

**An Update from Pasture Valley Children's Home
Note from Gail and Mike Messick**

Pasture Valley Children Missions is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to benefit orphans, orphanages, preschools, elementary schools, and vulnerable families in Swaziland, Africa. Swaziland is a tiny country about the size of New Jersey three quarters surrounded by South Africa, and one quarter by Mozambique. The HIV/AIDS pandemic had stricken up to 43% of the population, the average life expectancy is between 31 and 49 years depending on which report you read, and in a country with just over a million people, over 100,000 children are orphans.

Orphan is defined differently in Africa than in the USA and Europe. A single orphan is a child who has lost one parent, and a double orphan is a child who has lost both parents. Either case is traumatic for the child. There are almost no families in the country that have not been affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The parent generation is dying, and the grandmother generation is left to raise large numbers of children, many not even related, in a country where women are not respected and have few opportunities for gainful employment. It is not unusual for households to have in excess of 10 children because grandmother-age women, called "Go-Go" and "Grand Go-Go" in Swaziland, keep taking one more child, then one more child, then one more child.

Orphanages have long waiting lists of children who want to get in, and there are thousands of child-led households with no adult present. If a child gets to go to an orphanage, that means they get food every day, have adult supervision so they do not have to be afraid of things that go bump in the night in shacks with no electricity or safety, the opportunity to go to school, and the chance to be a kid again instead of trying to be Mom and Dad to younger siblings and not knowing how. The need is great, the resources are not sufficient, and children die daily of starvation, untreated inherited HIV/AIDS, and illness due water-borne diseases and lack of access to medical care. Many of those who survive are victims of crime because they are alone or have no guardian to protect them.

Against that backdrop of impossible odds, Pasture Valley exists to ease the burden, to help children and vulnerable families escape hunger and hopelessness, and to give a hand up, not a hand out, to a better future. We lean on God and depend on God to provide every need. God has been faithful!

Gail and Mike Messick of this congregation spend time at Pasture Valley every year. They sent us an update:

December 2025: We hosted about 350 children from outlying communities for a fun day of games, singing, food, and worship/Bible reading, Bible Stories. Here's some photos.

Being hope and love, joy and peace is a lifestyle - THE life style of Christians.

Thank you for all the ways you live out the Gospel, the Good News, of Christ.