

MATERO BOYS' - A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

What I am presenting is something bigger than a school. The Marianists in Zambia have a school - Matero Boys' Secondary School. But they do not see it simply as a school. The Marianists have its own mission to be of service to a larger community. The twenty-seven acre property of Matero Boys' serves many compounds and a large township of which the school is named. This was decided upon at the time of its foundation in 1966. On the property are situated twenty-six staff houses for teachers, workers, families who help with the teaching, coaching and maintaining the property.

The old traditional African society is undergoing a rapid change, becoming more and more similar to the Western culture. Family life is becoming more vulnerable, and so the flow of its problems come onto the property of Matero Boys'. In Zambia many of the children from the surrounding compounds and townships are treated similar to chickens - in the morning after tea, they roam the streets. These are known as street children. There are three types of street children. There are children on the street, children of the street and children for the street.

When we talk of the children on the street, these refer to those who work in the streets by day and return in the evening for their one meal a day. Many of these children are the ones who spend their entire day at Matero Boys'. They participate in sports programs, namely, tennis, basketball, volleyball and soccer. Because of the long days, we often furnish them with a bit of food and drink for survival, and at times provide them with medical care.

For those children of the street, they live full time in the streets, even sleeping there at night. Both of these groups of children can become children for the streets. What we try to do is to help those hopeless children in the streets by first giving our time, listening to them and giving them hope. When they spend time at Matero Boys' they feel safe and they find people on the property who will care for them – a home away from home.

Most of their parents, if alive, survive by selling small items along the roads, e.g., soap and other toilet articles, groundnuts and cigarettes. What has caused this is the result of many people leaving the rural life in the villages to find prosperity in the shanty homes of urban life. Children are then left on their own to survive, usually using abusive means to attain their needs. When children get to this level, they become children for the streets. They are exposed to a myriad of problems because of this lifestyle. They engage in sexual activities for reasons of survival, or they are abused by their peers or by other members of society. They live under the threat of violence and often are in violent competition with one another. This has led to an increased level of immortality and a pandemic of HIV/AIDS.

What is going on at Matero Boys' Secondary School is providing one of the answers for many other schools to emulate. We use to say about Cleveland, Ohio that it was the 'best location in the nation'. Right now, in Zambia, the property of the Marianists has become the best location in the nation. It is a safe haven for many of the street children, many of whom will eventually be brought back into the schools, learn some skills and may even find some suitable employment. We have been trying with the use of two thousand Bumper Stickers to raise funds to sustain the program for the street children. We provide these stickers at a cost of five dollars. Hopefully, we will sell a good number of them in the States, and we will also involve these same children in Zambia to also assist in selling the stickers. However, from their side a Bumper Sticker can only go at one dollar and twenty-five cents. We are in need of further funding to reach our goal of ten thousand dollars.