

My email address in Zimbabwe; - frtimpeacock@gmail.com
Email address for newsletters; frtimnewsletter@gmail.com

DearFriends.....

By the time most of you get this newsletter the national general elections, held on 30th July 2018, will be over and we will know the outcome. I have never before seen an election campaign that has generated such interest amongst the population. Since independence in 1980 this country was ruled by President Robert Mugabe, until in November 2017 he was finally ousted. He had been in power 37 years and was by then 93 years old. Up until that moment only about one million people had bothered to register for voting in this year's elections. But since then the numbers of those who have registered to vote has swelled to over five million. No more voter apathy here! I guess it is partly due to having new leaders of both major political parties, but also I believe it is because of the spread of the influence of the mass media. With prices of phones falling, some adults who work have been able to buy smart cell (mobile) phones these days. This enables them to discuss social issues, especially using WattsApp, which has become this country's favourite way of communication.

All the churches, including our own, have been holding prayer campaigns to help ensure free and fair elections, and certainly in the lead up to the elections there has been peace, in spite of the huge crowds attending the various rallies.

This year has seen a big milestone in my life. Together with my twin sister, Susan Jennings, we turned 70 years old on 28th January. Coincidentally, I was ordained a priest in 1983, when I was 35 years old, so that means that I have now been a priest for exactly half of my life. Sue and I had a celebration when I was on leave last year, on 28th October, as mentioned in my last newsletter of December 2017. Sue was, however, anxious that we should also be together for the actual birthday, so she came out to our mission with her daughter Ruth for a couple of weeks in January 2018, see pictures (1), (2), (3). It was the first time in 22 years that she visited Zimbabwe. On the actual birthday we had a simple but very enjoyable party with all those who stay inside the fence of the mission, a few resident staff, plus 15 teenage girls and 5 boys, all of whom lodge with us during the school term.

Sue and Ruth's stay also included a visit to the Victoria Falls, where we all got a bit wet, plus a visit to some of our outstations, topped off with a visit for a couple of days to the local national game park. There we saw many species of wild animals, including big herds of elephants, impala, giraffes and zebra and we even saw a lioness, a rare sight.

We are still blessed with vocations, and one event was the celebration of the silver jubilee of the profession of Sr. Juliet Sibanda (4). Her brother, Fr. Eusebius, is a diocesan priest in our diocese. Their parents are from our parish originally.

On the building side we are still developing the new secondary school at Lumbora, 40 Km from our mission, helped by the Irish charity S.H.A.R.P. Picture (5) shows a new teacher's cottage at floor level, and recently it reached roof level (6). We have also completed the extension of the girl's hostel at Neshaya Secondary School, just 1Km from the mission. It was blessed on 30th June 2018, [see (7), (8), (9)]. This will increase the capacity by 60 girls.

At Katete, some of my ex classmates from Ireland, who are now priests in Ireland, have been sponsoring the construction of a new primary school. This year we finished building a second teacher's cottage (10), and have now embarked on the construction of a new secondary school, just opposite the primary school. At present we have got as far as the floor level. More about that in the next newsletter. Still at Katete, last year we started building a large new dam nearby, to supply the needs for water for both schools. From the photo (11) you will see that progress is being made.

Since 2014 our local sisters, the Daughters of Calvary, have been anxious to construct a new convent and Catholic hospital at Tshongokwe, about 180 Km from our mission. Although I have been involved on the design side I have been relieved of the task of actually building it. In my July 2017 newsletter I sent a photo showing the completed convent, and now I can show progress on the construction of the first phase of the hospital itself (12), which shows that the roof trusses are already on, just waiting for the roofing sheets.

The needs of the people for development are always there. We are gradually building up the infrastructure of a complete new secondary school called Nechishala, situated just 22 km from our mission. Led by retired Spanish priest, Fr. Alexander Alapont, an informal group of private donors

from a village called Cacer, near Valencia, Spain, are helping with the construction. So far we have constructed six classrooms, but they are not enough, and the attached picture (13) shows one of the classes being held under a tree. With cool winters and very hot summers I wonder what these pupils are learning? Thank God some funds have now arrived to enable construction of a triple classroom block, which should help relieve the situation. More about that in the next newsletter.

I mentioned in my last newsletter that we had completed the building of four new classrooms and a teacher's cottage at Nakapande, about 130Km from our mission. The Japanese government sponsored the whole project, and finally on 28th June 2018 the Japanese ambassador came to the school for the official handover (14), (15). There were the usual speeches, plus entertainment, both from the pupils and the parents.

I mentioned earlier about the blessing we are having at the mission of the growing number of vocations. On Saturday, 7th July 2018, the big day arrived for one of our 'sons' Lashiwe Muzamba (16) to be ordained a deacon, the last stage before becoming a priest. The picture shows the newly ordained deacon on the left, with me in the middle, and on the right another of our 'sons' Fr. Albert Mudenda, who was ordained a priest last year. Lashiwe is from one of our outstations, named St. Patricks at Musuna Hills, about 30 km from the mission. The word 'Lashiwe' in the local language means 'lost' or 'we have given up'. When he was born he was so thin that the parents gave up all hope of him ever surviving, hence the name; that was 27 years ago! On the big day, held in a large hall in Hwange, built by the Salesian congregation, there were two other candidates ordained to the priesthood for the Salesians. One of them was Irvin Lumano, the younger brother of my assistant priest, Fr. Stanislaus Lumano. Additionally there were two other candidates that day ordained to the diaconate, one of which was another of Fr. Stanislaus' brothers, Vincent, who is his twin. Please God next year both the reverend Lashiwe Muzamba and Vincent Lumano will be ordained to the priesthood.

I can't finish this letter without at least a mention of the weather. Whilst some countries in the northern hemisphere are experiencing heat waves and forest fires we are all shivering here in one of the coldest winters we have ever experienced. It seems this is due to winds coming from the South Pole, which is unusual for Southern Africa. My guess is we will be in for a hot summer, which normally starts around September.

Having now spent half of my 70 years as a priest, I thought it might be in order to make a few reflections. Looking back over the last 35 years, certainly the time has flown. Since the day I decided to become a priest, back in April 1978, when I was working in Iceland, I have never looked back, thank God. I have never doubted my vocation, though certainly the challenge before deciding to become a priest was the attraction to the married state. But in spite of my attraction to marriage I have never felt frustrated as a priest. God has kept me very occupied over those years! Whilst a priest can't experience the intimacy of having a wife, and watching the children growing up, nevertheless, God compensates in so many ways. In a sense all 2,200 of my parishioners are my children, or I least I can say they are my spiritual children. My first appointment was to be given the post of parish priest of St. John's Mission, which was back in January 1985, and I am still there. To have such a long lasting appointment is very unusual in the Catholic Church. On the day of my appointment I was also asked to look after several town parishes, but the last of these, the cathedral parish of St. Ignatius, was handed over to another priest in the year 2000. Over the last 33 years I have watched so many of my parishioners grow up, get married, have children, and later become grandparents!

I thank God for my vocation, which I consider is mainly to try to shepherd my 'flock' on a journey that will lead them to heaven. If you could help with your prayers, I hope to labour on for some more years in the Lord's vineyard. I also pray for you.

Fr. Tim Peacock