

**The Salvation Army
ZIMBABWE TERRITORY**

Territorial Commander:
Commissioner Vinece Chigariro
Chief Secretary: Lt-Colonel Wilfred Varughese
William Booth – Founder



HOWARD HOSPITAL

P.O. BOX 190
Glendale, ZIMBABWE

Telephone (0)758-2433

THE ZIMBABWE BULLETIN
December 2008

“ For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” Luke 2:30-32, NIV

Dear Friends,

Season’s Greetings from Zimbabwe.

The year is rushing by like a tropical rainstorm rolling over the hills at Howard. In the current climate of the country, many people have expressed concerns about our condition, our hospital and our health and safety. Though we wish to reply individually to e-mails and letters, this bulletin is a collective comeback to the most frequently asked questions.

It's tough going, tougher than ever. Many government hospitals are officially closed. Howard Hospital is overrun with people from all over the country seeking medical attention, often 40 patients or more in a 26 bed ward. How many elephants can fit into a Volkswagen? Our volume has increased by at least 50 percent. This includes those with cholera, but for the most part our district has been spared the epidemic.

What hits home hard is the wanton loss of life, loss that would be preventable in better days. There are the tragedies of mothers who have died upon arrival from Harare after hours of continuous eclamptic fits. Their infants died in the womb earlier. There are the HIV patients from around the country who have defaulted on their antiretrovirals, and the men with days of intestinal obstruction. The list could go on. It’s too big for anger or blame. We are not prolific to write a book ... so we are settling on this newsletter.

Our professional staff are exhausted mentally and physically. We are hard pressed on all sides, but not crushed. The resilience of the hospital to stay open when many institutions have folded is a testament to their faith and friends, ... our friends around the globe. While Zimbabwean health care workers are washing dishes illegally in South Africa, for the most part, ours are nursing the sick at Howard. The optimism of the people defies the reality on the ground. Their government salaries in Zimbabwean dollars are

meaningless, that's if they long to join the long queues at the bank. Therefore, the hospital has been trying to pay our workers in kind, ... in soap, cooking oil etc, whatever we can scrounge. It's averaged the equivalent of \$10 US a month; not much, but it's more than their Zim salary.

There is political deadlock with no end in sight. 'When big elephants fight, it's the grass that suffers.' It is now overshadowed by the global financial crisis. With the focus on Wall Street, where is Second Street? In Harare. Howard is at the extreme north end of Second Street, the last stop of the chicken bus. Though we no longer call them chicken buses; chickens are as scarce as hen's teeth at the dinner table. Unbelievably, the people remain hopeful and longsuffering. To quote Churchill after the Normandy invasion, 'Now, this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.'

Despite the ongoing political stalemate, life has been quieter at Howard after the June election, ... except perhaps for the gurgling of empty stomachs. As stocks from the 2008 harvest have been consumed, people have entered into a time of famine. It is real. Fortunately, we do have a feeding program for our most malnourished children thanks to UNICEF, and yesterday we were delighted to receive 10 tons of corn soya meal courtesy of the Salvation Army in Sweden. Just in time for a Christmas distribution. Porridge never tasted so good. Though Paul, James and Alex had ordered cheeseburgers, fries and a shake to go.

It has been an enormous encouragement to us to receive ongoing support, and to sense the willingness of many to help in these distressing days. We have the dilemma of responding to the question of, 'How can we help? We expect only a few can pack their bags and head south to volunteer. On the other hand, American dollars are now the only currency to buy local commodities for those everyday needs at both hospital and home, but you can't withdraw US from the banking system. This has created a conundrum: How does the average worker or workplace find or afford US dollars?

Nevertheless, we are blessed with larger gifts sent from abroad. Since our last newsletter in August, we are privileged to report the arrival of a lorry of basic commodities for Home Based Care via the Stephen Lewis Foundation. A 40 foot container of Canadian medicines and supplies landed in October thanks to the collaboration between Health Partners Internationals, Rotary International, the Salvation Army, the Zimbabwean Embassy in Ottawa and a glowing list of individuals. A similar consignment set sail on the St. Lawrence in November. Pray for strong westerly winds. We have not yet mentioned the faithful sponsors of our programs at our school and in the community.

The Thistles are able to feed their hungry youngsters by grocery shopping in Botswana, and care packages from abroad. James and Alexander have adjusted well at the International School in Harare. In contrast to the kids whose parents work in diplomatic missions and NGO offices in town, the teachers forecast our arrival by the puffs of dirt around our creaking vehicle, a cross between the Beverly Hillbillies and Pigpen in the Peanuts cartoon. Accommodation has been problematic in Harare, but we have finally found a place close to the school. The house has no municipal water, but given the current cholera outbreak in Harare, this may be a blessing in disguise. The boys are staying with their uncle during the week while their parents plod on at Howard. Pedrinah successfully passed her exams and should graduate next year with her degree in nursing administration.

We solicit your prayers for the following:

.....Resolution of the political deadlock and national reconciliation.

.....The recruitment and retention of health care workers, physicians and nurses at Howard Hospital. Our staff have been going to work hungry. More accommodation is urgently needed.

.....Our community programs: Home Based Care, AIDS Education, Support Groups of People Living with HIV, Child Sponsorship and Orphan Care

.....Financial and logistic support for the daily operations of the hospital. We have had no working telephone for two months and are looking at the feasibility and affordability of a satellite phone.

..... The completion of our construction projects: housing, hospital and midwifery school. We know that Rome wasn't built in a day, but how about 2009 for Howard?

.....Sound minds and body for the Thistle family, especially the provision and protection of James and Alexander at school in Harare.

Christmas is the constant in our lives. However turbulent the year 2008 has turned out to be, however pessimistic the year 2009 is imposing itself, the salvation story of Christmas gives us strength to arise above our circumstances, and focus on God's grace at work in the lives of individuals at Howard Hospital. Its message has shone through the darkest days of human history and will shine again tomorrow. Jesus, thank you, Joyous Son.

Have a Very Merry Christmas.

Paul, Pedrinah, James and Alexander

The Thistles
The Salvation Army Howard Hospital
PO Box 190
Glendale, Zimbabwe

'The world needs dreamers and the world needs doers. But above all, the world needs dreamers who do.' Breathnach



The Thistle Tribe, December 2008 © Doug MacLellan