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Sr. Judith Bozek, a Missionary Sister of the Holy Family, shares a light moment with Esnart Kangwa (in pink shirt), one of the elderly residents at the Cheshire Divine Providence Home, located in a large slum just southwest of Lusaka, Zambia. (Derrick Silimina)



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Located in a large slum just southwest of Lusaka, Zambia's capital, the Cheshire Divine Providence Home, operated by the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Family, houses more than 20 elderly homeless people and 30 orphans.

The pandemic has offered a triple threat to the home — a reduced volume of donations, the specter of a viral variant making it tougher to keep residents from getting reinfected, and a drastic spike in the number of homeless in the ghetto as families deal with the stress of poverty, joblessness and the ensuing domestic violence.

"Every day, I receive about four to five individuals, either very sick who need medical attention or who have been shunned by their relations," said Sr. Judith Bozek, who has supervised the home for 20 years. "As you can see, this facility is located in a high-density area and, due to increasing levels of poverty, many vulnerable people run here to seek assistance."

One of them is Esnart Kangwa, 62, who was abandoned by her family members because they didn't have the money to manage her medical bills for chronic diabetes and hypertension.

"Without Sister Bozek, I would have died by now!" said Kangwa, one of the longest-term residents at the Divine Providence home.

Bozek's efficient and inclusive management style has transformed the foster home. During her tenure, the facility has survived on donations from local businesses, private individuals, Christian denominations, Muslims and Hindus.



Sr. Judith Bozek chats with Bernard Mpundu, left, from Northern Province who recently found solace at the foster home after he was stranded in Lusaka. Mpundu was searching for employment and was attacked by robbers and left injured. Passersby called Bozek to take him to the clinic and provide shelter at Cheshire Divine Providence Home. (Derrick Silimina)

"We used to receive enough food handouts, clothing and medical donations from well-wishers but, with the onset of COVID-19, it has been tough for us to provide basic needs for all these people being taken care of here," Bozek told Global Sisters Report in a June interview.

The sisters are now struggling to feed the residents of the home, some of whom are bedridden, wheelchair users, blind or mentally ill and receive attention daily and medical care when needed.

Despite limited resources and dwindling donations from local donors due to a critical economic landscape in the country aggravated by the pandemic, the home has opened its doors to people of different religions, tribes and races, Bozek says.

Before the global pandemic hit the southern African country in early 2020, the center was running smoothly with enough food, clothing and medicine. However, the effects of the pandemic have undercut public response to the needs of poor and vulnerable people.

While the world has focused on the health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the socioeconomic effect has received less attention. In much of Africa — as outlined in a 2020 [UNICEF report](#) — the pandemic's social impact, particularly for children, has been devastating, with an additional 140 million children globally projected to be living in households below the poverty line.

"Everything is so expensive now, and it is unbearable to cope in the advent of COVID-19. Anyway, we thank God he is still with us for sure," says Bozek.



Sr. Judith Bozek's goes on her busy daily errands to buy medicine, food and groceries for the elderly and orphans at her foster home. (Derrick Silimina)

Driven by her passion for humanity, the 78-year-old nun stressed that it hasn't been easy to manage a foster home for two decades and especially now.

Despite a limited budget, the facility has employed full-time caregivers and has managed to cover its power and water utility bills every month.

The home has a vegetable garden and poultry farm to supplement the foster home's daily dietary intake and also generate some modest income.

History of the home

The home was established in 1988 by Fr. Angelo Panzica, who was then parish priest in Chawama Township within one of Lusaka's shanty compounds.

Moved by the plight of a widow named Makelezi Rosaria Shumba who desperately needed a home, Panzica raised funds to build a residential block of seven one-room homes, according to a pamphlet history provided by Bozek. Seeing the need for more space to accommodate the growing number of abandoned people, especially the aged, Panzica sought a bigger piece of land to expand the settlement.

Officially opened in 1992, the institution became known as Divine Providence Home, and in 1998 the facility joined Cheshire Home Society of Zambia to form Cheshire Divine Providence Home for the homeless elderly and orphans.

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In December 1994, the [Missionary Sisters of the Holy Family](#) took over the running of the home under the supervision of Bozek, a Catholic missionary from Poland who continues as supervisor.

By 1999, the home had extended its care to include orphans, prompted by the advent of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Zambia. About 12% of Zambians ages 15-59 were [HIV-positive in 2016](#), according to U.S. Centers for Disease Control data.

Rising homelessness

The COVID-19 crisis also has led to heightened stress on families due to job loss, isolation and anxieties over health and finances. Those factors, in turn, have increased the risk of violence at home, both between partners and by caregivers

against children.

Many seek relief at the Cheshire Divine Providence Home, which is in the heart of one of Lusaka's informal settlements with high poverty levels and pervasive unemployment.

In their quest to take care of those in need with the onset of the cold season, the Holy Family sisters are relying on local remedies to treat the residents, especially the aged, who are at higher risk of contracting the coronavirus due to lower immunity or underlying health issues.

"We try to use natural remedies and make concoctions from lemon, ginger and honey to make tea every day. I also do get some volunteers from the USA who help them with physical therapy just to make them strong," she noted.



Sr. Judith Bozek receives a call requesting her assistance from one of the community members in need of urgent medical care. (Derrick Silimina)

As persistent infections are cropping up due to the delta variant of the coronavirus, businesses in the southern African country that had begun to reopen are now being closed or affected in new ways. Elderly homeless people need to be vaccinated before entering a facility, for instance, a goal that is almost impossible to meet, given the meager supply of vaccines in Zambia.

In addition, adhering to health guidelines, such as wearing masks and observing social distancing, complicates delivery of services to target groups, especially orphans, whose compliance levels are lower. This leads to a fertile ground for reinfection, and caregivers are forced to limit the number of residents in the one-room dwellings the sisters have set up.

As the COVID-19 pandemic rages on globally, the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Family have maintained their mandate against the odds to ensure that humanity continues to thrive.

Teddy Chipili, 68, a Divine Providence home resident from Luapula Province in northeastern Zambia, paid tribute to Bozek and the Holy Family sisters for accommodating him after he became homeless.

"I thank Sr. Bozek and her team for having considered my plight. I became stranded after I got admitted to the hospital for six months and, after my discharge, I lost my income and failed to pay for house rentals," Chipili said.

This story appears in the **Sustainable Development Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities** feature series. [View the full series.](#)