

THE VINEVILLE PAGE

Helping us all grasp the big picture of where we are and what our challenges are as we face the future.



The Church on Mission... From Macon to Zimbabwe

Issue #6

It is all too common for the religious life to become self-serving. So much of our initial response to God is an effort to meet our own needs. Particularly in American Christianity, we tout the benefits that come from being a Christian: going to heaven; forgiveness; comfort in life; knowing we belong; and, discovering moments of ecstasy when God draws near to us. It is probably not an overstatement to suggest that most people of faith ultimately become stagnant with a faith that is content with being blessed.

To ponder the mystery of God's coming to us in Jesus, however, evokes other longings. Sometimes it is gratitude—wanting to give something back. On other occasions, it is being grasped by the love of God for all humanity. For some, it is obedience to the simple commands of scripture that we are to be in our time what Jesus was in his. Still for others, it is a deep stirring in our hearts as we have grown in Christ-likeness to touch others with the gospel in word and deed. The result is all the same—to find yourself called to serve people and help them grow so that they can possess a living and meaningful faith that connects them with God and God's people.

This call may be: to teach children; to become involved in the Higher Life Ministry; to fund ministry to singles; to give blood; to work on a Habitat house; to go on a mission trip to MorningStar or Mississippi; or to ponder something way outside of your comfort zone. Spiritual growth that resists the temptation to become stagnant will always lead us to places of ministry and mission. The

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Church's very survival hinges on people who discover within themselves a commitment to ministry and mission. Those two things are the food and fire which nourish the life and health of a church.

In the summer of 2007, Vineville will respond to the greatest call yet—to touch and be touched by the people of Zimbabwe. Over the past 15 years, Zimbabwe has gone from being the bread basket of Africa to being in need of bread.

Here are a few of the challenges facing this country:

- Four million people—one-third of Zimbabwe's entire population—are facing hunger issues. The UN estimates one of every two school children are suffering from starvation related health issues.
- 70 to 80% of Zimbabwe's population is unemployed.
- One in four Zimbabwean children is an orphan, having lost both parents to AIDS or AIDS related illnesses.
- The life expectancy in the past 10 years has dropped from 68 years to 37 years.
- Inflation in Zimbabwe is more than 1000% and rising, the highest inflation rate in the world.
- In the 1980s, the Zimbabwean dollar was stronger on the world trade market than the US dollar. In August of 2006, however, the Zimbabwean dollar was devalued again—from \$100,000 ZD : 1 USD to \$250,000 ZD : 1 USD.
- The schools suffer shortages of textbooks, paper, pens and pencils. High school science

labs were found to have no power, no propane gas, no equipment, no books, and no desks.

- Hospitals and clinics are functioning without essential medications and supplies. Surgical nurses are utilizing straight razors in the absence of scalpels.

We first became exposed to the need of Zimbabwe during a visit last February by Dr. Henry Mugabe, the president of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Gweru, Zimbabwe. (He graduated from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky with his M.Div. and Ph.D. degrees.) Bonnie Jean Dixon, the founder of *Journey Partners* later visited with us and cast a vision of how our lives could be transformed by assisting the seminary. They need textbooks, library books, books for ministers, and medical supplies. Construction projects also abound, such as dormitory space for those attending the seminary and for constructing a 300,000 liter reservoir

(Rotary International is helping with this one). They can also use teachers of ministers to teach short term studies with the pastors of Zimbabwe.

What we will give is but a drop in the bucket in comparison with what we will receive. To live among the grace and hospitality of people who have every reason to despair is to have your faith deepened, your vision heightened, and your sense of mission intensified. Suffering changes us—not just

our own but also the neediness of others. To experience the magnitude of the need of these lovely and caring people is to see life and God more clearly than you ever have before. Pray that God will call our members to go, that financial support will be raised, and that Vineville

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will be enriched through our gifts. *Can you see yourself participating in this adventure of a lifetime?*

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