



Foreign Evangelism...

Nylstroom Scrapbook - February 2009

by Linda Maydell

For several months the two main political parties of Zimbabwe, Zanu-PF (the ruling party) and the MDC (who won over 50% of the vote in the April 2008 elections), have been holding talks. They make and break agreements. No one knows what is going to happen next. This causes continued hardship on everyone in Zimbabwe. The economy has virtually collapsed. Zimbabwe inflation is unmeasurable, and the currency is worthless. Most people in Zimbabwe now use Rands and US Dollars to do business, but at highly-inflated prices. Education has been seriously disrupted for nearly a year, it is virtually impossible to get medical treatment, electricity and water are only spasmodically available, trash is not being collected, cholera has infected over 60 000 and killed over 4000, mail takes months to deliver, basic food is only available in foreign currency (which the average Zimbabwean does not have), etc. Foreign aid has been hindered, partly because of the world recession and partly because it hinges on Zanu-PF and the MDC forming a unity government (something that has been going to happen "next week" for the past 6 months). The World Health Organization says that over 7 million Zimbabweans are dependent on food aid for survival. (It is estimated there are about 10 million Zimbabweans left in the country.) Reuters estimates that over US\$2 BILLION in goods/currency was sent last year from private people outside Zimbabwe (most of them expatriates) to their relatives and friends inside Zimbabwe – just so they can survive. (For more information about Zimbabwe you can visit www.zimbabwesituation.com.)

What amazes me is that, on the *surface*, life is seems so *normal*, but You go to visit someone in the spotlessly-clean hospital, but ... you can't find a nurse or doctor (they are striking to be paid in foreign currency). The streets are clean, but ... trash is rotting behind walls and in overgrown fields. You see people going about their ordinary business, but ... no one knows how he will be able to survive on his pay. You see children walking to school in their uniforms, but ... the vast majority of them will not find a teacher when they arrive (teachers are also on strike – their monthly salary is less than a loaf of bread). You attend worship as



usual, but afterwards you do not shake hands when you sing the greeting song (someone might have cholera). People give their children small change to put in the collection plate ... but when you look closely, it is a bill that has ELEVEN zeros on it! (100 billion!) (And that is after 13 zeros have been knocked off the currency in the past couple of years.) You socialize with a group of Christians, but ... you find out the two ladies sitting next to you are both widows with AIDS ... and two of the carefree-looking teens are actually 16 and 18-year-old orphans. They are looking after their older sister's toddler while the older sister (a single mother) tries to find work in South Africa. There are over 5 million Zimbabweans in South Africa and the police are fighting a losing battle to keep thousands more from arriving each day. While

we were waiting to cross the bridge over the Limpopo River from Zimbabwe back to South Africa, we observed hordes of people carrying the goods they bought in South Africa back to Zimbabwe. Virtually all goods are imported – a lot by truck – but also a lot by head!

Suddenly along the road verge pictured above, we saw a group of about 20 dilapidated-looking people – old, children, blind, mothers with babies on their backs – being herded across the bridge by a S.A. policeman, urging them on with

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a whip. Suddenly, one man tried to evade the policeman and dodge back through the traffic to SA, but the policeman was ready with his whip and got him moving back in the direction of Zimbabwe. It is all just SO VERY SAD.



But thanks to you brethren, there is some GOOD news! After 3 hours of hard work unloading the truck, a sister signs for her 10kg of maize meal by the reverse light of Gumbo's pick-up truck.



A widow gets ready to carry her maize meal home.



These orphans are going home to eat. Notice how strong this girl's arms are (from lifting buckets of water onto her head).



Any toddler can be happy when he gets a ride home. (His mother is getting ready to put the maize meal on her head.)

One day we travelled down terrible roads to a congregation we had never visited, but we had seen many of the brethren at other meetings. Eventually the road became impassable and we had to travel off-road through the "bush." Several ladies with huge eager smiles came running to meet us to guide us to the building. They were singing an "invitation song" as they ran in front of the

camper: *Buyani, ningafi!* "Come back [to God], don't die!"



Over 100 people were crammed into a small building waiting for us and singing – the men on benches and the women and children on the dirt floor. The goodness of the Lord: His love in the hearts of His people.

After another song and a prayer, the men went outside under a tree and left me to teach the ladies. I started the lesson about keeping your faith during times of suffering by reading a verse that describes Zimbabwe to a T: Haggai 1:6. Then I asked them if that verse describes their situation. They all solemnly shook their heads, "NO." I was quite disconcerted because at other congregations when I asked the same question, the ladies were so amazed to see how graphically BIBLE talks about their problems, that they always nodded an enthusiastic "YES." So I asked these ladies if they had enough food. They reluctantly admitted they did not. Nor did they have enough blankets to keep warm, nor did they harvest enough, nor did their money buy the things they needed. Then we read the context to see that it was the people's sin that had caused the problem, and I asked them for some sins that THEY, the Christians were involved in. Suddenly, there was a distinct lessening of tension and the ladies admitted that there was fornication among them. And of course then we studied other Scriptures that talk about other reasons for hardships and what Christians should do. I found out later that the tension among the ladies in the beginning was that there were Zanu-PF people there – and they were afraid I was going to accuse the government for their problems! (We know about that and we are careful not to be political.) My translator told me afterwards that the ladies were VERY happy with the lesson, and I was glad to hear that because the lesson was very difficult for me to teach. One reason is that I feel so unqualified to teach when I have never suffered as much as what they are suffering (and I tell them that). Another reason is that it is never pleasant to confront people with sin, especially when they are suffering. The goodness of the Lord: His Word has all the power to convict, to correct and to comfort. After that it was Les's turn to speak to everyone, and to address the fornication problem – and to get the usual question asked by the men: "What about our culture?"

Then it was time to go - everyone rushing to try to get as far as possible on their long journeys home before the threatening storm broke. So we bounced along several kms (but still FAR from civilization) and suddenly I smelled something getting hot. Les couldn't smell it, and the temperature gauge was registering "cool," but I insisted he stop – and like the verse he is always preaching about (Dt.24:5), he stopped just to make me happy. I thought maybe we had burst a tyre (you can't tell if you have a flat on those "roads"!), but Les checked and they were all fine. Then he opened the engine compartment – and there was the problem! A dry radiator – and no telling what damage to the engine – and the wire leading to the temperature gauge had broken off! Dusk – and the storm – was approaching, but we had to wait an hour for the engine to cool down enough to put water in it. So we (and the African couple with us) sat on side of the one-track road, talking. The next thing two ladies appeared out of nowhere with a bag of mangoes. They saw we were having trouble and they brought us some food – the goodness of the Lord: These people with so little have such big hearts that are tender to the problems of others.

Finally the engine was cool enough to put water in the radiator and see if it would start – Yes! Thank God we had stopped before damaging the engine, but the water again quickly drained out a hole in the bottom of the radiator. So then we had to try various "bush remedies" to block the hole. The first was curry powder (also maize meal), but the hole was too big. By now it was really dark and the storm had broken and the road we were on was getting more and more impassable. So Les dug around in the storage compartment and came up with a special glue/putty where you mix the contents of two separate tubes together and they react. It was obviously a bit tricky, but that putty held and we made it back to the house where we were staying, only to worry about being marooned by the heavy rain – but that's another story! The goodness of the Lord: we made it back to civilization! But *had* we been marooned, I'm sure He would have taken care of us in that situation as well!

What I enjoy most about Zimbabwe is the Proverbs 31 ladies:



Gladys (age 70) – and her 83-year-old husband who cultivate several acres by hand and encourage workers in the kingdom with gifts from the fruit of their labours.



Christine – who is always studying and growing – AND a wonderful manager of her homestead. She managed to save some seed from last year and has made several continuous plantings in order increase her chance of harvest, no matter what the weather. She also writes the most touching, encouraging letters. (One child is hers, one is her grandchild, and one is her adopted child, her orphaned niece.)



The Silalatshani ladies – who, on top of their heavy farm work, are teaching these children of non-Christians. They have helped start congregations in nearby communities, and they always encourage me by travelling such long distances with eagerness to hear the word of God.

Women like these are the backbone and hope of their families, their countries – and the Lord's church. Please pray for God's blessings on them and on us as we work together with all the brethren to God's glory. With love and thanks, Linda Maydell