

Zimbabwe Challenge

In April, twenty people from the Croydon Episcopal Area, led by Bishop Nick Baines, visited the Diocese of Central Zimbabwe. While there, they spent time individually in a variety of homes and parishes throughout the area.

These are just a few of their reports.

Bishop Nick

Bishop Nick found himself misquoted in Zimbabwe's national press after a meeting with the Governor of the Midlands Province (photo above). Here he says what he really thinks:

The Government-sponsored media in Zimbabwe dismisses any critical account of life in Zimbabwe as propaganda or 'UK media lies'.

Well, our visit afforded a unique opportunity to see for ourselves, as well as developing our long-standing link with the Diocese of Central Zimbabwe.

The situation looked like this:

- Inflation was well above 3,000% (now over 3,700%), making any planning impossible. The official exchange rate was \$ 250 Zim to \$ 1 US; but the parallel rate (on which prices are based) was \$ 16,000 Zim to \$ 1 US. The black market rules.
- Nothing has been repaired for years and the country's infrastructure is collapsing. Constant power cuts, some lasting days, are interspersed with water shortages. In Gweru, the whole town was without running water for five days. There had been no water supply in Kadoma for two months.
- Whilst we were fed daily with what would have been a banquet to many of our



Bishop Nick meets the Governor of the Midlands Province

hosts, behind the scenes we saw signs of malnutrition in children, and adults suffering from hunger fatigue. Most people we stayed with would normally eat what is called 'zero one zero' - no breakfast, a basic lunch and nothing in the evening.

■ Agricultural land, once so rich and well-farmed, is now largely abandoned. The land-reform process has been catastrophic, not because it was morally wrong in itself (the UK agreed to it), but because it was ill-conceived, appallingly executed and economically disastrous.

■ Many businesses and industries have closed down or are working at a small percentage of their capability.



Benhilde goes shopping. Even when food is available, her priest husband's stipend doesn't cover basic needs.

What they learned:

The UK Christians said that they learned:

- "...that no hardship should stop us from maintaining our Christianity"
- "...we in England need to get out of our comfort zones"
- "...to be more welcoming and open our homes more"
- "...to be more thankful...and less concerned about the length of a service"
- "...sacrificial giving, expectant prayer ministry"
- "...a lot about trust - and about going with the flow"
- "...it renewed an outrage in me at the injustices of poverty"
- "...it brought me back to prayer!"

Some of the Zimbabwean hosts told us that what they learned was:

- "...your ability to adapt to situations. You did not develop long faces when confronted with hardships"
- "...your openness, frankness and ability to show disappointment (at lack of hospital progress) without offending anyone. This has raised consciousness and enabled us to look at other ways of progressing"
- "...your spirit of openness and transparency"
- "...we learned humility from you. Your visit gave us a lot of hope"

■ HIV/AIDS is wreaking havoc. Average life expectancy for males is now down to 34 years.

In the midst of all this the Anglican Church is struggling to keep hope alive. The worship in churches was vibrant and life-changing. The music was fantastic everywhere we went.

People know how to celebrate their faith and their God, they are not celebrating their circumstances. Priests and people are trying to enable one another to remain faithful under pressure and to have the courage to do what is necessary to bring about change.

Are these observations the result of naive consumption of British propaganda? No, we saw for ourselves.



Martha Mutikani (2nd left) joins the celebration as we meet our hosts

Martha Mutikani

Martha Mutikani, a Zimbabwean now resident in the UK, stayed in the rural area of St. Mark's, Lozane, whose primary school is supported by her home parish of St. Matthew's, Redhill. She writes:

The welcome from my host couple was remarkable and loving. Mrs M is deputy head of St. Mark's school while Mr. M, a retired teacher, now farms and is chairman of the school board of governors. Their small scale farm grows maize, ground nuts and sweet potatoes, and has a mango orchard and some cattle ranching.

They have four adult children, three of whom live in South Africa. At the time of my visit they had just buried their fifth son and their son-in-law.

Mrs M travels to South Africa three times a year and brings

back groceries to help them through. Otherwise their income is not adequate for day-to-day needs. Their adult children help with financial support and had left 60 litres of petrol for my visit. Local parishioners had also brought food, so that I was given meat at every meal.

I learned that a third of St. Mark's 290 pupils are orphans after seven of them.) The school has very few text-books, no window-panes and multiple cracks on the walls. Classroom furniture funded by the Croydon Area is still in use and much appreciated.

St. Mark's priest lives in a simple home next to the school, with his wife and three children. His monthly stipend is now only worth £2 (\$100,000 Zim) per month, equal to the cost of two litres of cooking oil and two kilos of rice.

He looks after 10 congregations and 850 parishioners. The furthest outstation is 50 km away. He has poorly controlled asthma, so cannot use a bicycle and has to walk to all the outstations.

He has begun a new irrigation project to grow vegetables on mission land, helping to support the school and mission and see the local community through times of drought.

Wonderful times

During my stay we travelled to three out-stations, with more than 100 people at each service. They were wonderful times. The worship was vibrant and very exciting, with dancing and beautiful singing.

I cried at most of the services seeing so much joy and warmth, but at the same time understanding the circumstances behind them.

Their welcome was especially humbling since at every outstation we ended up arriving late. They'd be waiting, singing, at the gate, walking beside the car to the church.

They didn't even complain at one place when we arrived three and a half hours late!



Hilary Vale (left) gets to know one of her hosts...

Jane Penny and Hilary Vale

Jane Penny, a palliative care nurse from Christ Church, South Nutfield and Hilary Vale, a practice nurse from St. Mary's, Tatsfield spent some time at St. Patrick's clinic. They write:

St. Patrick's Mission is situated in a rural area about a half hour drive on dirt roads from the main highway and a further thirty minutes to the town of Gweru. The mission compound comprises a high school, primary school, church, diocesan retreat accommodation, homes for staff, farm (currently rather run down) and the clinic.

People travel for many miles on foot from the surrounding villages to attend St. Patrick's clinic. The local donkey cart brings patients too sick to walk.

The clinic is nurse led, and patients requiring medical support need to travel by ambulance to Gweru hospital. It can be very difficult for patients and their families to find the money to get to the hospital and the cost of treatment when they arrive.

We really enjoyed our time in the clinic but the lack of facilities was so different to the areas we work in here. Drugs and equipment are in short supply and even a basic urine test is not available. However the nurses are very dedicated and well-respected by the local

community. The clinic cares for a wide variety of diagnoses including HIV, TB, diabetes, hypertension, as well as childhood diseases and there is also maternity unit.

AIDS was very evident, although rarely named as such. The clinic has no testing facilities and cannot prescribe anti-retrovirals. It was interesting to see so many HIV-infected orphans attending the clinic, often accompanied by grandparents or other family members.

We were all disappointed at the lack of progress on St. Patrick's Hospital, which seems to have stalled at the foundation slab level. The whole group had a meeting with the building

committee, newly-formed with some young men who look able to move things forwards. Reasons for lack of progress were many: delayed approval from local government, breakdown of the tractor and trolley, prices of materials escalating out of reach. It was evident though that there were also management issues and our Link Team here will be working closely with the building committee in the coming months to see how these issues can be resolved.

Providing care is an ongoing struggle at the clinic but given the current circumstances in Zimbabwe, achieving any level of health care seems little short of a miracle.

On my last day I asked if there were any English people left in the area. The priest arranged for me to visit his former employer, the owner of a small factory. It turned out that he came from my home town of Hartlepool, as did most of the local factory owners, who had moved there in the 80s when the North East England steel works closed. I didn't have time to meet others, but we probably would have been at school together!

The factory owner told me inflation meant he was facing a wage rise of 50%, but his workers were threatening to strike if they didn't receive 400%. He had already been running at a loss for the last few months. He was not sure if the company could survive beyond June.

Meanwhile he and other employers are part of the local Lions club which undertakes an intermittent feeding programme and educational sponsorship in poorer areas. I'm hoping that our parish will assist with this support work.



Bishop Nick prays with one of the patients in St. Patrick's clinic



AIDS was very evident at St. Patrick's clinic though rarely named as such



...and Jane Penny learns drumming Zimbabwe style

Cecelia is dying of AIDS. Members of the Mother's Union bring her food and care for her children.

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Irene Hadley

Irene Hadley's parish of All Saints, Kenley, is linked with St. George's, Redcliffe. At first, finding herself staying in a comfortable middle class area, she wondered why she had come. Later she began to understand:

I visited several families in the high-density township areas, almost all of whom had lost relatives to HIV/AIDS. One was a widow, paralysed down one side. Her wheelchair was in need of repair. Her son and his wife and small children lived with her. Her son had been an Olympic athlete but was now suffering with TB. He looked very ill, but could not now afford treatment. The family had rented out two rooms in their small house in order to raise some money, but this rent was now overtaken by the tax they needed to pay.

I visited one of the families in the back room. The husband had a good job but his income only just paid the rent of this one small room, the total accommodation for him, his wife and their toddler twins.

I visited another couple whose only means of survival was to leave their four children in the care of the oldest (aged 14) for two weeks out of four, while they travelled to South Africa to buy items to sell on their return. The fuel shortage is likely to put a stop to this.

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Irene Hadley looks at a rural maize store - will there be enough to last the winter?

If you want to find out more about Zimbabwe and the recent trip, there are several forthcoming opportunities:

Wednesday 13 June 6pm for 6.30pm Southwark Cathedral Bernard Mizeki Festival

A service to commemorate Zimbabwe's most famous Christian martyr and to pray for a struggling nation. The new map of Zimbabwe in the cathedral will be dedicated, the Zimbabwe choir will sing and Bishop Nick will preach. Refreshments in the courtyard beforehand.

Sat 16 June 5.30pm - 8pm Holy Trinity, Carlton Road, Redhill Zimbabwe Challenge

Featuring a Braai (Zim style barbecue), and activities for all ages. Bishop Nick and other trip members will be sharing their experiences, and there will be a further flavour of Zimbabwe in music, displays and audio-visuals. £5 adults, Children FREE

Wed 18 July 7.30pm All Saints, Addington Road, Sanderstead Zimbabwe Challenge 2

Bishop Nick and trip members are also speaking at this event, which features a Zimbabwe choir, light refreshments - Shona style and displays and audio-visuals. Admission £3.

To book for the Redhill and Sanderstead events, or for more information, contact Ann Wright on 01293 821322 or wright@btinternet.com.



The town of Gweru had no water for five days - people went out into rural areas in search of wells or boreholes.

Annual Bernard Mizeki Service 13 June Bishop Nick will be talking in Southwark Cathedral at 6.30pm on 13 June at the Bernard Mizeki Service when everyone is welcome to join in prayer for Zimbabwe. The new map of Zimbabwe in the Cathedral will also be dedicated at the service.



Digging a pit latrine for St. Mark's Primary School. The community take turns, a women's team and then a men's team.