

Village EXCHANGE

Partnering for change in
Zimbabwe *and* North America

October 2009

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

Being the church in the midst of a crisis

ANNUAL GATHERING FOCUSES ON SUSTAINING FAITH AND COMMUNITY "IN TIMES LIKE THESE"

IN THE MIDST of seemingly insurmountable difficulties—continued scarcity of hard currency, sporadic fuel shortages, continued (though greatly decreased) violence, 90% unemployment, widespread disease—the Zimbabwean BIC gathered together for their yearly annual conference in late August. Hosted by the Mtshabezi and Gwayi Districts, the assembly focused on the theme “The Church in Times Like These”—a topic, according to BICWM worker Steve Newcomer, that couldn’t have been more fitting.

“The ‘times like these’ that the church must deal with are extreme,” Steve noted in a September message. “Fortunately, the teaching sessions at conference were very appropriate—‘The Church in Times Like These Walks in Wisdom,’ ‘The Church in Times Like These Walks in the Way of Forgiveness,’ ‘The Church in Times Like These Walks in the Way of Transformation.’ The lessons would be pertinent for the church in almost any time.”

Overall, Steve says, the conference had “a sincere atmosphere of worship and fellowship. God was there. His people in Zimbabwe realize very faithfully that He is their source of hope.”

The conference program included the re-election of Danisa Ndlovu as bishop of the Zimbabwean church for another five-year term. Ndlovu also serves as president of Mennonite World Conference, an international network of Anabaptist-related groups.

The highlight of conference for Steve and his wife Chris—who serve in Zimbabwe as teachers and administrators at Ekuphileni Bible Institute (EBI), a secondary



An enthusiastic crowd participated in the dedication of the new library at Ekuphileni Bible Institute during the recent General Conference in Zimbabwe.

school for aspiring pastors and church leaders, at the invitation of the Zimbabwean BIC Church—was the dedication ceremony for EBI’s new library. Even more overwhelming was the response from the conference to the ceremony.

“We were expecting perhaps 200-300 to make the walk across the Mtshabezi River to EBI for the library dedication,” Steve reports. “We’d set up all the chairs we could beg, borrow, or steal in the large open center of the library. Then Bishop Ndlovu came walking into the library where we were waiting with his eyes wide and said, ‘Steve, we need to move this outside. The whole conference is coming.’”

“It was an awesome sight to see about 2,000 people walk across the river from the mission to the Bible School to participate in the service,” reports Jake Shenk, BICWM regional administrator for southern Africa, who attended the conference with his wife, Nancy.

The crowd listened to a series of short speeches on the history of, present state of, and future plans for EBI. Additionally, Bishop Ndlovu offered a dedicatory prayer for the library.

The dedication ceremony was “an ideal opportunity to challenge the Zimbabwe BICC to accept their responsibility to give regular financial support to the program at EBI,” says Steve. “The response from the conference was very good and enough cash was contributed to pay all of the staff for the month of August.”

Ultimately, as Steve reflects, the annual conference reminded the BIC in Zimbabwe that “God does provide” and that “struggling is not necessarily bad if it brings us closer to God and increases our faith.” For a church in the midst of a political and economic crisis, these are important lessons to learn.

This Christmas, think outside the [gift] box

Give a gift of hope with a donation to the *Family to Family, Village to Village* project in the name of a friend or family member on your Christmas list this year, and be part of bringing hope to Brethren in Christ Christians in Zimbabwe.

Your honoree gets: A personalized card featuring the picture of a family in Zimbabwe and a description of the *Family to Family, Village to Village* program. The card will remind your friend or loved one of this truly meaningful gift given in his or her name.

You get: The satisfaction of knowing that your gift will bring help and hope to a Brethren in Christ family in Zimbabwe, along with freedom from worry that your gift will turn up in next year's "white elephant" exchange.



Message inside the card: The Brethren in Christ Church was pleased to receive a gift in your name designated for the *Family to Family, Village to Village* project. May this gift bring as much happiness to you as it will for a family living in Zimbabwe.

If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. Isaiah 58:10



Donor's Corner

"We feel blessed to be able to share so others can have bread to eat. We know this amount of money is just a drop in the bucket, but we're thankful to be able to help families in need."

—Carrie Thompson, director of Paramount BIC's (Hagerstown, Md.) Vacation Bible School, on why she chose Family to Family as their 2009 VBS offering theme. The program's 30 students contributed more than \$170 to the initiative.

Urgent Facts about Zimbabwe

80

Percentage of population living under the poverty line in 2004

91

Primary (elementary/middle) school attendance ratio among boys, 2000–2007

93

Primary (elementary/middle) school attendance ratio among girls, 2000–2007

46

Secondary (high) school attendance ratio among boys, 2000–2007

43

Secondary (high) school attendance ratio among girls, 2000–2007

63

Percentage of rural Zimbabweans without access to clean, safe toilets and wastewater management

Sources: UNICEF, World Health Organization (WHO), CIA World Factbooks 2003–2007

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