

## Latest News from Isabel and Jonathan Hill in Zimbabwe.



Easter garden at Hillside Methodist Church, Bulawayo.

Time for a general newsletter to give you a clue about what we have been up to just lately. Got to be short enough that you don't get bored stiff, but long enough to include all 'the main points of the news'. That won't be easy. But wait! I have an idea! If it gets too long you can just read the paragraph headings.

### **Family news: Children all now in UK**

Well, it's just the two of us now. Tony, Stephen and Susannah are all in England. Tony still working in Cambridge for Ede and Ravenscroft, Stephen in his third year doing Electrical and Electronic Engineering at University of Derby and Susannah in her first year doing English Literature at Anglia Ruskin University.



L-R: Stephen, Tony, Jonathan, Isabel, Susannah.

### **Isabel's work: Child Care and Healthy Living**

Isabel is Child-Care Coordinator in the Bulawayo District of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ). She has teams of volunteer Care-Givers in each of the nine Circuits of the District who generally keep an eye on the orphans (and other vulnerable

children) in their local communities. It is only in extreme cases that children are taken out of their local community to be placed in a residential institution.

Isabel visits the circuits and takes clothing, school exercise books, pens, pencils and so on to give to the children. She also arranges payment of school fees or levies for some children.



Isabel with two orphans who visited us for a few days at Christmas.

Isabel is also part of the District's Healthy Living Team, which visits mainly rural communities around the District. The focus of the programme is to improve the health of individuals and communities within the District, to teach participants the nutritional value and importance of using local and traditional foods and influencing them to adopt healthy eating habits and lifestyle. Also to prepare God's people for the work of service in their community. This in turn will have a positive impact on reducing illness caused by bad eating habits. This will reduce hospital bills and will limit the cost of food in communities, improving the lives of participants, their families, friends, neighbours, church family and patients.



Isabel, front centre, and the Healthy Living team with programme participants.

### **Jonathan's work: Teaching at Thekwane High School**

I teach A-Level Mathematics and Further Mathematics at Thekwane, a Methodist boarding school near Plumtree in the Matebeleland South



Thekwane High School Choir performs at Prize Day

Province of Zimbabwe. The school has many challenges, but has recorded a number of successes too, including improving academic results and sporting and other achievements.

Securing a good water supply has been a major task facing the school and community, this being a semi-arid part of Zimbabwe. Currently a new pipeline is being laid to bring water from a source to the east of us.

### **Our local church: Hillside Methodist**

We are very much involved with the life of our church at Hillside in Bulawayo. Isabel is currently teacher to the new members of the Ruwadzano/Manyano and she is also a regular member of the Praise and Worship Team which leads our Sunday morning services. I am busy each week with the Sunday School (also known as Junior Church, if you like). We usually have about 40 to 50 children and from 1 to 4 teachers and helpers. I am also serving my last year as a church steward, which involves attending lots of meetings.



Me, riding on a fire engine at church.

## In the Garden: Looking like Swadlincote in the 20th century

The garden has been looking a bit like 20th century Swad just lately. I bought about a dozen trees and so they all need holes to be dug, resulting in about a dozen spoil heaps too, of course. Of the more established trees, some of the palms seem to be struggling, but others were healthy enough to be pruned early on Sunday March 20th and the branches waved vigorously in church that morning.



## Wildlife: Some of it in the wrong place!



Recently, as I drove home from work, I saw a pair of ground hornbills. Then further along, a tortoise crossed the road in front of me. Then a kudu ran across the road as I approached it. At the side of the road, I saw a tree full of vultures. Swifts or swallows were swooping and diving in front of the car. That evening, just after sunset, there was a bush baby on our gate. Next morning, I saw many

large birds of prey as I was driving to work and some baboons sitting at the roadside, grooming each other. A pair of storks flew across the road and over me. The usual selection of domestic animals strayed into the road at various points.

All of this is well and good, but that afternoon as I was sitting doing some filing on my laptop a sound disturbed me. I stood up to see a long thin snake, a cobra, in the corner of the room, with its head raised, looking at me: That's now too much wildlife!

## Life in Zimbabwe: Drought; food shortage

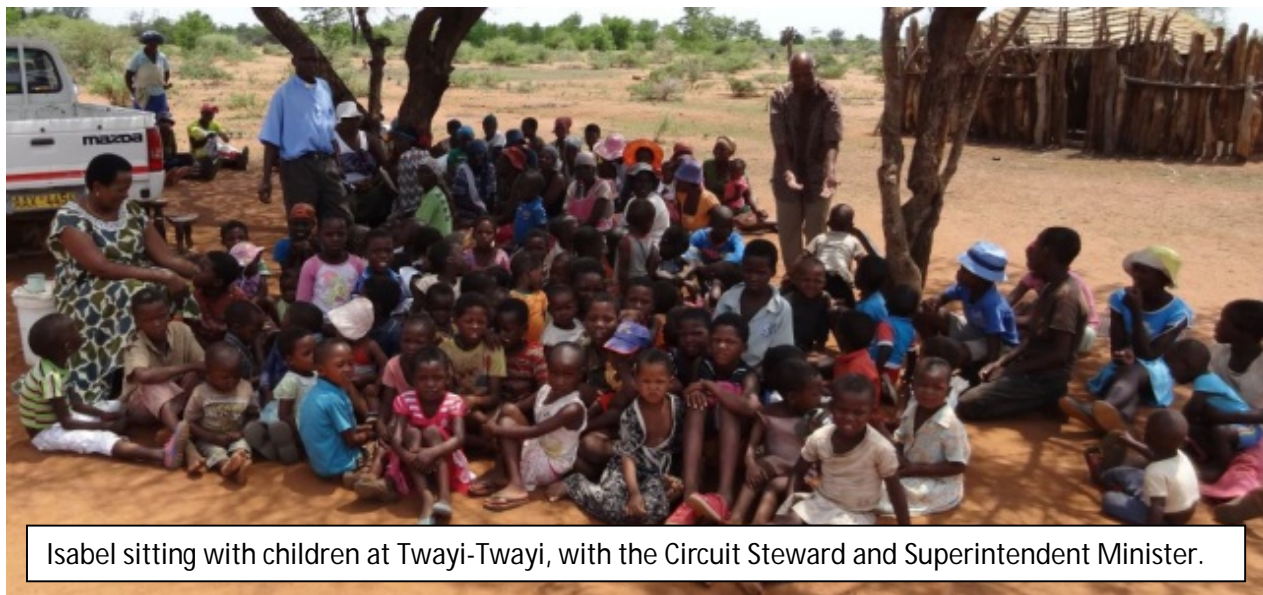


The major issue affecting Zimbabwe as a whole, and Matebeleland South in particular, is the disastrous rainy season. It started very badly with almost no rain at all. Then we had quite good rains in February and March, so several people around the province told me that they had planted late-season short-season varieties of small grains in the hope of getting at least some sort of a harvest.

Last year's rainy season wasn't very good either, so

there is an urgent need for food in the rural communities. We are running a feeding scheme at Thekwane Primary School, giving 160 children a cooked meal every school

day, prepared by a team of local volunteers. We are also providing food for a feeding scheme in the remote community of Twayi-Twayi, where 95 young children are being given a daily cooked meal and basic education, again with local volunteers, including a pre-school teacher, running the scheme.



Isabel sitting with children at Twayi-Twayi, with the Circuit Steward and Superintendent Minister.

A typical week at work?: There's no such thing!

As I write, it's still school holidays, but here's a school week extracted from the diary:

**Sunday:** The third in a series of three at Sunday School: the previous weeks' themes were "Hearing the Voice of God" and "Listen and Obey"; today our theme is "Trusting Jesus". Meanwhile Isabel is part of the team leading worship in the 'Senior Church' (my name for those left behind when 'Junior Church' go out for our session). Isabel is also a



Sunday School children at Hillside Society.

vestry steward today. After the service we jump into the car and drive to another of the churches in our circuit where three new Local Preachers are being commissioned.

**Monday:** I get up at 4:15am and drive to work, counting the police roadblocks: not so many today, (it's a bit early for them); the record is eight on this 120 kilometre trip. I go into the house, warily looking around for snakes or other wildlife, and as I hold the door handle a wasp stings me on the thumb! Anyone passing by must think that I am trying to do a traditional Kalanga dance, because I start stamping my feet and flapping my arm, before running to immerse the thumb in cold water. It swells up and continues to itch for several days. Lessons as usual at school. Isabel works from home on Mondays, on the phone or visiting.

**Tuesday:** After lessons, I drive back to Bulawayo and in the evening Isabel and I attend our weekly Bible Study and Fellowship group. Our usual programme is replaced today by a discussion on the church's finances (uh-oh!).

**Wednesday:** I have arranged for a colleague to cover my classes for today so that I can go with Isabel to the meeting of the Matthew Rusike Children's Home Bulawayo Management Committee, which is being held at Mzinyathi, south of Bulawayo. We have some income from renting out our building and we agree to use some of it to start a feeding scheme for the local orphans.

One of the children at Mzinyathi enjoying a cooked meal.



**Thursday:** Isabel is back in the office, next door to the Bishop's office and in the city centre, so in addition to other work, she sees some destitute people who pop in for a sympathetic hearing and some food. She also offers a shoulder to cry on and help and advice for girls and women who have been abused. Meanwhile, I am back at school. I have just received a new Further Mathematics textbook that I ordered and I get to grips with planning how to incorporate some of the material into my teaching of this subject, which is now becoming established.

**Friday:** Lessons are cancelled for the day, because it is Inter-House Athletics. I am Chief



Children at Sigola.

Recorder, with a team of teachers and student teachers as my assistants. I tell them that they must refer to me as "Chief" if they need to ask for anything. Only one decides to play along with my sense of humour on this, (but that's enough!) Isabel has gone out of town to Sigola to visit the orphans and the volunteers who look after them. She distributes exercise books, pens and pencils and then

gives them a treat of bread and Mazoe orange squash.

**Saturday:** Back now in Hillside Circuit, Isabel and I spend the day together at the Leadership Training Workshop which goes well with plenty of worthwhile discussion. Back home in the evening, we talk to Tony, Stephen and Susannah via skype, before calling it a day.



Isabel (2nd from R), participating in group discussion at circuit workshop.