

Report on Visit to Zimbabwe 1st-15th January 2010

The General Situation in the Country:

We arrived in Zimbabwe travelling via Johannesburg with South African Airways. After excellent flights and a completely hassle free journey with all of our overweight luggage making it through, we were met warmly at Harare airport by Jonah and several members of the training centre staff. The early days of our stay gave us an opportunity to get a handle on the general situation in the country. Our observations, discussions and reading 4 different newspapers - one produced by the Government and 3 giving different perspectives (copies available) were very enlightening.

Generally, life for the average Zimbabwean is extremely hard and a real struggle on all fronts. Money barely stretches to cover the bare necessities, medical needs are an enormous challenge and everyday activities are a burden. However the churches are full. Given all this, people we met remain bright and largely positive, living without complaint and with much gratitude to God and to others who have supported them and hanging onto hope for the future.

Update on Jonah and family

Jonah and family are currently all well and in good spirits. Clearly 2007/8/9 had been one of severe hardships for them all economically and this was made worse when Jonah had his car accident in September 2008 which was far more serious than he had reported to us. After this accident, he had to wait all day in the hospital until family had collected enough money between them and friends to pay for an X-ray. Thankfully after 3 to 4 months recuperation, he has fully recovered, extremely grateful for his new car - a reconditioned Toyota Combi which suits the local needs very well. He is still full of energy, vision and whole hearted commitment to the work and is revered by all as an outstanding pastor, community leader and project manager with so many people regarding him as their mentor and guide. We are indeed very blessed to have him overseeing all our work in Zimbabwe.

The rest of the family are all doing well in the difficult circumstances and it was good to spend time with them all. Tracey, Jonah's wife is well although having to cope with diabetes and arthritis. She is still working in the Church pre-school in Kuwadzana and is a wonderful wife and support to Jonah in the ministry. We stayed in their home during our visit and they were the most wonderful hosts imaginable, making us very welcome and comfortable and attending to our every need. We are most indebted to them.

Kuwadzana Presbyterian Church and Christmas 2009

We were very warmly greeted by the Elders and members of Kuwadzana Presbyterian Church who held a lovely welcome party for us the first Sunday after the morning service. The church was packed to overflowing with approximately 300 attending.

We received many reports about **the Christmas party** we had sponsored from UK. For this, they had bought a big mombi (US\$500), rice, cabbages, tomatoes, onions and salad plus 15 crates of bottled drinks. For the children they bought crisps, biscuits and orange drink. A group of women stayed up all night cooking the mombi (minus the head which was sold to an Elder for US\$^) over open fires outside. The party took place after church on December 20th with each person bringing their own plate and spoon. The church was predictably packed that day with over 400 attending. Reports told us that all went away well satisfied with some getting second helpings and other taking some food home with them. After the

food, the people stayed singing, dancing and chatting together with no one wanting the day to end. All agreed it was a truly wonderful day, people went away full of Christmas joy, for one day at least having eaten well with no more need for searching for food and cooking that day. They expressed heartfelt thanks to all who had contributed to this happy day.

Also after the service that day, the church distributed 109 food parcels with 10kg mealie maize, 2kg rice, 2kg sugar, 2 litres cooking oil, 500gms salt, 1kg beans, a bar of soap, some sweets and biscuits to the neediest families in the township who queued to receive their parcels. The church leaders were so thrilled to be able to reach out in this way into their needy community. All affirmed that Christmas 2009 was one of the best Christmas celebrations for a long time for the people of Kuwadzana.

The Situation at Kuwadzana Christian Training Centre

Driving into the training centre is certainly akin to driving into an oasis in a desert. One is immediately impressed by the well kept grounds with beautifully mown lawns, colourful flowers, well maintained buildings and generally very smart appearance. Having not visited for over 8 years when we opened the Christian training school, we were utterly amazed at the progress over this time. The centre complex now consists of the following:

The Centre office, 2 Bible School classrooms, Coordinator/Lecturer's office, Library/reading room, Toilet, Community Hall, 1 office, 2 meeting rooms (used by Pre-School), kitchen, Dormitory with Kitchen, Dining room, Lounge 6 double bedrooms, Refreshments area, 2 shower/toilet Security Guards house - 5 rooms (shared between 2 families, Secondary school prefabs - 4 prefab classrooms (owned by Emmanuel Venge, Headmaster, Uniting College), Other items including Borehole, Water tank, pump, community tap, Children's play area, Welding area/store shed, car port, Latrine block
Grounds: Vegetable plots, Gerald's garden with 2 orange trees, 2 naartijies trees, 1 avocado tree, 1 mango tree surrounded by guava trees, Small lawns and flower beds.

Jonah, as Director of the Centre, is doing a superb job training up a team of 10 staff responsible for the day to day running of the centre and its activities. Currently the team is as follows: James Ndhlovu: Bible School Co-ordinator and Lecturer, Oripa Ndhlovu : Bookkeeper/Secretary, Robert Gwatidzo: Librarian/Future Lecturer, Patience Gwatidzo: Superkids preschool teacher), Christine Mutaramutswa (Matron/Dormitory Housekeeper), Susan Jaluwa: Cook for pre school, other guests, Mailos Jaluwa: Groundsman, Netsai Mutozho: cleaner, Nyasha Mutozho: Security Guard and Marian Mutamba: Superkids Pre School Teacher. They meet together for prayer each morning 8.30 to 9.00 and have a monthly business/finance meeting. He is seeking to instil a sense of responsibility and motivation into the team and is working very hard to maintain high standards. This we found very impressive.

Regarding current Activities at the centre, each day the centre is alive and buzzing proving to be a real focus for the Kuwadzana community. Activities at present are as follows:

- 1) **Kuwadzana Paraclete Bible School:** This meets daily on weekdays throughout the year offering ordinary and Advanced Diploma courses in Christian Training and Adult Education. In 2009, approximately 30 students attended but more are enrolled for 2010. Students come from different denominations including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Pentecostal and or course Presbyterian. Although courses are really designed for lay people in the church, increasingly pastors from other

denominations are attending, especially Pentecostals. This is an encouraging development giving us a wider sphere of influence among the churches.

- 2) **Superkids Pre School:** Opened only in May 2009, this meets each weekday during term time. Currently 30 children attending 8.30 to 3.30 during which time they get 2 meals. In 2010 it is hoped to receive 50 children. Families pay US\$40 per month plus per term they must bring 2kg rice, 1kg sugar, 750 ml cooking oil and 2 litres orange squash per child. The school is extremely well run with a full curriculum of activities and a varied menu.
- 3) **Uniting College Secondary School:** This meets weekdays during term time and rents rooms from the centre plus has its own temporary prefab classrooms on site. It offers 6 classes for O levels and A levels in a wide range of subjects with approx 80 students attending and 8 teachers.
- 4) **Library/ Reading room:** This opens daily 9.00 to 3.30 and was even opened on Christmas day to allow some advanced Diploma students do their studies! Used by Bible School and school/college students and is open to all. Participants pay a joining fee of US\$3 plus US\$2 per month. Approximately 200 are enrolled.
- 5) **Community Hall Hire:** The hall is currently hired out to 5 different churches meeting weekly and paying US\$100 per month plus US\$1 per chair used!!! It is also hired out for weddings and different parties at a rate of US\$100 per day 8-4
- 6) **Sewing Courses:** These will be held regularly throughout the year in 2010 working on 4 sewing machines and 1 overlocker (currently broken).
- 7) **Farming courses:** From time to time, farming courses based on Biblical principles are held and in the future it is envisaged that the centre will be a hub for on-going training. These courses run in conjunction with the organisation "Farming His Way"
- 8) **Courses using the dormitory:** Throughout the year, different groups come and stay in the dormitory and undertake courses of training. The Presbytery of Southern Africa often use the dormitory and in 2010, a 2 month training course for evangelists will be held here.
- 9) **Brickmaking/welding Project:** From time to time, where building projects are underway, the brick making and welding projects are fully functional.

During our stay and after discussion with staff, the following materials needs were highlighted:

All types of gardening equipment, More tools for general repairs/maintenance, A calor gas stove for cooking when no electricity, More pots and pans and kitchen utensils, More bedding - sheets and blankets for dormitory, Kettle, cups, canisters etc for refreshments area in dormitory, More mattresses for larger groups staying at centre More sewing machines/overlockers, Printer inks HP45 and HP 78, Box files for Bible school, Paper clips!!!, Memory sticks, Old mobile phones and chargers, Rechargeable Torch for security man, More mattresses for Superkids children, Lots more books for library, Paint / partitioning for caretakers house (already sponsored by Lynda's brother) A portable DVD for Bible School staff to view DVD lectures in advance

Our activities during our stay;

Without doubt, our days were filled full with activities as follows: On the 2 Sundays, we worshipped at Kuwadzana Presbyterian Church with June giving the children's talk each time and Lynda preaching on both occasions. We also participated in both a welcome and a farewell party at the church with the Session and Training Centre staff. Lynda marked over 300 test papers from Bible School students and prepared all final assessment marks with grades for the 21 graduating students. Each morning we led staff prayers with Bible study from the book of Ephesians Lynda taught 5 Bible School sessions again based on Ephesians helped by June prior to graduation. In week 2 she met with students to outline arrangements for new courses in 2010. On Wednesday we both spoke at the Women's Association meeting battling against a massive thunderstorm! We met individually with all staff members to review their life situation and encourage/pray with them. This included some pastoral/ marriage counselling. We also attended the monthly staff meeting for business/financial report and were well impressed by the business like manner of the centre management. We visited Superkids pre-school and were well entertained by the young children's presentations. We held meetings with the various people. In addition, we had long hours to talk with Jonah and James about existing issues and for future planning.

However, beyond doubt, the highlight of our stay was graduation day. We had not experienced a full Zimbabwe style graduation ceremony before. It was a thrilling, heart warming experience. The ceremony took place at 2.00 p.m. in the community hall lasting approximately 2 and a half hours. 21 Bible school students were graduating plus 8 women from the sewing course. The students arrived very smartly dressed and joined the graduation ceremony in their graduation gowns made by a local tailor complete with caps. The ceremony was led by Noah Chataika, Jonah's son in law who got proceedings over to a very lively, joyful start with much singing and dancing. Prior to the actual graduation certificates being given, there was much singing and various. The actual graduation part of the gathering was very lively (far better than the average UK graduation!) with each student being awarded their certificate by June, followed by handshakes by Jonah and Lynda and then the photographs. This all took place amidst loud cheers, clapping, dancing as family, friends and churches supported each student. Prizes were awarded to the top students and to James for all his lecturing input. Lynda then gave a graduation address. This was followed by more singing and dancing. After the ceremony refreshments consisting of a sandwich, a piece of chicken and a drink were served to the 30 plus people attending. This occasion was wonderful for us all as ordinary people from the township found cause for celebration and as we honoured the achievement of the students who had performed so well often in very difficult and deprived circumstances. Both we and Jonah were thrilled with the day and went home tired but rejoicing.

Proposals for new ventures 2010 and beyond

1) Kuwadzana Paraclete Bible School: New Courses The Ordinary level Bible School courses are going well and no major changes are needed. Students will continue to take 10 courses to get the certificate and 15 courses to get the Diploma. Lynda will continue to mark papers in UK. Currently 16 new students have enrolled for the new term. With the **Advanced Diploma**, Many students having completed the Ordinary level courses want to go on to the Advanced Level. However some of them will struggle with the level of the course work assignments and with their English as they require a lot more reading and

writing with essays etc. Therefore Lynda will prepare some easier assignments for such students who can then pass at Advanced certificate level rather than Advanced Diploma level. The teaching input will be the same for all students. Currently 12 students wish to continue studying on these programmes. Also those having completed the Advanced Diploma wish to continue. In addition, some pastors working in churches do not have the time to attend daily classes but want to do further study. Therefore we are going to introduce a 3rd course - **the Advanced Research Diploma** - which will consist of 8 modules which will each take place within a 6 week cycle as follows: Week 1: Teaching week and course test; Weeks 2,3,4: Students do private study using library etc to produce a research paper which will be assessed in UK; Week 5: Students return to classes and each does an oral presentation of their research and leads some discussion (assessed locally to enhance teaching skills); Week 6: Free week or time to complete any outstanding work. The modules will be based around David Pawson DVDs Unlocking the Bible which will be shown in the first sessions and the new course will begin in February 2010. Lynda will also write some **new short courses** for varied use as requested/discussed with students in Zimbabwe as follows: Marriage and family matters, Managing your finances, Ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit, Church history/understanding sects and other religions, Apologetics. Some of these courses can be taught during short visits to Zimbabwe to both staff and others who have special interest/need in these areas. Lynda will write these during the course of 2010.

In future years, graduation will take place in early January as it did this year. Jonah hopes very much that a representative from PCNI/UK will be able to attend each year to keep students and staff well motivated and encouraged. We saw the vital need for this during our visit. This will also give the opportunity for new short courses to be taught in the week before the new term proper begins again in the 3rd week of January.

Proposals for a new Computer Room

Much discussion took place about the need for a computer room for students, young people and others in Kuwadzana township. All felt this would be a very positive new venture to help students educationally and give all a chance to learn basic computer skills which might help the younger people in the jobs market in years to come as the economy and society recovers. Only a small minority of people in Kuwadzana have a computer and Jonah believes this will be a very good income generating project. In addition, the building of the room will provide short term employment for brick makers, welders, labourers, carpenters.

Fortunately we have the appropriate people to be able to see the project through. To advance this project, if PCNI Trustees give the go ahead to act as main sponsors, the following will be needed: Jonah will get plans drawn up and planning permission from Harare CC and will liaise with Douglas Chigweda and get a costing for the room. He will also estimate costs for the furniture required i.e. wall tables and chairs and cost out a generator which, under current circumstances with limited electricity supply will be needed. PCNI Trustees need to decide whether we would want to buy all the computer equipment locally or ship it in from UK. The alternative, sending goods from UK, will depend on the costs quoted by companies like Vadomark, who Nelson Chamisa works for. Once we have all the information, we can make a final decision and we can start fundraising between us. We hope the project can be completed in 2010 and that the computer centre can be officially opened in January 2011 to coincide with graduation.

Much time was also spent discussing the need for a primary school. Parents from the Pre School children would dearly love to see the provision of a private primary school at the centre because they are confident of the quality of the education that will be provided and they do not want to send their children to the state schools which are poor with very large classes and frequent teacher strikes. With such provision, children would be able to continue on to the secondary school. The other advantage is that this would be another income generating project. Hatfield Presbyterian Church run such a school and charge US\$390 per term per student. Permission has already been given by the Government for such a school to begin. It would require 7 classes. However 1 issue is classroom space. The community hall could be adapted with the provision of a sliding screen to double up and be used as 2 classrooms. This could get the school started with a first year intake and each year additional classes could be added.

The problems envisaged as things stand at present are lack of space for any more buildings on the site. We do not want to clutter the grounds with too many buildings. A 3 story building might be the answer. However with the secondary school on the site using so much space, things might get very crowded. A system could be put in place for different classes in the mornings and afternoons on a shift system. The other factor to bear in mind is that Uniting College has the 4 prefab rooms that are not legal. Emmanuel Venge, the headmaster would like to find his own plot of land but can't afford to do so. He would like to find partnership for this venture. If he stays on site and if proper buildings were available, he would be willing to pay a much higher rent which would generate more income for the centre.

At present in all these deliberations, none of us felt very clear about proceeding with this project which would require such a high capital investment. Jonah felt it was best to concentrate on the computer room and continue praying about primary school provision during 2010. Obviously if a big funder came forward to finance a school, we would take that as a sign that we need to resolve the above issues and find a way forward. Thus this plan is on hold at present and will be held under review with Jonah.

June and I are very grateful to all for their prayer support during this visit to Zimbabwe. It was for both of us a truly memorable and heart warming visit which has enriched our lives. At the same time, we feel the visit was highly significant and vital in assessing the work we are involved in, encouraging Jonah, the staff and students in the difficult situation they are living through, and in making plans for the on-going development of the centre seeking to ensure its long term future. We trust the training centre will continue to meet the needs of some of the poorest people in Zimbabwe and will continue to bring glory to God.

Lynda Hulcoop, January 2010