

A Serious Christian

I read with great interest the article “A Colonial Life, Growing Up In Zimbabwe” in the November copy of the Presbyterian Record. I had visited there in 1989, 91 and 93 while working for Fleming College, Frost Campus in Lindsay. This was part of a CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) contract to provide forestry training and upgrading to students and staff of a forestry college in Mutare, Zimbabwe.

Mutare is located in the eastern part of Zimbabwe close to the border with Mozambique. My first trip was 9 years after Zimbabwe acquired its independence and my memories were of a country filled with all sorts of possibilities for the future. Anything could be grown in their climate. Their people were happy and filled with enthusiasm and hope. Prosperity was obvious as the streets were clean with no litter; the parks were aglow with flowers and well maintained gardens and fountains; and the hotel offered all the amenities one could expect. Only a very few places in the countryside showed remnants of the war for independence with bullet and shell holes still remaining in their walls.

With each visit afterwards I could notice changes taking place, subtle but none the less evidence that the economy was suffering. The streets were not kept as clean, or the parks and gardens showed signs of lack of attention. Indeed on my last visit in 1993 people were now sleeping in the parks, weeds were replacing flowers and inflation seemed to be the order of the day at the hotel. In the well written article by Margaret Zondo she states, “Access to food, water, electricity and basics that we take for granted in Canada is a daily

struggle.” She also mentions that “45 per cent of Zimbabwe’s population will be at risk of starvation” with an estimated deficiency of maize production, a staple in Zimbabwe, approaching 1 million tons. The most shocking part of Zondo’s article is on inflation. She states, “By June this year, inflation stood at 11.2 million per cent (as opposed to 7,634 per cent in July 2007) although independent economists put the figure at 40 million per cent and rising.”

This week on CBC news I heard that the infrastructure in Harare, their capitol city, had broken down and people were getting sick with cholera, dysentery and other diseases related to poor drinking water. Not to mention anything about Aids problems or a totally dysfunctional political system.

On my last trip to Zimbabwe I was asked to assess the possibility of developing a wildlife training centre in an abandoned school, ex-military base in a National Park in the south eastern highlands. A beautiful forested area with lakes and an abundance of wildlife, especially impalas and kudu antelope. Wapare, the director for the site was a delightful person to meet and we spent a couple of days together. Somehow, during our conversations Sheila asked Wapare if he was a Christian. His infectious smile lit up as he said “yes, and are you?” “Yes” we said. “But are you a serious Christian” Wapare asked? “Yes, at least we think we are” was our reply.

I invited Wapare, his wife and 2 children to join Sheila and I for dinner at the hotel. The

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