

TARIRO AND ZIMBABWE AFTER A BREAK

Zimbabwe has been hit by inflation of the US Dollar which has pushed our costs up considerably. There seems to be nothing we can do about that. Despite the Covid situation I find everything in Tariro is going well. The youngsters seem mostly happy and confident about their futures. We have six girls and boys from the rural areas writing A levels next month. This means of course we shall be faced with the problem of funding tertiary education - lap tops and so on, but that is quite a happy problem to have.

On my first Sunday here I went out to Tafara township where Fr Mutasa is priest in charge. Earlier this year we funded a drugs awareness programme as Covid has exacerbated the drug problem among the youth. I met the leaders of this programme and it was good to see their enthusiasm for this work and their determination to help their children avoid the dangers of drugs.

Yesterday I visited the Harare Tariro house and spoke individually with most of the 17 youngsters there. That was a delightful experience. One girl who came from a very abusive home two years ago has quite transformed into a happy confident and very articulate young woman. Another who has just completed her accountancy diploma has a job running an English company's finances and administration on line, and has started her own chicken raising project. I could say much more but it was a very heart warming experience talking with them. They are high spirited, happy young people who organised themselves well during lockdown and have come out stronger.

On Tuesday Edwin and I went down to the Honde Valley to see the agricultural project FSJ has funded. They have done an amazing job. Dumisani and Edwin, with advice from Fr Mutasa cleared the land, put up a small cottage and fenced it. They have a pump on the river and solar power is making everything run well. They have also built pig sties and moved the 22 pigs from Goromonzi down to the Honde two weeks ago. The pigs seem happy and should contribute to the fertility and viability of the project. Their first crop of sugar beans was not very successful as the promised rains didn't come. Their present crop of cabbages is magnificent. Some cabbages very big, but also very tasty. Dumisani has done a lot of research into the best way of producing crops in an ecologically sound way and we want to encourage the Green aspects of this work. This has very interesting possibilities for the future.

Tomorrow I shall set off to Daramombe (four girls in school), Masvingo (a boy at University), Shurugwii and Gweru (about ten youngsters in various stages of education). Finally, I shall go to the Agricultural college where one of our star young men seems to be doing very well.

On my last day here I shall be meeting with the 'Tariro graduates' - our young marrieds - to talk with them how they can be more involved with the running of the project. This should develop into some new forms of outreach, maybe to the Children's Home from which we have already had some youngsters.

Second Journey

Edwin and I set off on Tuesday to make a tour of the southern part of Tariro. The journey did not start well. Traffic in Harare was appalling and we didn't get onto the Masvingo road till an hour after we had intended. They are remaking this road, at least 20 years later than they should. That is good but the deviations were tiresome. Then 20 kms from Chivhu the car stopped with smoke pouring out of its engine. An electrical fault had caused a whole lot of wires around the battery to melt. We were lucky the engine hadn't caught fire.

Fortunately, the priest in Chivhu, Oliver Mazambara, is a good friend of ours and was expecting us so Edwin phoned him and he turned up an hour later and towed us into town. He took us to a mechanic who is a good Anglican and he started work at once. Then Oliver took me put to Daramombe mission, about 40 miles away to see the four girls we have studying there. That was nice though Shona girls find it very hard to talk to elderly White men so conversation rather languished.

Back in Chivhu the car was still stuck. They needed a new part and Edwin was about to set off to Harare to buy it. I set off hitching in the other direction and got a good lift through to Masvingo, about 100 miles away and was warmly welcomed by Bishop Godfrey and his wife. They are about to retire after 20 years building up this new diocese in a dry and poor area of Zimbabwe. They have done a magnificent job and thoroughly deserve a rest, but I shall miss their friendship and support. Changing a bishop in Africa is dodgy and we pray the new man will be good.

Next day I was marooned in Masvingo so the Bishop got me to say mass in the Cathedral and I later gave a talk to a little group of ordinands; then saw one of our Tariro students who is doing law at the local university. He is a very bright young man with the unusual name of Elshaddai! He is also very talkative and did 90% of the talking. He will clearly be a good lawyer.

Edwin finally turned up on Thursday and we set off on the three-hour drive to Shurugwi. Shurugwi is hot and dry and I can never understand how people manage to live there. When it rains the crops are good. When it doesn't, they go hungry. The Community has contributed to a couple of feeding schemes for the children. Most recently Fr Antony and the students raised £5000 to help set up gardens to feed the children in the four Anglican schools round here. This project seems to be going well.

Our Tariro project here is focussed on St Francis mission where the sisters of the Community of the Holy Transfiguration live. They are a break away from the CZR at Penhalonga. There are only five of them. They are good, hard working and devout, but aging and struggling. Like CZR and the other breakaway (CBLM) they really have no future unless they can get together again.

We arrived with a pile of cokes and biscuits (a gift from a sponsor) and had a happy party with about ten youngsters. It's hard to talk with them as their English is poor (and so is my Shona). Boys are easier than girls. One new boy, Williard, turned out to come from a very abusive home with a violent father and a struggling mother. His teacher says he is by far the outstanding pupil in his class, so I have promised him that if he does well enough at the end of this year to get into Daramombe School (a good diocesan school) we will send them there as a boarder. I can't tell how his face brightened at the prospect of getting away from home. Another boy, Munashe,

whom we took on last year for secondary school is turning out to be a very good carpenter. This is good as there is always a need for good carpenters in the rural areas and he could well make his own living when he leaves school.

We spent just one night at St Francis and were well fed by the sisters with mounds of sadza, porridge, vegetables and chicken. Then we drove on to Gweru and to St Patrick's Mission where the Community of the Holy Spirit live. Here I met another of our boys, a nice 16 year old called Ebenezer! His father was an evangelical pastor, hence the name. When father died the church did nothing for the family so we have taken him on.

The CHS are a remarkable community. They follow the rule of St Benedict, though they are actually very committed to various kinds of pastoral work. Friar Joshua is their superior along with Sr Gladys.. Joshua has two doctorates but is very quiet, unusually dour for a Shona. The ideal of the Community is to have friars and sisters, but he is the only friar in vows. The others come and go. The sisters are lovely, some young and well educated. They have bought a small farm near Gweru and in just four years have managed to put up some very good buildings. I am having a nice quiet time here talking with the sisters and catching up on prayers. Tomorrow after mass we will return to Harare. The weather having been very hot for the past week has now turned overcast, cool and very slightly wet. Sadly, this means the solar panels do not give off enough power to drive the fridge and I can't chill my beers! But life is good.