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Dear friends a family

Since the whole world seems to have been turned upside down with the Covid 19 pandemic, I guess you may be wondering how it is developing in Zimbabwe? In my last newsletter of December 2020 I did mention the challenges that the shutdown was causing. Since then the government opened schools finally in March 2021, but then abruptly closed them again at the end of May. As I write this letter we are still waiting to see if and when the schools might be reopened. Thank God since the start of the pandemic we have had very few cases, around 40,000, and only around 3,000 deaths, which is less than 1% of those infected.

Meanwhile life goes on, even in our church. We have a pattern of the churches being opened and closed and for the two months of March and April the churches were open, even if the numbers were restricted to a limit of 50. During that time one or two important celebrations took place, including a thanksgiving Mass for one of the sisters of our parish, Sr Indra Munkuli, who made her final profession as a sister of the Daughters of Calvary on 6th January 2021 at Dete, about 75 Km from Hwange. None of us priests could attend due to Covid 19 restrictions. She had her Mass of thanksgiving at St Augustine, Kasase, where she had grown up. This is one of our outstations, just 9 Km from our Mission. The attached photos show the celebration (Photos No. 1, No. 2).

On the male side, one of our parishioners, Ian Muaenda, from the outstation of St Albert, Shashachunda (30 Km from the mission), was ordained a priest at our cathedral on 27th May 2021, followed by his Mass of thanksgiving at Shashachunda on Saturday 29th May. Another seminarian, Assani Nyendwa, from another parish, was ordained with him, and we see the two of them in the photo, taken later at our mission, left to right, Fr Dumisani Ndlovu (my assistant priest), a visiting priest from South Africa, Fr Ian Muaenda, Fr Assani Nyendwa and myself (No. 3).

Another of our young parishioners also took her final vows as a new sister, Sr Sikholiwe Ngwenya, on 31st May 2021 in Cape Town, South Africa. Again, we could not attend the ceremony. She is from another of our outstations, St Michael, Kasibo, (40 Km from our mission). A Mass of thanksgiving was held at Kasibo at her parents' homestead on 19th June 2021. Sr Sikholiwe is third from right, and Sr Faustina Ncube second from left, a recently professed sister from my old parish of St Ignatius, the Cathedral parish (No. 4).

I write this from a sunny but cold Zimbabwe. I see reports of extreme weather conditions in various countries, with heat waves here and there, and flooding in many countries in Europe and Asia and even in Africa in the Sudan. Here we have had the coldest winter in all the 38 years that I have been here. Forecasters are warning of an El Nino weather pattern for the coming rainy season in November, which could spell a drought.

Meanwhile, however, we had good rains in the last rainy season, so our people are enjoying bumper harvests. On 20th February we happened to be visiting one of our building projects, the new hospital at Tshongokwe, and I took the attached picture on a bridge over the Shangani River (No. 5). The Gwaii-Shangani River forms the longest river in Zimbabwe and the government is building a dam on it, with help from China. The new dam, the third biggest in Zimbabwe, will be completed in 2022 and will hopefully alleviate much of the water shortages that the second city of Zimbabwe, Bulawayo, currently suffers from.

On the building side there has been much progress at Nechishala Secondary school. Fr. Alexander and his team of collaborators from Valencia, Spain, have helped us to finally complete a new triple classroom block (No. 6). The new girls sleeping hostel now has the roof on (No. 7). This project was sponsored by an NGO World Vision, but they are pulling out of this area, so we are relying on Fr Alexander's team to help complete the building.

At Neshaya Secondary School, located just near our mission, the roof is now on at the teachers' cottage, which we have been building with help from a German private charity plus a donor from England. (No. 8).

When I first came to Zimbabwe it was still popular to thatch some of the churches. I thatched three or four, but over the years we all realised that these roofs needed a lot of maintenance since the termites and other insects soon spoil them. We applied last years for help to re-roof the last thatched church at one of the outcentres, St. Felix Church, Chunga. See (No. 9) and (No. 10) for before and after, when the project was nearing completion. The St Peter Claver Sisters of Australia have kindly helped with this project.

Earlier this year our local primary school, just a few hundred metres from the mission, with 250 pupils, was re-registered as a Catholic School. This school was first built in 1932, as a Catholic school. The priests and brothers who built it, as part of a mission complex, were from the Marianhill congregation. There was even a convent built besides the school, run by the Precious Blood sisters. But just 4 years later the mission was closed, due to the remoteness of the place and the scarcity of people. Meanwhile the school carried on as a council school and about 6 years ago the parent teachers association requested that the school be registered again as Catholic. Most of the teachers happen to be women (No. 11) and the children wear a maroon uniform (No. 12). Much of the infrastructure needs renovations and modernisation, as you may see from the photo of the headmaster's house (No. 13). During the time when our churches were open we had the wedding of Mayor Ngwenya and Immaculate Shoko. I was happy that it was a "white" wedding, i.e. the couple had not yet started living together (No. 14).

A donor from England, who has been helping us over the years with various projects, has kindly sent a donation to build the first phase of an entirely new secondary school near another of our outstations, at Dambwamukulu, about 20 Km from the mission. The attached picture (No. 15) shows the first classroom block at foundation level.

It is very popular these days to go 'green' and we don't wish to be left out of the scene. Earlier this year we bought a solar powered geyser for the priest's house at the mission (No. 16). #####

Last year a good friend of mine suggested that in view of the uncertain future we should invest in becoming self-supporting as regards feeding ourselves and those around us who may be in particular need. I note that the NGO's who are working locally have invested heavily in helping the local people to establish irrigation vegetable gardens. Surely the local population here do not get a good balance of diet. The main challenge is their lack of buying power. They are officially classified as subsistence farmers, and the crops they grow that only rely on the rains are not sufficient to give a balanced diet. Hence these gardens are proving a great blessing.

The lockdowns have only served to exacerbate to problem of poverty here. Some of the children of those living in the rural were working in the towns or even out of the country, especially in South Africa, which has at least 2 million Zimbabweans living there. But with the huge loss of jobs it has severely impacted the local people, who now not only have even more challenges to afford food but medication also. I believe that is one of the reasons why we have such a high death rate all over Zimbabwe these days.

All this might give you the background as to why I decided to try to establish an irrigation scheme adjacent to our mission, as mentioned in my last newsletter. Since that letter was written most of the trees and rocks on the land have been cleared. We have built a kiosk, which can be used for selling surplus produce (No. 17). We have about 50 local families that have registered to be given small plots to cultivate for their own needs. They are the ones who have been working hard to clear the land. We managed to buy the fence after a long struggle and in July we began erecting it.

Every two years we are allowed leave and I will be away from August until October. Surely I will find so much change from two years ago, when the Covid 19 pandemic had not yet started. I will only reach Ireland and the UK this time. I used to go also to Germany and Spain for fundraising, but I see the challenges of the lockdowns are becoming too much.

I realise that many people have become depressed when faced with the effects of Covid 19. In the book of Job, after his fortunes had changed from a life of great comfort to one of great sufferings, we hear him saying; "If we take happiness from God's hands, must we not take sorrow too?" God, we are told, holds us in the 'palm of his hands.' We believe that war is a result of sin, and the two world wars of the last century were surely a wakeup call for the people of the world to put back God first in their lives. Could we not see a similar message now? But on the other hand Christ promised that he would never test us beyond our strength. No one can escape having crosses in their lives and surely if Christ suffered for us there are times when he is asking us also to be willing to suffer for him. Rather than succumbing to depression, let us look towards Christ in hope, who invites us to unite our sufferings with him, as he says, 'Come to me you who labour and are burdened, for my yoke is easy, my burden is light.' (Matthew 11:28) Let us emphasis the words, "***Come to me.***"

Thank you all for your prayers and financial support.

Fr Tim Peacock

CFNZ (Children and Families in Need in Zimbabwe), our UK based registered charity to support the running of the Mission for Fr. Tim, has been able to keep sending money every month to Tim, despite many challenges.

(18). shows Mercy and Pindani sewing school uniforms to sell, and (19) Shingani who we sponsored with his Diploma in IT. He is now employed as an apprentice and married with a daughter. The chicken project is also going well, with eggs being sold to pay for their feed. 37 children are being helped with school fees etc., 36 families receive extra food, and wages are paid for 14 staff, in addition to medical assistance and running costs for the Mission at Makwa and beyond. Bank details for BACS – Business ac, CFNZ, ac number 00024308 sort code 405240. Donations can be Gift Aided also. Or send direct to Sue, Pen Y Cae, Llanfaethlu, Caergybi, Ynys Môn, LL65 4HH
Sue