

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District – Revd Dr Julian M. Pursehouse

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‘Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’ (Rev. 3:22)

Dear Friends,

Apparently, there is an African proverb which says, *‘Listening is the most difficult skill to learn and the most important to have!’*

Our recent trip to Harare West District, Zimbabwe, has taught me the value of this African saying, for even before we left the UK, the members of our party were united in their conviction, that first and foremost we were there to listen, observe, and learn from our sisters and brothers in the Zimbabwean Methodist Church. Over a period of two weeks, we travelled the length and breadth of Harare West District, visiting projects, schools, orphanages, circuits rural and urban, and finally participating as guests in the District Synod. To say that it was an amazing trip feels like an understatement and I suspect that all of us are still processing the experience.

At this point in time, I would want to name three perspectives that became very evident to me, and they are characteristics that I have carried back with me to the United Kingdom. I continue to ponder these marks of God’s grace and to contemplate their place within the practise of Christian discipleship and the communal life of the Church.

Firstly, there was evidence of ***persistent and faithful prayer***. Wherever we travelled and whomever we met, we were invited to pray and bless, the people, the church, the project in question. There was also the deep privilege and knowledge that we were being faithfully held in the thoughts and prayers of our Zimbabwean hosts!

Secondly, there was unambiguous evidence of a ***joyful confidence in the Gospel***, even amid real and obvious challenges, hardship, and adversity. As we speak, the nation of Zimbabwe is facing huge challenges, through climate change, drought, crop failure, instability of the currency and significant levels of economic migration of the population to surrounding nations. The pressures that this places upon the Church are enormous and we witnessed some of the places where this is most evident. However, even in the face of these challenges, the Church is pressing forward with plans, projects, mission, and ministry, with a confident assurance that God’s grace will carry them through this crisis.

Thirdly and finally, we were the grateful recipients of ***radical hospitality***, for wherever we travelled, we were met with water and food. This is an accepted and expected element of Zimbabwean culture. Over the course of many years, I had heard fabled stories of African hospitality from ministers and returning mission partners, but it was quite something to experience this at first hand, as a visitor from the United Kingdom.

If listening is the most difficult skill but the one most needed, then I am glad to have listened well whilst being in Zimbabwe and I think I heard God’s invitation to be attentive to these marks of grace: ***persistent and faithful prayer, a joyful confidence in the Gospel and radical hospitality***. Now that we have returned to the UK, I want to invite you to be attentive to these things too.

With peace and blessings,

Julian