

Zimbabwe Mission Trip Report January 13- 26th 2020

This year, those on the Mission trip were Lynda Hulcoop, Stephen Hulcoop, Tim and Maz Walker, Graham Hoslett and Jane Seals.

The current situation in Zimbabwe:

Many are saying Zimbabwe is a broken country. Sadly, there is much evidence to support this and since our last visit 2 years ago, there are signs of marked deterioration. The economy is in serious crisis with unacceptable levels of inflation, high prices for basic commodities and a complex currency situation. Whilst there, the exchange rate for US\$ increased from 16 Zimbabwe bond to US\$1 to 18 in just 2 weeks. This is a worrying trend. Food prices in the shops are unbelievably high even by our standards. For example a small tray of carrots costs US\$2, a large watermelon cost around US\$15, tomatoes - a basic for local Zimbabweans - cost around US\$3 for around 10 and a tin of beans cost US\$1 - something we could buy for around 25p. Imported or luxury goods are massively expensive. Bread, which would be considered a basic commodity in every country has become a luxury food with many families only eating one loaf per weekend as a treat. The price of mealie maize is also increasing and there is a real danger of food poverty in around 3 months when Zimbabwe's stock of maize is predicted to run out and it will need to be imported at even higher cost. Part of the problem here is drought and the other aspect is that the farms grabbed from white farmers many years ago and given to high ranking black politicians etc. have been left largely unproductive leading to food supply shortages. Currently the present government is seeking to seize unproductive farms from black farmers and parcel them up into smaller units to give to those who might be able to make the land productive again. This might make some sense but is likely to cause political unrest.



The fuel crisis in Zimbabwe continues unabated with petrol stations constantly running out of fuel. When new deliveries are expected, long queues begin forming along the roadside with drivers having to wait maybe 6 or more hours not knowing if petrol will still be available when their turn comes or whether by then it will be rationed to only 20 litres. Petrol is available on the black market at ridiculous prices and often mixed with ethanol to make it seem more.

The US\$ is no longer officially accepted as a trading currency although some shops do unofficially (illegally?) take US dollars on the side, needing them for international trade. Most local shops want people to pay by card or telephone banking. The local Zimbabwe dollars or bond notes or RTGS as they are known are also accepted but in very short supply. Also the highest bank note value is 5 bonds equal to around 25p. This means large wads of notes are needed for even small purchases.



Thus for local Zimbabweans, the economic system is in crisis with a daily fight for survival for the people we work among and especially for the huge numbers who are unemployed, those on very

low incomes not keeping pace with inflation or those employed but often receiving no salary at the end of the month - something inconceivable in the UK. Combi (taxi minibuses) fares have also more than doubled as drivers have to queue for petrol one day and then drive the next, decreasing the number of fares they can generate. Thus on all levels the situation is miserable and causing high levels of demotivation and hopelessness. Many teachers and doctors are on strike because their pay will simply not cover basic living costs.

Other signs of deterioration are the severe lack of electricity, which is off say 17 hours a day and only on in the middle of the night. Water shortages due to drought and lack of chemicals for the treatment plants are evident as are poor yields of crops this last year. For us the situation was



made slightly easier thanks to our newly installed solar panels providing some supplies of electricity. However we did have some teething problems with these; some days were cloudy so supplies to our 6 panels and batteries were limited. The electrician has told us we need to add a further 6 panels which the inverter can take to bring in more electricity to pump water from our bore hole and hopefully make the geyser work. Thus we had electricity some days, part of some evenings with the later evenings being enjoyed (or

endured!) in candlelight. Our only source of hot water was when Nyasha, our security guard, had logs to build a fire and heat water in a big pot, giving us very welcome hot water for dousing ourselves. Thanks to our borehole, water was available albeit not always flowing from the taps.

Other evidence of deterioration includes the roads, the total transport system, the state of vehicles, the rubbish in the streets and lots of things broken and not functioning. Thus the country has a very downtrodden, sad and broken feeling with people struggling to survive the everyday realities of life.

The situation with personnel

Everybody was still feeling very sad about Tracey Masaka's passing in October last year. Jonah seems to be coping quite well and spoke freely about his sense of loss, but was able to enter fully into all activities and still engage well with everyone as usual. It was good that Graham was able to stay at Ashdown Park with him. One day we celebrated Jonah's 73rd birthday attended by family members Tendai, Patricia and Patience, who too are deeply grieving.



On the positive side, James and Oripa are now grandparents plus their second son, Kudakwashe has got married. Susan and Mailos have moved into their house and Rumbidzai now lives on site with his daughter in the house shared with Nyasha and Netsai and family. Christine's younger daughter is also married. Shelton is doing well at University in his second year studying Mechanical engineering. However a crisis has arisen as his fees have risen from 638 Zimbabwe dollars to 5700 Zimbabwe dollars per semester. The family are simply unable to meet this increase. Since we were unable to take gifts for staff this year due to luggage allowance restrictions, we were able to give each staff member US\$20 which was gratefully received.

The situation with Superkids Preschool

Tracey's place at Superkids has been taken by a young lady called Nicole who is Kudakwashe's wife and Sandra has become the leader. The school is flourishing again in 2020 with a good number of children at this early stage of the term. We spent some very happy moments with these beautiful little children during their activities.



Superkids Primary School

We were able to make a visit for the first time to Superkids Junior School meeting in Tina's house. One class meets in the garage and one in the front room. The maximum number of children allowed on the site is 30 with small classes of 15. The children are picked up by Combi from the training centre each morning around 8.00 and are in school till around 1.00. This seems a very happy set-up but the challenge comes in 2021 when a new class will need to be added and there is no space on this site. Jonah has made preliminary plans to ask the council for a plot of land for the school to be established and has had possible building plans drawn up. Again we spent some very happy moments singing and marching with these kids each morning before they left for school.



Paraclete Presbyterian College

It is good to report that the college is rising up and improving year by year. Last year, the headmaster/administrator, Job Makimbire, left his post due to ill health but there were also some work related issues. His place has been taken by George, chaplain and ordained minister at Mondoro Presbyterian Secondary School. He works one day a week ensuring the smooth running of the college and especially when it comes to exam time with our centre being used for O and A level examinations for the locality. At present he is doing well and both Jonah and the teachers are very happy with him.



Whilst we were there, both O level and A level results were issued. The teachers were very happy with the performance of the students and there was a marked improvement in 2019 results. One boy, Edwin, got 2 A's and 1 B at A level and we met him quivering with both shock and delight as he received his results. A remarkable achievement under the circumstances. O Level results were also quite good. Our sponsored students had mixed results but we are aware we are sponsoring some of the more needy students who are most challenged in their studies.

The teachers seem in good form, unlike many of the teachers in state schools. In 2019, a strike situation among them was averted over pay thanks to extra support from Westborough URC and the fact that when we send money over, both staff and teachers receive some of their salary in

US\$ which makes their money stretch further. Thus they are in relatively good form, encouraged by the results but clearly challenged and discouraged by the situation in the country offering so little opportunity to leaving students.

This year, the college enrollment is very encouraging. Class 3 is already full up and numbers are expected to exceed 200 once Form 5 is established after the O level results. From our point of view, thanks to the favourable exchange rate for the US\$, fees in US\$ will be comparatively much



lower than in 2019. Currently the fee per term is 600 or 680 bonds (depending on the class) which at current exchange rates equals approximately £100 per year. This means we may be able to attract more sponsors say at £10 per month with any extra going to buy much needed textbooks and towards teachers' pay. We hope existing sponsors will continue. We have some heart rending letters and photos to distribute to them.

We were able to take 3 new laptops to replace old ones bought from Computers for Africa. We need further laptops to take out on our next visits. Also there is a great need for textbooks to enhance class studies and homework. It was also very good to meet up with some former sponsored students who have gone on to further study.

Activities at the Centre during our stay

1) Leadership for Life Courses

It was very good to have Tim and Maz Walker with us on this trip doing two Leadership for Life courses, one over the weekend and one on weekday afternoons. Over the weekend, they were joined by two young men from Bulawayo they were training up to be course presenters. This four-module course consists of the following components: 1) Leading yourself 2) Leading your finances 3) Leading a team 4) Leading a project. They have had a lot of experience using this course across Africa and it was certainly well received in Zimbabwe.



Approximately 18 attended over the weekend including Stephen and Lynda and over 50 during the week with over 50 in total completing all 4 modules and receiving certificates. This included some of our staff (Patience, Rumbidzai and Nyasha), some teachers and 6th formers and most Bible School students. Others also attended from other churches. Many students seemed well motivated to go out and put their learning into practice with specific projects. We are very grateful to Tim and Maz for their valuable input and we will pray about future input from them. We are also grateful to Jeanette who was not able to join this trip due to health issues but instead gave the money to sponsor Tim and Maz's expenses.



2) Walk Through the Bible Schools Programme

Whilst the leadership course was meeting, Lynda, Stephen and Graham ran the Walk Through the Bible Old Testament 5 Session course with over 120 of the college students assisted by Perseverance, the Deputy head teacher. The size of the group presented its challenges but we had a great time with the children eager to participate in acting and activities and remembering all the signs. We had a lovely thank you letter from a group of students. Doing this course has not only

taught the children a lot about the Bible but also given us closer relationships with students in the college.

3) Philippians Course for Bible School students

On 4 mornings, Graham conducted 4 sessions on the book of Philippians attended by approximately 20 students, many of whom stayed on to do the afternoon leadership course. Again this was very well received.

4) Other activities at the centre

Lynda spent time marking test papers, meeting with students and helping some with their assignments and printing off numerous certificates - a challenge with so little electricity. Stephen as ever did some practical work, mainly fixing broken window panes and spending time speaking to local people seeking to promote good relationships between us from the UK and our African friends. Jane spent long hours on accounts and in meetings with Oripa and Jonah and preparing a budget for 2020. It was also good to receive a visit from ladies who had been on the 2019 Israel trip.

5) Graduation day



In 2019, there was no graduation held as we were not in Zimbabwe. This year's graduation was thus a bumper one with certificates issued to Sunday School teachers, Leadership for Life participants and Philippians course attendees. Then certificates were awarded to students graduating at ordinary level in their 1 year Christian studies course, to those having completed the Advanced Diploma and others having done the Advanced Research Diploma for the first time. It was good to see those graduating this year joined in procession with previous years' graduates, all looking lovely in their caps, gowns and Paraclete sashes. We also gave prizes to top students and the Doris Aaron Memorial prize. The occasion was very well attended by around 150 people and ended with refreshments and photoshoot opportunities.

Activities outside the centre

1) Visit to Batsirai Special School

Stephen and Lynda accompanied by Jonah visited Batsirai Special School to hand over a gift of money raised by women at Lynda's church doing fundraising activities. We had a lovely time there engaging with the students and staff with singing and much laughter.



One boy, Ralph, with Downs Syndrome who is a member of Kuwadzana Presbyterian Church, where he is head usher, had been unable to go to Batsirai in 2019 due to family hardship. We talked to the headmistress who was very keen for Ralph to be back at school as he is such a good influence, very respectful to teachers and a good role model. Thus we decided to use some of the money (US\$200) to pay Ralph's school fees for the year. He and his mother were absolutely delighted and it was very moving to hear young Ralph pray thanking God for this provision. The remainder of the money we gave to the school will be used for food, fuel and cleaning products.



2) Church visits

a) Lynda attended the Thursday afternoon Women's Association gathering.

b) On the first Sunday, Lynda and Jonah went to City Presbyterian Church in the centre of Harare, the first Presbyterian church to be built, the Presbyterian "cathedral" and the congregation where Ian Smith was once a member. Jonah is interim moderator there as they seek a new minister. We received a very warm welcome; Lynda preached which was received well in this largely African



professional congregation - very different from the township churches. She was even invited to apply for the ministerial post which she politely declined! Graham, Jane, Stephen, Maz and Tim went to Kuwadzana Presbyterian - first to the extension congregation and then to the main one where Graham preached. We all met there for lunch with some of the Elders and Simba (the minister) and his wife Catherine.



c) On the second Sunday, we all went to City Church where Lynda led prayers and Graham preached. All except Graham then left to go to Kuwadzana service where Lynda preached and Jane gave farewell greetings. Graham and Jonah went on to Kambuzuma Presbyterian where Graham preached and led communion. Again we had lunch with the minister and Elders at Kuwadzana.

We all felt encouraged at the situation in these churches despite the hardships. City Church faces challenges but it is good that Jonah as an experienced minister is there for such a time as this.

3) Free Time visits



In the little free time we had, Tim and Maz went to watch Zimbabwe play cricket against Sri Lanka, the rest of us went to Avondale market to shop, where sadly the car broke down for the second time. On Saturday after graduation, we went to the Lion Park and game view drive nearby seeing plenty of lions at very close proximity plus the elderly giant tortoise still going strong (or going at least) after 300 years, kudus, impala, zebra, monkeys, donkeys, wildebeest

and warthogs etc.



Challenges for us in 2020

All agreed this was a very positive and worthwhile visit all round despite the very challenging situation in the country. It was helpful to experience the situation firsthand, not having been in Zimbabwe since January 2018 (Graham had visited also in October 2018). We have come home grateful for all we have in the UK and realising how very difficult life is for local Zimbabweans day to day and just how bleak the future looks, humanly speaking.



1) Prayer

We need to hold Jonah especially in our prayers plus the family as they come to terms with life without Tracey. For Jonah we pray especially for health, strength, wisdom and ongoing vision for the work at the centre.

2) The Solar Project

We have completed Part 1 of the solar project thanks to generous donations. As stated, we need to complete Part 2 - adding 6 more panels. We have costings for this and think it will be good to try and seek some form of grant for this. We will discuss this at our next Trustees' meeting

3) Vehicles

Vehicles for getting children to schools is always a big challenge and vehicles only last a few years due to the challenging road conditions. It may be good to seek a grant for a minibus for school children too. This will also be discussed at a Trustees' meeting.

4) Budget

It is difficult to budget for the future year of the training centre with inflation being so unstable. All staff need prayer support to be able to make ends meet.

5) Our fundraising

Thanks to the US\$ now being so valuable in Zimbabwe, Jane has suggested we decrease our 2020 giving by £100 to £1500 bimonthly in our long, slow journey towards the centre eventually being self supporting. We need creative ways to continue raising this amount every two months.

6) Student sponsorships

Sponsorships will now only cost us around £10 per month. Hopefully we can add sponsors and make our money go further to sponsor more students, plus have some extra amounts for text books and towards teachers' pay. We need to do a revised schedule for this and send letters out to sponsors now we know 2020 fees.

7) Junior School

We need to prayerfully consider how the Junior School might develop after 2020.

8) New Bible School course

Lynda will need to write a new Bible School course. Now many pastors from independent churches take our courses and want to continue to do Advanced research level. Thus it seems we need a course more suitable to church leaders of independent churches which often do not stand the test of time because of lack of structure, procedure, false teachings, poor leadership, etc. In addition, following conversation with James and on the back of the New Testament Greek course Graham led in October 2018, Graham will be producing a 12 session Introduction to New Testament Greek course, available in monthly worksheets. This will be prepared by Graham and managed locally by James.

9) Other possible sponsorships

It might be that we want to seek sponsorship for Shelton with an increase of university fees beyond Nyasha and Netsai's means to pay (approx 670US\$ = £525 per annum or £44 per month); also we met with Kudakwashe Katesi, one of our special needs sponsored students and her brother. They are seeking a place where she can do some practical training and might need sponsorship for this.

We are grateful to all who prayed for us before and during our trip. If you would like more details of any aspect of our work in Zimbabwe, please get in touch.

*Lynda Hulcoop
Director Paraclete Christian Network International
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