

Village EXCHANGE

Partnering for change in
Zimbabwe *and* North America

July 2009

Newsletter of the **FAMILY to FAMILY, VILLAGE to VILLAGE** Initiative



Zimbabwe congregations reaches out to widows and **CHILDREN**

IN ZIMBABWE, where over half the population now faces severe food shortages, Brethren in Christ Christians could easily be overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenge—but not the Nketa BIC congregation in Bulawayo. The church distributes food to more than 300 orphans and widows every month. And when resources become available, the congregation also provides basic medicines and educational supplies to needy families.

“I am amazed at how well this congregation knows its community,” says Jake Shenk, BIC World Mission’s (BICWM) regional administrator for southern Africa. He points to the church’s work with households that are headed by children, the majority of whom have lost their parents to AIDS. (Zimbabwe is experiencing one of the world’s worst HIV and AIDS epidemics. Close to 3,000 Zimbabweans die every week as a result of AIDS.)

Brethren in Christ churches all across Zimbabwe are ready and eager to be of assistance to the people around them. Unfortunately, lack of resources stands in the way of good intentions. Now, with funds provided by the *Family to Family, Village to Village* program, many more churches are able to bring hope and help in Jesus’ name to their communities. Through your gift to *Family to Family, Village to Village*, you are a partner in their good work.

Urgent Facts about Zimbabwe

39%
Population under the age of five

17%
Children under the age of five who are underweight for their age

33%
Children who are chronically malnourished

120,000
Number of children living with HIV

85%
Probability of dying before the age of five (per 1,000 live births)

1,300,000
Estimated number of orphans

40.6%
Children who die before the age of five of HIV/AIDS

58.6%
Births attended by skilled medical professionals in rural areas

12
Age at which some girl have turned to prostitution in exchange for food

75%
Public schools that are not functioning properly

SOURCES: World Health Organization (WHO) Statistical Information System’s 2000 and 2006 reports, BBC, World Vision

North America churches make **CHILDREN** a priority

WHEREVER POVERTY IS FOUND, including North America, children are among the hardest hit. According to the US Department of Agriculture, more than 12 million children live in households that don’t have dependable access to food. One-third of food bank clients in Canada are under the age of 18, and a recent Health Canada study reports that aboriginal children experience hunger at a rate four times higher than non-native youngsters.

As do our Zimbabwean brothers and sisters, Brethren in Christ in Canada and the U.S. are reaching out to their communities in Jesus’ name. For example, this past spring, a women’s ministry group at Living Faith BIC Church (Chatham, ON) offered a helping hand to women and children who had experienced domestic violence by preparing and then donating emergency kits to a local women’s shelter and a nearby Children’s Aid Society (CAS).

In late 2008, Conoy BIC (Elizabethtown, Pa.) Church became the host site for a local chapter of Kid’s Café, an after-school program that partners with local food banks to provide hot meals and nutrition education to children living in “food-insecure households.” As Joy As-tuto, child-care director at Conoy, explains, “It’s hard to teach young children that Jesus loves them when they have empty stomachs.”

Imagine all that can be accomplished for the Kingdom if even more BIC churches in Canada and the United States would get involved in compassion ministries.



North American church **FARMS** its neighborhood



FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES are essential to a healthy diet, but for people trapped in economically depressed neighborhoods of North America's large cities—areas that have been dubbed “food deserts” by researchers—in-season produce is hard to come by. Big-name supermarket chains have fled to the suburbs in pursuit of a stronger bottom line, leaving inner-city residents to shop at corner grocery stores and mini-marts. The shelves in these “fringe retailers” (another term from the researchers) are stocked with pre-packaged food items that are high in fat and sugar and low in nutritional value.

The Urban Farm Team, a compassion ministry of The Circle of Hope BIC Church, is taking steps to alleviate the produce gap in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Philadelphia, Pa.—a city where 1 in 3 children lives below the poverty line. The team continues to develop and maintain the Frankford Avenue Park garden, even as they work toward the bigger goal of building and sustaining a small farm in the city.

In early June, the folks from Circle of Hope won a major victory for their gardening project when they were able to coax the Philadelphia water department into providing them with a key and a hose adapter for the hydrant on the corner. With a reliable source of water, the garden should produce one bumper harvest after another well into the fall.

To learn more about Circle of Hope's gardening effort or for ideas about starting a project like this in your community, go to the Urban Farm Team's blog at THEARTICHOKEHEART.WORDPRESS.COM.

Zimbabwe churches seek to restore their **FARMS**

SUCCESSIVE DROUGHTS, lack of know-how and equipment, and government corruption have all taken a toll on Zimbabwe's agricultural sector, turning the entire country into a “food desert.” In pre-Mugabe days, Zimbabwe was known as the bread basket of Africa, with high-producing farms dotting the countryside—including three large farms owned by the Brethren in Christ Church of Zimbabwe: Mtshabezi, Wanezi, and Matopo.

In years past, the three farms provided food for the mission schools, hospitals, farm workers, and BIC church families in the surrounding areas. However, as Danisa Ndlovu, bishop of the Zimbabwe BIC Church, explains, “These farms are in need of equipment and cattle to make them productive.”

In 2006, he requested assistance from Mennonite World Conference (MWC) to help restart these fallowed farmlands. In conjunction with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the Brethren in Christ Church of North America, MWC responded by launching a feasibility study.

In early June, a six-member team—3 Zimbabweans and 3 North Americans—visited the farm sites. The team also reviewed the financial histories of the farms and talked with other church agencies that have attempted similar projects. A report with recommendations related to potential use of the farmland to increase food security in the regions should be completed by early fall.

Through initiatives such as *Family to Family*, *Village to Village* and the World Hunger Fund, North American churches will be prepared to assist as requested in getting things growing again on the three farms.



Kids to Kids

The *Family to Family, Village to Village* initiative is a great way to connect children in your church, small group, or family to the global BIC community and to encourage generosity and compassion in Jesus' name. Follow the link on the denomination website (BIC-CHURCH.ORG) for kid-focused resources.

For more about Family to Family, Village to Village, including information on how to make a gift, visit our website at

BIC-CHURCH.ORG/MINISTRIES/COMPASSION/FAMILY.ASP