



THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA  
NATAL COASTAL DISTRICT

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NATAL COASTAL DISTRICT COMMUNIQUE APRIL 2013  
A LETTER FROM BULAWAYO EAST DISTRICT (BED), METHODIST CHURCH  
OF ZIMBABWE (MZC)  
PART ONE

GREETINGS FROM BULAWAYO, ZIMBABWE  
PEACE AND GRACE BE UPON US ALL

VISITING BULAWAYO EAST DISTRICT (BED), METHODIST CHURCH OF  
ZIMBABWE (MZC) 10 TO 18 APRIL 2013

**BACKGROUND:** As you know Rev Carol Walsh and I were invited to be part of **Bulawayo East District (BED), Methodist Church of Zimbabwe (MZC)** and the BED District Bishop Rev. Cleopas Sibanda will be with us at our Synod next month. The purpose of this visit and Bishop Sibanda's visit to us is to explore ways of linking our two Districts - mainly through Circuits, evangelisation, education, exchanges and other appropriate links where these are shared in common with each District. There will be time at our Synod to meet with Bishop Sibanda and we will arrange meetings and visits during the week following Synod to some Circuits; SMMS; Organisations, projects exchanges etc. We tend often only to have partnerships with Methodists Churches in the USA or UK; **this will be an opportunity for us to expand our friendships and partnerships with our fellow African Methodists as well.**

**THE JOURNEY, ACCOMMODATION & OVERVIEW:** After an 'adventurous' three hour Beit Bridge border crossing experience we arrived in Bulawayo at 22h30 on the evening of 10 April having left Pretoria at 09h30, tired and ready for bed. We are staying at Glen Lodge in Bulawayo, which is owned by one of the Church members. **The hospitality here is ubuntu at its best.** The Lodge offers all home comforts in spite of water rations (sometimes up to two days) and electricity rations. I admire the Zimbabweans how they are prepared for any eventuality - electricity goes off generators come on. Water stops - water appears in buckets. (Not dissimilar to the experience some of our Northern Circuits)

**The supermarkets are now well stocked since 2008/09** when all food items were scarce and inflation at its worst (Billion Zimbabwean Dollar notes were made). We have heard stories from that period of how people waited in long queues for bread and other food items, shelves were empty. Francistown (Botswana) and Musina (SA) became places where, those who could afford it,

shopped. In fact Francistown's economy become reliant on Zimbabweans at the time and now that there is no need for them to go there any more, Francistown is beginning to feel the pinch.

The economy is much stronger now that they have done away with local currency and use US Dollars, Rands and Pula from Botswana. The economy still has a way to go. US Dollars are so well used through constant circulation that many of them are now faded.

Aside from the economy other challenges faced are drought in Matabeleland and most regions in the Western parts of Zimbabwe; political tensions especially with the build-up to next General Elections which may take place in June this year. The fear is that violence and torture increases when there are elections.

**METHODIST CHURCH IN ZIMBABWE (MCZ), BULAWAYO EAST DISTRICT (BED) SYNOD, 11 TO 13 APRIL 2013. THEME: "GOD IS ABLE" DANIEL**

**3:17:** We gathered with our Methodist Sisters and Brothers in The Bulawayo East District for their Annual Synod from 11 to 13 April, Northern Circuit, North End Society, and Bulawayo.

Their Synod has separated Ministerial and Lay Representative sessions. The Ministerial session deals specifically with issues pertaining to training, assessment of Probationer ministers and Candidates, District Bishop's review of the District with responses. The Lay representative session, Chaired by the District Lay President Mrs. S Matiwaza deals with the care and resourcing of Ministers, the financing of the Church and any issues from Circuits. The Synod begins and ends with a Joint Session. (Must say it felt good to be part of the Ministerial Session)

The Presiding Bishop Rev. Dr. Amos Ndhumbu and Connexional Lay President Mrs. Sithimbile Ncube of MZC visit every District Synod during April. They were with us on Friday 12 April and each addressed the Synod. This gave a sense of strong accountability and encouragement from Circuit to District to Connexion. Connexionalism is very tangible.

The particular challenges they are faced with is drought in Matabeleland, political tensions, the decline in youth membership and finances.

**HERE FOLLOWS SOME SNIPPETS FROM THE SYNOD:**

- ***"Our political and economic situation is still not good enough. I continue to encourage you to advocate for peace. I also encourage you to be apolitical while being prophetic"*** said Bishop Cleopas Sibanda in his address to Bulawayo East District Synod. Presiding Bishop Amos Ndhumbu addressing Synod underscored this by saying "the people of God need to be proactive and promote peace as we approach the upcoming elections. We risk political tensions and violence based on 2008 elections."

- District Lay President Mrs. S Matiwaza in her address to Synod said: “I applaud those who have fulfilled our church’s mission by being an Oasis of Life, Peace, Justice and Hope as some groups have continued to visit the sick, preached the good news to the discouraged given food and counselled those who have lost hope they have mediated for peace where there were disputes and fights. Sometimes it is very difficult to measure our achievements as Christians but if we live each day and make each decision like a true disciple then indeed we can make an impact. Christianity is not only about worship on Sundays but the focus should be the focus communities from where we come. **We need to move from self-edification and let’s go out.** ”
- Presiding Bishop Amos Ndhlumbu addressing Synod "**Ministers function is to keep the Gospel of Jesus Alive**"
- **The water situation is quite critical in Matabeleland due to severe drought** - the consequences thereof are desperate and some are turning to sex work, selling their assets etc. The church is responding through the Farming God's way project (see below), which trains folk in organic less water reliant methods & using small livestock i.e. Chickens, goats etc.
- Rev Carol Walsh promoted the **Thursdays in Black (TIB) campaign** and spoke about violence against women, as part of our greetings to the Synod. A TIB badge was given to each delegate.
- The Synod voted for a new District Bishop. **A District Bishop in the MZC only serves for five years maximum.** The Connexional General Secretary comes to Synod in person to oversee Elections pertaining to District Bishops, which as is it with us is a nomination to Conference where the appointment of a District Bishop is made.
- MZC Organisations:
  - o In the MCZ the men's Organisation is known as Men's Christian Union (MCU) and they wear Red Jackets this is the MCZ's equivalent to our YMG.
  - o The Women’s Manyano (WM) is the same as ours in structure and uniform.
  - o The Women’s Association includes all race groups.
  - o The Girls Christian Union (GCU) wear same the uniform as our Young Women’s and includes girls and young female adults in their membership. Once a GCU turns 30 years old they become a member of the WM.
  - o The Boys Christian Union (BCU) (Wear white jackets) and includes boys and young male adults.
  - o The Girls & Boys Brigade (not sure what uniform if any they wear).
- **We celebrate the cook’s** @Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, Bulawayo East District Synod. Cooks are the real peacemakers at any event – if

people don't eat food they get grumpy which could result in conflict and even violence - hence blessed are the cooks for they are the peace makers.

Synod came to an end today with singing, farewells and dancing Saturday 13 April 13, 2013.

After the Synod we attended a Wedding of a Methodist member and we ate again. How can one refuse such good food and hospitality? (Neither of us have weighed ourselves since leaving home and we have eaten so well that I suspect that some 'kilos' increase may have occurred)

**FARMING GOD'S WAY:** I met with Rev Dr. Brian Mugwidi who heads up a project aptly named "Farming God's Way". Rev Mugwidi is a seconded Methodist minister working with the Zimbabwean Council of Churches.

Farming God's Way (FGW) adopts the principle that God does not disturb the soil. People are therefore encouraged to plant in the same hole, even for crop rotation, for minimal soil disturbance. This method is ideal for drought stricken areas because of its water retention. The drought in the Matabeleland area of Zimbabwe is severe. There is no doubt in the minds of local people that this is a direct consequence of Climate Change.

This is how the FGW method basically works:

- Dig a hole 20cm x 20cm
- Place a hand full of organic manure or its equivalent like compost into the hole
- Place mulch for water retention into the hole
- Plant seed like maize by putting 3 seeds per hole.
- When the maize plant begins to grow select two of the best ones and take out the third one, so that the two remaining plants grow well.
- An area of 70 metres x 70 metres is all that is needed and holes can be made in rows 90cm apart.
- A seed bank is established coming from the plants
- It is estimated that 90 cobs can produce a significant amount of maize.

Another aspect of Farming God's way is the principle of 'smaller is better' in times of drought and 'pass on the gift'. A gift of a hen and cock is given to a homestead. Once they have produced chickens then a hen and cock is given as a gift to others with similar survival needs. Also goats are given in a similar way and the same process of passing on the gift is followed. In a time of drought cattle are not suitable because of their need for water and their cost.

This combined effort of planting crops and cultivating smaller livestock is a way of adapting to drought caused in the main by Climate Change.

Climate has changed again and again in history and its impact is on all of us as the intensity increases - the poor who lose all and those who have the means to survive are rendered poor. This process is being experienced more frequently on our continent than in the past with devastating consequences. **AWAKE THOU WHO SLEEPEST** - is what I think John Wesley would be saying to us today.  
*Come Holy Spirit bring rain to Zimbabwe.*

Until my next letter which will cover the period 14 to 18 April, take good care of yourself

Shalom - Bishop Mike