Winter is upon us in this part of the world, and this is a big concern for us under normal circumstances, without the added stress of a virus decimating our elderly, the vulnerable, our medical personnel, and adding to the numbers of individuals and families in need of some form of aid intervention.*

*We honestly thought that by now we would have been through the worst of this pandemic, but last night our president, Mr. Ramaphosa, indicated that we could be in this situation for months, even to the end of the year. Our humble contributions toward those most in need, the alleviation of their hunger and/or aid in their domestic situations should nevertheless reduce somewhat when the government's interventions start to have an impact. Our assistance will still be very needed as we often find that we have to fill in or make up where the state is unable to or is incompetent, or where rampant corruption has simply eroded and destroyed the state's capacity to impact positively on the living conditions of our people.*

*I remain hopeful, nevertheless Rosalie, despite the seeming drama all around us. We cannot part the red sea, but we can make a real and significant difference to many who are struggling and in despair. We are united as a community as never before, and this is key to overcoming this present crisis.*

*All I can say to you Rosalie, and the very generous people of the St. Brigid's Third World Group, and the entire congregation of St. Brigid's, is that I cannot imagine not having your support at this particular time. Your generous donation toward Poverty Alleviation is now more needed than ever, and it is making a real difference in the lives of local people at this time of pandemic.*

*With every good wish and God bless.*

*Fr. Raymond McQuarrie, M.Afr.*

*Lenasia-Golden Highway Catholic Parish*

*Archdiocese of Johannesburg*