

Report on Zimbabwe Mission Trip Sunday January 21st - Tuesday January 30th 2024

This visit was undertaken by Lynda Hulcoop, Jane Seals (PCNI Trustees) and Daniel Muwanguzi (SEAN Regional Coordinator for Africa) who flew in from Uganda to conduct Bible School classes introducing SEAN (TEE) discipleship training courses into Zimbabwe.



1. The General situation in Zimbabwe

Upon arrival in Zimbabwe (on the most turbulent flight we have ever been on!), we were met with a smartly refurbished Harare airport. Clearly vast sums of money had been spent upgrading and extending the airport, despite the fact that there are very few flights per day coming in and out. The vast majority of these are within the African continent, the only exceptions being flights to Dubai and Doha, catering for the many Chinese workers now in Zimbabwe. It was also clear that some other new buildings had gone up with some new businesses springing up including petrol stations and fast food outlets. These may have been developments around the elections or signs of ongoing Chinese investment. Either way, sadly, these developments have little positive impact on the lives of the poorest people we work with as they will not use such facilities.

Economically, the situation is dire and worsening. Inflation is spiralling (officially 90% but in practice much, much higher; prices are going up all the time and definitely much higher than UK prices. The value of the local currency RTGS is now officially 4-5000 per dollar (2 years ago it was around 20) but much higher on the parallel market. This means large bundles of notes are needed for even the smallest of items and the 100 RTGS note, which is the only denomination available, is worthless. Petrol is very expensive at around US\$1.50 per litre - slightly lower than here in the UK but in a country where wages are significantly lower.

Electricity supplies continue to be very limited, with power cuts daily and sometimes for several days in a row (4 days in some areas during our stay). ZESA, the electricity company is now known as **Zimbabwe Electricity Sometimes Available**. The City of Harare water supplies are also limited and not properly treated; thus people have to rely on local borehole supplies where they are available within communities. Alongside all this there is cholera spreading around the country.



On the positive front, there has thankfully been good rainfall in recent months meaning that the crops are growing well. There seemed to be plenty of maize, tomatoes and other items like avocados and mangos (we were inundated with them!) We also heard of a few cases where young white farmers are being invited to farm the land. This represents a little hope as many farms are lying unproductive.

Politically the country remains tense. SADC who were the international observers for the August 2023 elections deemed them not to be free and fair (the normal situation for many years) but unusually they are going to be rerun sometime in 2024. The main opposition leader, Nelson Chamisa, has left the MDC opposition party which was being infiltrated and

weakened by ploys for the opposition and formed a new party. Many see this as a sign of hope. But all fear there will be political violence in the year ahead.

The Masaka family and Centre Staff

Jonah seemed to be in very good health and good spirits having just celebrated his 77th birthday. Understandably he does get quite tired given the workload he still undertakes from early morning at the centre. Early on in our visit, he was keen to talk about his plans for retirement and any ongoing role he might have. He has plans to develop a small farming project growing mushrooms and do something with transportation. Jane and Lynda had initial conversations with him and these will continue with us here in PCNI and the centre staff. Given his impending retirement, we also had preliminary discussions about how the centre would function without his day to day leadership.



The rest of the Masaka family seem to be doing well. Patience and Shylet continue to work at the training centre, Patricia continues to work for ZIMRA, the Inland Revenue alongside running the business of her late husband. Tina continues as a pharmacist in South Africa but is pursuing plans to undertake further study in Canada. Tendai continues to be a teacher. Whilst we were there, Shylet's husband Noah was inducted into a new church - Highfields Presbyterian - a larger congregation who can offer a manse and a car. We



attended a very joyful induction service enabling us to meet up with some old friends including Norest Ajapa, a former Bible School student who is now a presbyterian minister ready to be inducted to Mabvuku and Mrs Magomba, now an elderly lady but one who cooked and cared for Lynda and Peter on their very early visits to Mbare. Patience and Robert and family are all well and Robert is about to start teaching building in the school once equipment and tools have been purchased.



The centre staff all seem to be doing well despite the challenging circumstances in the country and seem to be working well as a team. The same is true for the teachers. During our stay, it was good to see the staff being offered a wage increase with the extra work commitments given the growth in numbers of students in the school.

Superkids



Superkids pre-school continues to function now meeting at Tina's house but being picked up and returned to the centre each day in the Combi driven by Kudakwashe, James and Oripa's son. Kudakwashe's wife, Nicole, is a superkids teacher alongside Sandra who heads up the creche. However, she hopes to go for ministry training this coming year which will mean staff changes. Currently the enrolment is around 30 but further enrolments are expected in February when, hopefully, families have more money to spend after recovering from

Christmas.

Paraclete College Secondary School



It was such a joy to see the new two-storey classroom block that has been built during 2023. It offers two classrooms upstairs and an office for Oripa, the administrator and Jonah. It is remarkable that it has been constructed so quickly and has released further classroom space in other rooms formerly used by Oripa and James. We were also able to see the science lab being used - a joy to be reacquainted with bunsen burners and see the classroom equipped with other items and consumables

sponsored by donors in the UK.

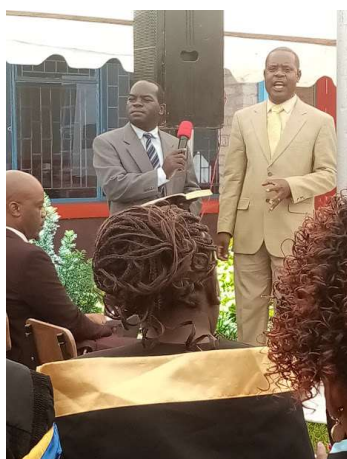
Currently the intake of students is around 600 with a further 100 expected to join, some in Form 5 now the O level and A level results are out. They are taught a wide range of subjects by around 17 teachers in 2 sessions during the day - Forms 3-6 coming in the morning from 7.30 to 12.00 and Forms 1 and 2 coming from 12.30 to 4.00. It was a truly wonderful experience for us to participate in an assembly gathering for the whole school out in the grounds. Daniel and Lynda also led a session of the school's Scripture Union group of around 40 students over a lunchtime.



As stated, whilst we were there, the O and A level results came out. The teachers seemed happy with the overall results, with an improvement on last year. For the students, there



were, as ever, joys and disappointments. Any successes are a real credit to students working in such difficult circumstances in overcrowded homes with limited electricity for doing homework in the evenings etc. At present we have around 20 sponsored students and this year we have received requests for around a further 10 sponsorships from needy families. Given this, we need to see if we are able to interest any others in the UK to sponsor a student to meet this need. It was a joy to meet many of the currently sponsored students and get their pictures and receive letters from them.



Bible School

This year, the main aim of our visit as far as the Bible School is concerned was to introduce SEAN (TEE) courses into the Bible School and further afield. Daniel, who accompanied us from Uganda, led a 4-session course over 4 mornings for 33 students from around 8 different denominations. His teaching was very vibrant and well received by all. We now have an initial strategy in place to offer the SEAN discipleship courses into the churches represented. We were also able to make some significant contacts with others interested in this teaching, namely 2 army chaplains and a top lawyer who is a leader in the Methodist

church who can help us with making the teaching materials available and who might help us with translation into the Shona language.



Alongside this teaching, Lynda offered a resource session for Sunday School teachers from Kuwadzana church and Extension with materials also made available to Kambuzuma. On Sunday afternoon, we held a joyful graduation attended by around 100 people - families, students and local ministers. Here we gave certificates to those who had taken the SEAN course and 8 students who had completed the year course. The advanced students who are still completing their coursework were also recognised and encouraged.



The biggest need in 2024 is to be able to make the SEAN course materials available at the cheapest possible prices. Currently we are working on whether these can best be printed within Zimbabwe or printed and sent from Uganda. We hope our army chaplains can use these courses among the soldiers. For this, they are requesting 35 Bibles for those studying the courses. They can access these in Zimbabwe at US\$8 per Bible. This is another project for us to raise money for Bibles.

Other activities during our stay

Alongside the above and several meetings and Noah's induction, we undertook the following activities. Jane spent several hours working alongside Oripa on financial matters including preparing a budget for 2024 and reviewing 2023 spending with the building project etc. She has written her own report on the financial situation which thankfully is relatively healthy although they may struggle with cash flow issues in the future.

We all visited the Kuwadzana Presbyterian church Women's Association on Thursday afternoon which was again a joyous occasion with much singing and dancing. We were able to present an elderly lady with a blanket made by residents in a care home that Lynda visits. After this we were entertained with sadza and mangos at the home of Mike and Beauty, the minister and his wife.



On Sunday, we went again to Kuwadzana Presbyterian (Kambuzuma were also expecting us!) We all participated in the children's talk and Lynda preached. Jane had meetings with the church leaders later in the day regarding Westborough URC's support and partnership with the church.

Summary

Overall, Jane and I felt this was one of the best visits we have had with everything going so smoothly. We were able to achieve all we came to do and much more. Daniel was a great asset to the team and seemed to thoroughly enjoy his visit and will return to further develop SEAN courses in 2024/5. We have work to do to seek further student sponsorships and continue raising support especially for Bibles and SEAN Bible teaching resources.

Thankfully and miraculously, despite the impoverished and worsening economic situation in Zimbabwe, the work of the centre continues to flourish by God's grace. Changes are ahead with Jonah's retirement but we continue to trust God for his guidance and provision.

Revd Lynda Hulcoop February 2024