

The Wigglesworth

Zimbabwe 2009

It is hard to believe that it has already been a month since we left Zimbabwe.

When we were preparing to go, we didn't know much about this southern African country. We only had a few weeks' notice and no time to research. The news we heard from others painted a bleak picture. We were starting to get nervous. We were pleasantly surprised to find a very different picture when we arrived. Yes, the politics there are not good. Yes, HIV/AIDS is a huge problem (Zimbabwe has the 4th highest rates in the world). Yes, hunger is a problem. Yes, there are utility shortages. BUT, things have improved greatly in the last six months. We felt safe. People radiate with joy. Even when faced with extreme poverty, it was easy to miss because the joy and excitement of the people overshadowed their lack of resources.

After a long journey, our small team arrived in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. It was early in the morning, and the leader of the Orthodox Church (His Eminence, Metropolitan George) didn't waste any time putting us to work! After dropping our bags at the flat where Kevin and I stayed with our teammate Wendy Bodnar (fellow teammates Clark Wilson and Fr. Michael Miklos were staying at the Metropolis), we went to the St Nektarios Mission Center. There is a church, a clinic, an office, and a school building (that has recently been built) on the grounds. We did not teach that day; instead, we met the people and they sang and danced for us. Trying to put this experience into words, our teammate Wendy wrote the following:

We set off to meet our first group of Orthodox converts at St. Nektarios. We were greeted with hugs, songs, and dance. This was probably the most humbling experience of my life. I was in awe of their smiling faces, and the way their bodies swayed with the uplifting Shona songs. They were sincerely happy to see us, and to receive us as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the way we were received at each and every indigenous African Orthodox and non-Orthodox location throughout Zimbabwe.



Over the next two weeks, we taught the people about many topics. They are hungry for instruction about the Orthodox



Church and way of life. We found so much joy during the teaching times as we shared from our own knowledge and experience, and tried to answer their many questions. They also bared their souls to us by asking very personal questions before and after sessions, as well as during the gender- and age-specific sessions.

We stayed in Harare most of the time, but we also travelled to Bulawayo (the second largest city in Zimbabwe) and some small villages. In one of these villages, Mrehwa, we witnessed their Peanut Butter Project. We had never met them before, but each woman embraced every team member with such excitement, energy, and length that it appeared as though they were greeting

long-lost relatives. They honoured us like dignitaries and happily showed off the village. We were also able to try grinding the peanuts and tasting the result. It tasted just like the organic peanut butter I buy at home! The women cooked a traditional Zimbabwean meal for us including meat (something that is always rare in villages). We blessed them with food, toys, school supplies, and candy which had been sent in crates from Greece. His Eminence also blessed them by buying their entire stock of peanut butter as well as handcrafts they had made (which he then distributed as gifts). The entire village was blessed that day... and so were we.



In another village, Hurungwe (outside of the town of Karoi), we participated in the service to consecrate the foundation of their church. Let me take you there...

Red dust kicks up from the ground, highlighting the stark beauty of beiges and browns in the fields and the leafless trees. The rains won't begin for at least another month – you can taste the dust coating your throat. A group of men are singing in jubilation and stomping the dust with vigour. They keep the beat with their hands and one man has shakers and a whistle, but no drums.

The tiny village of Hurungwe has little to offer –tattered clothing, bare feet, and hungry bellies are in abundance – but today their spirits are full because today their bishop is visiting with a mission team from the United States and Canada. Today, the foundation stone of their new church will be placed into the foundation; it will go under the place where the altar will be built.

Emotions are high for everyone. The team members assist in the service and watch their names being lowered into the foundation as founders of this African church. As they clap and dance along to the songs of the Shona women, they know a part of them will remain in Africa forever.

In Marondera, we saw a building project for a new mission centre which will eventually have a church, a clinic, a school, an orphanage, and a home for a priest. His Eminence dreams big, and big things are happening as a result.



We were blessed to witness a Shona wedding of a young diaconal candidate. His ordination to become a deacon is scheduled for November. The Metropolitan indicated that this young man will likely become a priest soon after he becomes a deacon. This is very exciting news because there are so many Orthodox people but so few clergy members. Cur-

rently, there is one Greek priest who serves at the Greek cathedral in Harare, and two Shona priests. One of them, Fr. Rafael, serves a community of approximately 300 people in Bulawayo. The people speak Ndebele there so Fr. Rafael serves in English and the people can sing in English, Ndebele, and Greek. The other priest, Fr. Augustine, serves two Shona communities: St. Nektarios (over 800 members in a church that seats 200) and another community in Warren Park (approximately 300 people meeting in the yard of the priest's mother-in-law). Since the priest speaks the language of the people, these two churches are able to have services primarily in Shona, but they also use some English and Greek. Translation of services is on-going, and developing music in a local



musical style is yet to begin. Currently, the churches use Greek melodies as well as the Greek school of iconography.

I've mentioned the Greek people a few times. This may have surprised you. It certainly surprised us! In all of our expectations for Zimbabwe, we did not expect to encounter a little Cyprus and Greece! Many of the Greek people in Zimbabwe are third or fourth generation Zimbabweans. Many still refer to themselves as Rhodesians, since the country has only been called Zimbabwe for 29 years. It was hard to wrestle with the idea of white Africans, but I realized that they have lived there longer than my ancestors have been in North America. Saying that they cannot be African because they are white, is like saying a second or third generation Asian cannot be North American simply because they are *not* white.

Despite their African roots, the Greek community has remained very distinct, and has maintained close ties with Greece and Cyprus. We enjoyed visiting with these people too, often for yummy Greek meals. We were able to tell them about our experiences with the black churches and how receptive the people are. They were able to tell us stories of Zimbabwe and how it has changed.



One Greek woman we encountered is St. Efterpi of Harare. She passed away approximately six years ago. We heard stories of her life and of the miracles after her death. We saw her crypt and experienced the fragrance of myrrh that exudes when she is present. We were able to bring back some of the healing oil that exuded from her incorrupt body three years after her death. This was a very unexpected experience!

At the end of the day, it was hard to leave because of the relationships we had started to form. After two weeks of clinging to us like Velcro, a few small children will now be wondering, "Where did the white women go?" We connected with brothers and sisters in Christ of all colours, genders, and ages in various ways. As we shared our stories and the people shared theirs, we realized how much we have in common even when our day-to-day lives are so different. It was hard to say goodbye to our re-



markable brothers and sisters in Christ after so short a time, but we know that they will be praying for us, our churches, and the next team that will come to serve them. Already, I (AE) am wondering whether I will be a part of that team. When God asks, "Who shall I send to Zimbabwe?" Will you answer, "Here I am, Lord. Send me."?

Kevin and AmandaEve Wigglesworth

Team photo (from left): Wendy Bodnar (CA), AE & Kevin (MB), Fr. Michael Miklos (FL), Met. George (ZIM), Clark Wilson (IL), Fr. George (ZIM)