

A GREAT THING HAPPENED ON MY TRIP TO ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe seems an unlikely spot to have “great things happening,” since this African country is facing a ruined economy, unemployment, disease, and hunger. Zimbabwe has the second lowest per capita annual income—\$324.

However, three young people from Mt. Lebanon felt “great things” WERE happening at the Nyadire United Methodist Mission in Nyadire, Zimbabwe, when they visited there this summer on mission trips. They were part of THE NYADIRE CONNECTION (TNC), a group of volunteers whose goal is to keep the services and programs at Nyadire operational during these difficult times. TNC was organized after the first mission team returned from Nyadire in 2006. Now the group is committed to a long-term relationship with the Nyadire mission, working as partners through “Chabadza.” This is a Shona word meaning to stop and help someone who is already at work.

Rev. Kimberly Greway, Ben Dempe, and Maddie Gioffre journeyed the 8,400 miles from Pittsburgh to the Mission in Nyadire, located two hours from Harare, the capital. The mission is much like a college campus with a 240-bed hospital, a nursing school, a school

system for 1,200 students, a preschool through high school, an orphanage, a teachers’ college, a church, and farm. These programs serve a wide rural population. TNC helps to keep a doctor at the hospital, sends medications and medical supplies, procures sponsors for the orphanage and orphans in neighboring schools and rural pastors, and performs needed services when mission teams visit.

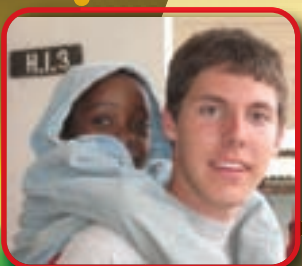
Kimberly, now head of Chaplaincy Services at the Allegheny County Jail and formerly the associate pastor at Mt. Lebanon United Methodist Church, was returning to Nyadire for her fifth mission trip. She had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Zimbabwe for two years, knows the culture, loves the people, and speaks Shona, one of the native languages.

Kimberly organized a three-day Pastors’ Conference with other United Methodist pastors from the Pittsburgh area on the team and the rural pastors of the Mutoko/Mudzi area. These pastors have been sponsored by people in Western PA through TNC for several years after it became known they were not receiving salaries. Their congregations did not have the means to pay them.

The pastors came together to exchange information about what it meant to be in ministry, these two diverse cultures united by a global denomination. They examined such questions as “What is our calling?”, “How do I develop leadership skills in myself and my congregates?”, and “What are the issues of being male and female pastors doing the work of God?”

Pastor Kim recounted, “Dorcas Kanyayi, one of the Zimbabwean pastors, explained that, in Zimbabwe, churches have no problems accepting female clergy. She said, ‘In Zimbabwe, we are pastors first and men and women second.’ What a wonderful example for us in Western Pennsylvania! We have so much to learn from them and they from us. The conference gave us the opportunity to share face to face.”

Ben Dempe, a junior at Allegheny College, majoring in economics with a focus on international studies, was the first TNC intern at Nyadire. He spent 10 weeks on the



mission and lived with a Zimbabwean family. His internship had three goals: 1) assist the newly created Internet Café and help with computer skills; 2) work with the administrator of the Home of Hope Outreach School Sponsorship Program, a program that finds sponsors for orphans in schools neighboring Nyadire to pay for school fees and backpacks of school supplies; 3) design a micro-lending program offering small loans to persons at a low interest rate.

The micro-lending project was quite a success, as many folks who live on the mission wanted a “jump start” to augment their salary or to

greeted by a bus-full of kids returning from a basketball game. In the dark, two girls came up to me and asked if I knew Emily Mihalko and Erin Flaus. I was completely taken by surprise because those are two of my good friends who I play soccer with! It turns out that my friends were the these girls’ pen pals! It was truly amazing that I could make connections back home while I was in a completely new environment. I made some really good friends while I was there and had so many eye-opening, wonderful experiences. It is three weeks of my life that I will never forget.”

“hundreds of children patiently waited in the sun – waiting for a photo – wanting for a chance.”

have some income at all. Ben received 20 applications for loans. He interviewed all of them and visited their homesteads and made two awards. One of \$300 to Leticia Bhandira, a Nyadire Primary teacher, who would buy 100 day-old chicks to raise; the other, to Simon Mukodoka, who works in the hospital laundry. His \$350 would go to buy a cow that would end up being food for a school or many individuals. These new entrepreneurs could repay the loan and have the money to continue their business endeavors. Ben’s daily blog while he was in Zimbabwe reveals more details of the mission, the countryside, the people, and the culture. To access go to <http://www.nyadire.blogspot.com/>

Mt. Lebanon senior, Maddie Gioffe traded the usual South Hills high school summertime fun for a 30-hour flight (on four different planes) to be part of this mission team. She found simple, but adequate living arrangements with power availability at 50%, and running water dependent on power, and lots of children. She and another teen team member, Natalie Geer of St. Paul’s UMC in Glenshaw, and Ben, were constant playmates with the 24 children of the Home of Hope, and also made friends with high school students at Nyadire. They played and invented games, wrestled with, read to, listened to, played Flashlight Tag, held hands with, and walked with the young people of Nyadire.

In Maddie’s own words, “Going on the July mission trip has changed so much for me! I believe that I learned more from the people there than they learned from me. One of my very first memories was being woken up to the Home of Hope kids singing to Natalie and I at our window. We had just arrived the night before, and there is nothing in the entire world like waking up to twenty-five singing, smiling children. I spent most of my time with the Home of Hope kids and the high schoolers, where I made life long friends! I have many pen pals now from just walking around the high school grounds meeting so many new people. Our second night there, Natalie, Ben, and I went on a walk to see one of Ben’s friends at the high school and on our way back we were

One of the activities all of the team members took part in was visiting neighboring rural schools in order to meet and photograph the orphans who hope to be sponsored by The Home of Hope Outreach School Sponsorship program. Five schools were visited during the summer, and over 500 orphans identified and photographed.

Sponsorship involves \$60 to cover the school fees for a year plus a backpack of school supplies. One fourth of Zimbabwean children are orphaned, many of whom live with extended families, on their own, or are caring for younger siblings. Most do not have the money for school fees. For information on this program, contact Mary Beth Zollars, mbzollars@aol.com. Maddie was struck by how hundreds of children patiently waited in the sun – waiting for a photo – wanting for a chance.

Where the accommodations luxurious? NO

Where you pampered? NO

Did you meet anyone interesting and exciting? YES, everyday

Was it the same old, same old? NO

Was it GREAT? YES, YES, YES



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