

Isabel's News



Isabel (right) presenting a certificate to one of the caregivers

Greetings from Zimbabwe

As I look around I am overwhelmed by what I see: greenery and flowers everywhere. "What a mighty God we serve!"

For a number of years now we had been experiencing drought in Zimbabwe. Everywhere you looked was dry and bare, but this year our Good Lord has blessed us with plenty of rains. Thanks to the Almighty for covering our fears of running out of water. The city dams were running empty. Now water rationing has been lifted. While we are happy about the blessing of rains, a lot of destruction also happened: roads and bridges were washed away, some houses were destroyed, people relocated to higher ground and crops destroyed in some areas.

Hence my work was affected too, because without proper roads I can't reach some places with dirt roads, so I was only managing to visit those places which I can reach on tarmac roads.

We continue receiving resources from well-wishers for orphans and vulnerable children in our circuits. Among them are school materials, clothes and food. We have also started educating orphans and vulnerable children on health and life issues, for example, sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy, hygiene, respect, alcohol awareness among other things. A role play is sometimes done at the end of a lesson. When we arrive at a place, we start with devotions conducted by the minister of that circuit or by one of the caregivers. Then we have a talk or games with the children, depending on the age group and the children love these moments.

We have noticed that children feel more free to contribute when

we are with them than when the local community volunteers are there. We had been wondering why this was so, until a certain incident on a recent visit to a place that I won't name to protect the identity of the child. We had given a talk on teenage pregnancy and afterwards an orphan girl asked us what she should do if her legal guardian tells her that it is her turn to provide something for supper or otherwise go to bed without food. We said she should report to the caregiver, but she said she is afraid it will reach the ears of her guardian and also it will leak and the whole community will know about it. Since then we have organised a training and refresher course for both new and old caregivers, with the issue of confidentiality among the topics. The National Director of Matthew Rusike Children's Homes sometimes brings her team from Harare to assist with the holding of workshops for caregivers. Although in our African culture it's customary for extended families and the community to care for orphans and vulnerable children, it's becoming very difficult to help as the resources are overextended. So a lot of orphans are out of school because the guardian will have seen that he or she has catered for his or her own children first.

The Matthew Rusike Children's Home Bulawayo Management Committee has decided to help establish vegetable gardens. This will be as an income generating project and also to provide nutritious food for orphans in the communities.

We thank God for all you dear friends who are helping us financially and in prayer. Please continue to pray for us that God can use us effectively in this ministry. Thank you for your prayers and we in turn pray for you. Pray for the education of children currently dropping out of school because of financial reasons. Pray for protection for children against abuse of all forms, protection against diseases, exploitation and violence.



Isabel giving a talk to the children

Jonathan's News

It's starting to feel a bit wintry now and there's just a few days until we go back to school. As usual, the holidays have been almost as busy as school days. So, what have I been doing?

Inevitably there will always be some school work that needs to be done. I have to draw up a new school timetable to accommodate further changes required by the new National Curriculum. I am also writing a new textbook to fill a big gap in what is available commercially. More about that below.



Thekwane River with water in it

We have just enjoyed one of the best rainy seasons for many years and everywhere is looking green and the fields are full of healthy crops. This is wonderful news and most people should reap a good harvest.

We had a full programme of activities for Easter at Hillside Methodist Church in Bulawayo. I maintain the Hillside Circuit website, (MCZHillsideCircuit.com), where you can find out more about what we are doing.

We have a lively Sunday School at Hillside, with over 40 children aged from 3 to 13 years, which can be quite challenging because we have a shortage of teachers and

sometimes I am the only one. It is a real joy and privilege to teach the children, but you do need a certain amount of energy and I often feel like I should go and lie down in a darkened room afterwards to recover from the excitement! We try to vary the activities each week. We sometimes watch movies, but I always make sure that I have 'Plan B' available: the week after Easter I had the projector set up and then the electricity went off. Our theme recently was "Helping Others", so some of the children suggested that they could bring some of their outgrown clothes to give to needy children.

At work at Thekwane High School, I am still teaching Mathematics mostly to the older students. The whole education sector is talking about the new National Curriculum. It was launched in January at all levels from ECD (Early Childhood Development) to A-level. Teachers, and their students, are trying to get to grips with new syllabuses. There are big changes, especially now that continuous assessment is being introduced in a big way in all subjects. Many people are complaining that the changes have been brought in too rapidly and without enough advance consultation.

In Mathematics, we have seen Mathematics and Further Mathematics at A-level replaced by four separate subjects: Pure Mathematics, Statistics, Mechanical Mathematics and Additional Mathematics. Since many students will only be able to pick one of these and for most of them it will be Pure Mathematics, we have decided that we should reintroduce Statistics at O-level so that students will still have a knowledge of Statistics before heading to university. I volunteered to teach the first Form 3 class, but I soon discovered that there are no suitable textbooks available for O-level Statistics in Zimbabwe, so I have started writing a textbook, which I hope to finish before the end of the year. Meanwhile I am printing enough copies of the draft version of the early chapters to use with my class.

We have been supporting feeding schemes for young children at Thekwane Primary School and at Twayi-twayi (which is in Ndolwane Methodist Circuit much further north of Thekwane). We have been helping at Thekwane Primary School for quite a number of years, providing maize meal, dried beans, cooking oil and salt (all non-perishables) so that the team of volunteers can cook a nutritious meal for the youngest children every school day. Now the Government of Zimbabwe has come in and started helping by providing the maize, so we now are able to concentrate on the other components of the meal and adding dried fish as an alternative. If the food situation in the local community improves we may be able to divert resources to helping the children in other ways.



Isabel (centre) with other Synod delegates

Isabel and I are both members of the Bulawayo District Synod and this year the Synod met at Gwanda, the provincial capital of Matebeleland South. We slept in student accommodation and we had to be careful to keep windows and doors closed to stop baboons and monkeys from getting in and grabbing our belongings. The Synod went well, lots of intense debate as usual and an opportunity to enjoy fellowship with leaders from around the District.