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Dear Family and Friends

Psalm 37:19 In times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.

The New Year began in Mwandu and we visited Nalolo where a new Hospital is being built and which will be under UCZ Management, then Sefula School where we dropped off beans and learning materials and finally a visit to the Musaada family in Mayukwayukwa.

The next big event at work was the Annual Staff Retreat where we were encouraged as redeemed children of God to serve one another with good works and thankful hearts. During this time Keith was kept busy with parents seeking school places for their children in Grades 8 and 10 at our UCZ Schools. Our schools are outstanding in both the quantity and quality of passes in public examinations.

We are both Committee Members of the Lusaka Caledonian Society and enjoy the country dancing once a week they organise. This year Keith was invited to give the Immortal Memory at the Lusaka Burns Supper.



Ida started holding a series of fortnightly meetings of a number of UCZ Consultants and Doctors with the aim of establishing a UCZ Polyclinic at the new Headquarters. Sulota and she have opened a small sick-bay/clinic at the new Headquarters and will work to develop it further in the coming year. It is hoped that this Clinic will become an Income Generator for the other Health Institutions.

She has also held Board Meetings at Lubwa, Mbereshi, Chipembi, Mwandu and Kafue

Keith then set out for the first phase of School Board Meetings in Muchinga Northern & Luapula. At Senga Hill he was joined by the General Secretary and Former Synod bishop for a School Retreat. After addressing the pupils the staff met together for a time of fellowship. The themes covered were Servant Leadership, Obedience and Adherence to Policy.

In February Keith flew to Nairobi to take part in the first Meeting of the Africa Methodist Council. Its theme was Wesleyans Shaping the Future of Africa. This would be done through evangelism, social action and personal holiness. A colleague, he met on the Communique Committee is a Zimbabwean, now working for the Methodist Church in South Africa. We both taught at the same school at Sakubva, in Mutare, Zimbabwe but I was there 8 years before her! Amazing the connections you find.

Churches in Zambia have been lending support and facilitating the process of national dialogue and political reconciliation but the UCZ have withdrawn from the national body as it was felt the process was not neutral, even-handed or non-partisan enough. There have been a number of By-elections recently. For one the Minister of Health passed through Mwandi Mission Hospital on his way to Sesheke and after an on site inspection and conversation with Ida and other staff, he reversed the closure that the Health Professional Council had summarily, unfairly and unilaterally pronounced. It was deliberately targeting Mission Hospitals and fining and closing them for the flimsiest and most ludicrous of grounds. Mbereshi was also similarly affected.

After complaints and a change of personnel at the top the HPCZ came for a second visit which coincidentally coincided with a visit from the Zambian President and the Minister of Health. Ida was able again to speak with both the Minister and President.

With both of us being Secretaries for Health and Education our institutions have been seriously affected by the severe financial difficulties the Government and country are facing. The Government has overstretched itself on both infrastructure and recurrent expenditure. Much of the available resources are being used to pay back interest, bonds or international debts leaving very little for salaries grants or other Ministry budgets. With the result some workers have not been paid since November; other civil servants are receiving their salaries up to three weeks late. The Zambian Post Office cannot pay its staff and is closed. It is a similar story with school and hospital grants. Our institutions have been told to rely on their own income-generation as little will be forth-coming from the Ministry of Finance.

Simultaneously, the Ministry of Education ordered a large reduction in user fees for both Boarding and Day Schools. As National Secretary for the Education Secretaries Forum Keith is trying with Catholic colleagues to arrange an emergency ESF Meeting with the Permanent Secretary to seek clarification on how the Directive will affect the Grant-Aided (Mission School) sector.

In light of all this it was a great blessing to receive the two crates from St Andrews Presbytery for the hospital and schools. The contents being distributed as we go for the Board Meetings in Mwandi and our other institutions. Our grateful thanks to all who contributed to this, who helped to pack and who organised and paid for the transport. It could not have been possible either, without the enthusiasm and commitment from Ronnie in the East Neuk and Muriel at Hope Park and Martyrs.



Keith setting out for some of his Board Meetings.

Hope Park and Martyrs have also donated a Thermocoagulator to the Cervical Cancer Unit in Mwandi. The first patient to receive treatment was a 24 year old lady with pre cancerous cells. Patients no longer need to be referred to Livingstone for treatment. (7% of the referrals only accessed further treatment previously) Ida has done a Concept paper and is looking for potential Donors to role out a similar program to all our other Health Institutions. Zambia records 3000 Cervical Cancer patients a year. It is mainly in the City's where screening is done so the majority of patients present with Cancer when it is too late.



A few weeks ago we moved from the old Synod Headquarters to the new modern Office Complex, called United Church House at Woodlands. A major cause for rejoicing is that Health no longer squats in Education but now has her own desk!

While we were spared the ravages of the recent Cyclone Idai in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe we have not escaped from environmental and climatic change in Zambia. While the North of the country has had good rainfall, too much in places with flooding and the washing away of two strategic bridges, the South and West has been hit by a drought. It was sad to see the shrunken dried up maize in the fields as I visited the UCZ schools in these Provinces . In Mwandia, it is reckoned that there has been a 95% harvest loss. As a stop-gap Ruairidh through World Renew is working with the Government to try to help 2000 of the most vulnerable to September, this will rise to 4500 then for 7 months to see them through to the next harvest.

This poverty and environmental damage have their roots in the greed of exploitative individuals with selfish motives, whose drive is directed towards profit and not human need. Technology and skills used primarily for this, corruption and profiteering rather than towards protecting and preserving the air, water, land and energy sources that are necessary to sustain life on earth.

As we enter into Holy Week we remember his wounds bring healing, his pain - relief, his suffering brings freedom and the cross and his resurrection - victory.

Wishing you all a blessed Easter.

With love

Keith Ida & Mubita