

## Zimbabwe Adventures

God never ceases to surprise us. Back in 2005 a student stopped me after a Greek class. Could I arrange for him to visit South Africa? I did; and took him to Zimbabwe too. He loved it. The next year he was back with three other students and his girlfriend (now his wife!). Every year since then has seen at least two College students come to Zimbabwe, and some have been to Johannesburg, Lesotho and Cape Town too. And it is not only College students who come to Zimbabwe; three priests, an OHP sister, a teacher, a chiropractor and most recently some Americans have been with me round parts of Zimbabwe tourists do not usually see. It has been wonderful fun but what has it achieved?

I suppose most of us go with the idea that we will help Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has been in a mess for years now and really needs help. There is no doubt that our visits do help. We bring money which the church desperately needs. Our young ordinands and priests give an example to young clergy in Zimbabwe which they don't get elsewhere. Our visits have brought Tariro into being and that has been a life saving project for scores of young people. My companions find themselves laden with the most extraordinary variety of luggage: vestments, chalices, rosaries, spectacles, foot balls, wool, books, medicines and all kinds of odds and ends that improve life for people out there. The vestments, chalices and rosaries have been particularly important in helping priests and people to rediscover the riches of catholic devotion and to do it properly.

Yet beyond this material help it has been important for Zimbabweans to meet people from overseas and discover that Anglicans in other parts of the world know of their problems and care about them. In the early years of the economic collapse people constantly asked me "Do people in England know how we are suffering?" Now they know that people do. In the ecclesiastical struggles between true and false bishops they have come to see the importance of being in full communion with Anglicans all over the world. Our visits have put real flesh on the teachings they have heard about the world wide nature of the body of Christ.

On the day I write this piece we have heard the gospel for Christ the King – that those who give food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners are doing it to Christ. We have done that and it has been a wonderful privilege for us. And of course through that we have found that the people who benefit most from all this is ourselves. The students who came have gone

back home enriched, with their concepts of Anglicanism broadened. They have found courage and joy and most incredible life amongst people who seemed to have nothing but in fact have God. Students have found they can live without electricity, running water, choice of food. There have been scary moments, and surprises too: at our first road block on one journey the policeman looked in the back of the van and saw four students surrounded by petrol cans and NO seat belts. "Hi!" he said cheerfully and sent us on our way.

This year, as our financial commitments grew we put out an appeal that people should help us through their Harvest Giving. Many parishes have done this and it has given our finances a big support. If you are one of those who helped us here, thank you very much. At the same time it has become clear that we need to develop our projects so that they are no longer just 'first aid', that is getting kids back into school, crucial as this is. We need to get the local communities more involved so that they share in the benefits and in the long term planning. The local communities are Anglicans, often very poor, and by helping them get involved we can help them find a stronger Anglican identity. And we can show them, as St James in his epistle tells us to do, that Christian love is not of the feelings; it has really practical consequences.

Many people have asked whether Archbishop Rowan's visit was good for the Anglican Church. Most definitely it was. Anglicans were hugely encouraged by his visit and his conversation with Mugabe seems to have resulted in two significant court judgements in our favour.

As you read this article I shall be back in Zimbabwe, visiting the Tariro groups and the Anglican churches. Please do pray that this is fruitful, that we are able to see where God wants us to God and that we will find the means to do it.

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