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Dear Friends

As we get near to Christmas we think of that great day when Christ came into the world for the first time. He appeared amongst us as a poor innocent child, born in a stable, unnoticed and unwanted by the world. Yet he came to show us the way to heaven; he was so determined to help us on the way that he eventually died for us on the cross. For many of us to see a small child gladdens the heart, we are confronting the happy smiles of the innocent of this world. The first picture (1) that I attach today I took during a wedding just a few weeks before Christmas. The four girls are wearing the uniform of the 'Missionary Childhood', a Catholic association for small children who want to share their faith with others. The one on the left is Shantal Ncube. She is 10 years old, but is the size of a 6 year old. She was born with HIV, but thanks to ARV medication she has survived all these years.

Our building work carries on as usual, and two double classroom blocks were completed in July 2017 at Nakapande Secondary School (2). This school is located about 130 Km from our mission, at an adjacent mission. The Japanese government sponsored that project. Up until then the school only had one double classroom block, but there are around 200 pupils, so most of the pupils were learning under trees. The school had built temporary mud huts, but one day a storm destroyed them, injuring a number of the pupils inside. Please God the situation should now be much better, with six classrooms instead of two.

The government is aware that there is much malnutrition in the rural area, especially in our area. The malnutrition consists mainly as a lack of a balanced diet. Due to perennial low rainfalls few vegetables are grown. Hence they are now encouraging all schools to set up nutrition gardens. On our side the Catholic Relief agency, CARITAS, has set up a number in our parish, including this one at Dambwamukulu Primary School (3). You will see the children carrying water on their heads.

The 12th of August 2017 was a big day at one of our outstations Musuna Boatel. We had a 'white wedding', meaning that the bride was still a virgin. It is a struggle here to get white weddings; usually we do 'patch up' jobs for couples who have already been living together for a number of years. The first picture (4) shows the wedding ceremony of Request and Eutripia. We had it outside the church because the crowds were too much. The second picture (5) shows the cutting of the cake. This church is situated on the banks of the Zambezi River, just where Lake Kariba begins. Request is 23 and Eutripia just 18. At the last check the couple are still madly in love! I can recommend this way of marriage! They had to be very patient as an engaged couple, since in this country a couple can only marry now if both partners are at least 18 years of age. Eutripia was just 16 when she fell in love.

On 20th August all roads led to the new mission of Lusulu, located about 170 Km from our mission. I accompanied the Legion of Mary of Hwange, who hired a bus to carry all 75 of us. We stayed the weekend, and had gone there to help set up the Legion (6). The road was bumpy and the old bus was noisy but the women managed to sing and pray virtually the whole way. God bless their enthusiasm!

Back at our mission we had a two day congress of the Junior Legion of Mary for the diocese (7). Topics included boy and girl relationships. Please God, apart from marriages, we hope to get some new priests and sisters for the group. Hopefully just before Christmas 2017 we will have the first profession of one of our parishioners, Sr. Octavia Munkombwe. Lashiwe Muzamba, also for our parish, now has his ministries and hopefully will be ordained a deacon in 2018. That is the last step before becoming a priest.

Early in September I set off for two months of home leave. It proved to be quite an eventful trip, criss-crossing between four countries, England, Ireland, Spain and Germany. The trip was partly to see friends and relatives, partly to do fund raising and partly to visit prayer groups that are praying for our mission and all its needs. My first port of call was England. I stayed mainly with my twin sister, Susan and her husband Dave (the Jennings). They live near Oxford, in the southern part of England, which is about 150 Km west of London. During my stay I went with Sue up into the 'Lake District' to visit her daughter Ruth, who lives there. This is a beautiful part of the country, situated in the North of England, about 400 Km from London. It is popular with tourists, having many lakes, mountains and forests. (8). Lake

Windermere is the biggest of the lakes. It is about 45 Km long and one day we treated ourselves to a boat ride (9).

The following week, thanks to the cheap airlines of today, I found myself visiting Valencia, which is situated on the Mediterranean coast of Spain. This is also a strong tourist attraction but the purpose of my visit was to see Fr. Alexander, whom I had worked with for many years in the early part of my priesthood (10). Although he is living in a retirement home and is only in fair health he still fund raises for some schools in our parish. He presented me with funds to further develop the new secondary school at Nechishala.

Whilst in Valencia I took the chance to visit the cathedral, where the Holy Grail is kept (11). This is the very chalice that was used at the Last Supper when Christ instituted the Eucharist. This surely is a great honour for the city of Valencia.

After Spain I winged my way to Ireland, the country where I studied for the priesthood. There were various prayer groups there that pray for our mission, and I tried to visit them all, with the help of my old friend Tom Clair, who chauffeured me around. We were criss- crossing the whole country, covering over 2,000 Km. At one stage we got stuck, thanks to meeting the tail end of one of the American hurricanes. A huge tree fell and blocked our way. We tried another route only to find that was also blocked, but thankfully some local neighbours had a chain saw, and in no time the way was opened. During my stay we were able to visit the national shrine to Our Lady of Knock (12). Almost 200 years ago Mary appeared for a few hours to a group of lay people who were gathered outside the local church. It gave the people of Ireland hope at a time when the great Irish famine had decimated a large proportion of the population due to the potato famine. The Irish relied mainly on potatoes for their food and blight had killed most of them.

Towards the end of October I winged my way back to England for the last week or so of my leave. 28th January 2018 us twins will, please God, reach a milestone in our lives by becoming 70 years old. To kick off the celebration Sue organised a 'preview' birthday party on 28th October. Relatives and local villagers were invited to the party, which took place in the local village hall of Uffington , where Sue and her husband Dave stay (13). The final picture from my leave is of Dave, Sue and myself, taken in their front garden (14). Please God Sue and her daughter Ruth will celebrate with me on the actual day when they come out to visit Zimbabwe in January 2018.

Since I came back to Zimbabwe in early November there has never been a dull moment. Almost as soon as I arrived the vice president Emmerson Mnangagwa was fired, but it seems the military were not happy with that decision and they moved into the capital with tanks. They surrounded the presidential palace and insisted that the vice president be brought back. There were a few days of stalemate but then the parliament decided to take its own action by voting 260 to 30 to begin impeachment proceedings against the president. Once this happened President Mugabe, who had been in power 37 years, abruptly resigned. Three days later Emmerson Mnangagwa was sworn in as president. I have noticed that many people have now registered to vote in next year's election.

Thank God the change of leadership took place without any violence. The army's behaviour can only be described as exemplary. Back at the mission our choir was busy practicing for the annual diocesan competition in Hwange. On 3rd December the day of reckoning came (15), with our choir coming 7th out of 14 choirs.

May God bless you in this time of anticipation. Christ is coming, not just as a new born baby, but as our guide and our saviour.

I pray that 2018 will bring us all abundant blessings. I thank all those who have helped me and the mission either financially or spiritually.

Fr. Tim Peacock

Have a look at the website for the Charity CFNZ, at www.childrenandfamiliesinneedinzimbabwe.weebly.com

Facebook page - please search for Timothy Peacock on facebook, and like/accept/become friend
This increases exposure to the charity, for fund raising