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Dear Friends, family-supporters of Fr Tim's work

As we approach Christmas let us try to pause to reflect on the significance of this feast. Our world seems to be going dizzy these days with information overload, natural disasters in many countries, including the USA, and all sorts of political and social unrest in many countries, especially in the Middle East, but even in Europe. In short we face a very unsettled world these days. Does that leave any room for us to celebrate Christmas? Rather than immersing ourselves in following the way of the world let us reach out above the cares of this world and renew our love for Christ. In that way we will be ready to welcome the new born baby, our redeemer, on 25th December. He is the only one who can bring true peace into our world and into our hearts.

At the time I last wrote in July 2018 we had just had the ordination to the diaconate of one of our parishioners, Lashiwe Muzamba, on 7th July. The following day, we had a Mass of Thanksgiving at our mission. The attached photo (1) shows him with his parents. If all goes well he will be ordained a priest on 2nd February 2019.

We were also having elections when I last wrote. The ruling party ZANU PF, led by Emmerson Mnangagwa, won the majority of seats in parliament but there is an ongoing dispute as to who won the presidential election. While these disputes play themselves out the economy continues to deteriorate, causing more and more hardships. The local currency, called the bond, has devalued on the streets from being roughly on par with the US dollar at the beginning of the year to now being less than a third of the value of the dollar. The problem is that wages are paid in bond and they are stagnant, whilst at the same time much of what we consume is imported, so with prices rocketing this has put more and more people below the poverty line. It also means that more and more commodities are in short supply, including many basic food items, and especially fuel. How long can any economy last without fuel? People spend many hours and even days in fuel queues.

We are caught up in all this, and we have to jump around to find fuel. Recently we had to apply for a police clearance certificate to be allowed to buy fuel! We pray that next year things may improve. Meanwhile, everyone gets on with life and the people can still smile.

During August and September 2018 our Bishop, Albert Serrano, came to our parish on four separate occasions to four of our centres to administer the sacrament of confirmation. Photo (2) shows one of the children being confirmed at the mission itself. Almost 200 parishioners were confirmed. It was a very joyous occasion for all the people, especially since it is about three years since the bishop has given us this sacrament. Candidates have to be at least 12 years old and they can only receive it once, like baptism.

I can't write a newsletter without mentioning the weather, since it affects the livelihood of our people so much. We started in September with a very hot and dry summer, but at last the first big rains came just on 7th December. We are told there is another El Nino here this year, so we are expecting a short rainy season. Nature always anticipates the coming of the rains and back in early October I happened to be in Bulawayo when the Jacaranda trees are in full blossom (3). The dry season starts in March, but without fail each year, in spite of having six months of dry weather, the trees and shrubs blossom, knowing the rains will come soon.

On our side the little bit we are doing to try to help alleviate the shortages of water consists of dam building. We are helped by an Irish charity, "Zimbabwe Rural Development Trust". The members are a small group of dedicated people, who set up this charity precisely to help my development projects in Zimbabwe. They have a particular interest in building dams, but they are open to any project that may be deemed suitable to assist our poor. At present we are building one of the biggest dams that we have built so far, at a place called Katete (4). At Katete we are also building a new primary and secondary school. When I opened this outstation for the first time around 1995 there were no public amenities at all. Hence my decision to build the two schools, a new church and some dams. For the schools I have mentioned before that some old classmates of mine for my seminary days have been helping. The attached picture (5) shows the first triple classroom block being built for the new secondary school.

These days we also find ourselves repairing buildings, which otherwise may have to be pulled down. One such building is the parish church, St. Joseph's, of one of the township's in Hwange, called Makwika. This church was built about 60 years ago and holds over 300. There is an underground coal mine nearby and there is regular blasting to loosen the coal. This has undermined part of the church and the roof was in danger

of collapsing, due to one of the side walls starting to lean outwards. We built 7 buttresses to prop up that wall, then the carpenter used jacks to restore the shape of the roof. He then reinforced all the roof trusses. It cost about \$3,000 for the repairs; a new church that size would not cost less than \$100,000 dollars (6). Another building that had dangerous cracks was a convent at one of the missions, Kariyangwe, about 150 Km from our mission. The sisters managed to get about \$10,000 US to renovate and modernise it. We have just finished on the building side, with new floors, 4 new outside buttresses, a new toilet, 4 new showers and some new windows (7).

Weddings are becoming more and more of a challenge these days, as they get fewer and fewer. But on 8th September this year we had a 'white wedding', with the groom, Simbarashe and the bride, Sibongile, only coming to live together on the day of the wedding (8). After the weddings there is always much rejoicing and something to eat (9).

After being so many years in the same mission there are few churches left to construct, but recently we completed the new church of St. Joseph and Gwaai Mouth, one of our smaller outstations (10). Please God the church will be blessed in the not too distant future. All that is left on the inside is to install the tabernacle and statues (11).

For many years I have dreamt of establishing a primary school at Chezya, an outstation near the Zambezi River, only about 10 km from our mission. For various reasons I have been unsuccessful to get funding, but in the meantime the children learn under trees (12). Earlier this year some help arrived thanks to politics! One of the campaigning parties donated 10 tons of cement, and another local well-wisher donated 2,5 tons. With that we decided to just trust in God that other help would arrive, and we commenced construction. The school itself sourced the window frames and door frames from a small government grant, and picture no. (13) shows the construction going ahead.

Over the last 10 years or so I have been involved in the development of St. Patrick's Hospital. It is a Catholic hospital, situated in the heart of Hwange town. So far we have build a new maternity wing, a physiotherapy wing and a new entrance and reception area. Now we are constructing a new on-call accommodation block. This is for staff who may be on-call at night. It will enable them to sleep at the hospital, so if there is an emergency during the night, such as a car accident, the staff will not need to be collected from the townships. This should greatly improve the service at night. There are three buildings, one block of four bedrooms for men, one block of four bedrooms for women, and a block in the middle containing a kitchen and dining area (14).

I mentioned in the last newsletter the progress in building a new teachers' cottage at Lumbora secondary School, supported by the Irish charity SHARP. Thank God this is progressing well (15). There was also mention of the help given by a charity in Spain, spearheaded by an old colleague of mine, Fr. Alexander Alapont. We have had many challenges to commence building a new triple classroom block, at Nechishala, but thank God we now have a builder and we have all the materials, so he started construction just recently.

I finish by offering a picture (16) of all of our priests. We were gathered together for a 'Presbyterate' meeting from 11th December 2018. We were 33, together with our bishop, Albert Serrano, who is seen in the back row in the middle. The picture was taken in the minor seminary chapel at a place called Dete, about 115 Km from our mission. Amongst other things we discussed a new theme for 2019, the theme of sharing the Gospel with others.

Thanks to all those who kindly support CFNZ (Children and Families in Need in Zimbabwe), your donations provide education, clothes etc. For 40 children and young people; medical assistance; food for the elderly and young widows; and fuel, food and salaries to run the Mission here.

May God bless us all during the year 2019.

Fr. Tim Peacock

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