

A LIVING HOPE

Graham Shaw

When I was invited to write a short piece about the Zimbabwe Victims' Support Fund (ZVSF) I was delighted to accept the challenge - even when told it might appear in the 'Good News' section of the magazine. What good news, you might ask, could possibly be found in Zimbabwe today - a dysfunctional State close to collapse? A State moreover in which the unimaginable suffering and hardship among the people is now worse than at any time in the country's history.

But yes, for those with eyes to see and 'ears to hear what the Spirit is saying' there are good news stories emerging from within this troubled nation, and we in ZVSF are privileged to hear some of these stories from our partners on the ground, an amazing team of volunteers - we call them 'the Bulawayo team' - to whom the Lord has entrusted a very special ministry.

The core work of the Trust, now a registered charity, is to provide humanitarian aid and material assistance to relieve some of the suffering among the poor, the dispossessed, the victims of political violence and their families. Also within the scope of our mission is the rebuilding of communities through projects that enable displaced people to become self-supporting. And it is this aspect of the work that has received a welcome boost in recent months. I will touch on just a few of the good news stories arising from these distinct but related parts of the project.

The first letter of Peter was written to a dispersed Christian community who had already 'been grieved by various trials' and were to share more deeply in 'the sufferings of Christ.' Yet the letter begins with a ringing affirmation of 'the living hope' into which the new believers had been 'born again ... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' And it is this 'living hope' among a suffering people which we are witnessing in Zimbabwe today.

In a recent online meeting between the UK trustees and the Bulawayo team we were both encouraged and challenged as they shared with us some of their accounts of that 'living hope' being born in the midst of utter despair.

Our generous supporters here in the UK have enabled us to sustain the funding of the ongoing relief feeding programme to a few thousand destitute families and over twelve hundred hungry primary school children. In recent months also, with their support and in partnership with a local church in Bulawayo, we have been able to fund the setting up of a new self-help community garden which is to benefit 125 displaced families. Here the participants will not only learn the basic horticultural skills but also receive that personal dignity of being able to feed their own children. You can read the joy on the faces of the jubilant new gardeners in the photos we receive.

It goes without saying that all of this comes as a great blessing both to those receiving the food aid (because they do not know from where the next meal is coming) and to those now participating in the longer-term, self-help horticultural project. But it is a good deal more than this because it also opens the door for our team to build relationships in the communities where they are working, and to talk with them about the love of Jesus. There are pastors in the team who are experienced in ministering to the unreached, and all have a passion to share Jesus. So now we see the Lord providing both the food that sustains life to the seriously malnourished, and 'the Bread of Life' to one and all. And we say with the Psalmist, 'This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes.'

We covet your prayers for this special work of the Lord and for the patient, persevering and selfless workers in the vineyard.

Rev Graham Shaw is a retired Methodist minister. He was born, educated and married in Zimbabwe where he was also ordained. He served his first appointment in Zimbabwe for 17 years, during which time he became involved in human rights work and relief feeding. He now lives in South Devon.

For further details of ZVSF please see the website and linked Facebook page on www.zimbabwvictimssupportfund.org



Mothers and children are blessed - and the smiles say it all !



Above left: Primary School children receiving nutritional food supplement called e'pap

Above: From the first crop of vegetables of the self-help community garden



Left: Spontaneous praise and thanksgiving to the heavenly Father