

2009 PROBATIONERS AUGUST CONFERENCE/TRIP

Round trip: JHB to Polokwane, Bulawayo, Lusaka, Harare, Masvingo & JHB. By Eddie Germiquet (Ministry Secretary)

A new format for the 2 week Post Academic Training (PAT) Conference was envisaged for 2009. Instead of being the usual residential conference, a round trip by bus from Johannesburg to Lusaka and back was organized. Stopovers and exposure to the ministry of churches along the way was the order of the day.

In the light of this "traveling conference" the theme for this PAT Conference was "The Journey Narrative of Luke-Acts". Each Probationer, for his/her devotions, had to prepare a message that entailed some aspect pertaining to the early Christians being known as "Followers of the Way."

The question that we repeatedly asked ourselves wherever we stopped was: "What do we see God doing?" This question was posed at 3 levels.

- i) With us on an individual basis.
- ii) With the Probationers, as a group.
- iii) With the wider church i.e. UPCSA and wider.



We left Johannesburg on Monday 10th August for Polokwane where Rev Diane Vorster accommodated us in various homes. The challenges facing the ministry in that city were outlined to us. Rev Vorster answered the question about what God is doing by affirming that God is breaking down pride so that people can reflect His image. After morning devotions and a healing service on Tuesday 11th August, we headed for the border and Bulawayo.

The Probationers at the Central Offices of the UPCSA on the morning of the departure

At Bulawayo we visited David Livingstone School, under the auspices and spiritual guidance of the UPCSA. Rev Hlangaiso Moyo, the Chaplain of the school, shared his responsibilities and personal experiences. He focused on his special bible verse: Lamentations 3:22-23 "God's mercies are new every morning because God is faithful." He spends time in study and prayer every morning, before the clamor for his attention sets in.



Rev Moyo addressing the Probationers on the David Livingstone School premises

We then visited Rev Stan Chatikobo at St Andrew's Hillside. He shared his privilege at being able to minister to people, both black and white, and like the second part of Isaiah, he brings a word of encouragement.

Rev Reggie Mudenda shared how the economic meltdown has affected the burial of people. As government mortuaries in Zimbabwe are virtually non functional, the funeral service and burial of people has to be done within a day of a person's death.



Thursday 13th August we arrived at Livingstone and were welcomed by the Moderator Rt Rev Chris Mkwandawire. We learned about the first Presbyterian Church planted in Zambia in 1923, largely as a result of the church spreading where the railway line went.

The Moderator, Rev Chris Mkwandawire, addressing the Probationers on the premises of the first Presbyterian Church in Zambia

For most Probationers this was also the first opportunity to view one of the wonders of the world, the Victoria Falls. After also fitting in a visit to Lubasi, a home for abandoned children or children with no parents, we headed for Lusaka where we spent from Friday evening to Tuesday (18th) morning.



Rev Challa Habasila, from the Copperbelt, stayed with us at the Justo Mwale Theological University College and guided us wherever we needed to go. We were able to have a guided tour of the College where many of our students are trained. We had presentations from various ministers and we were reminded that the root of hope for us all is that *ministry is God's work*. We are offered the privilege of joining in God's work, if we have the humility of a servant's heart.

Rev Jane Nyirongo reminded us that God is already at work in the congregations where we serve, through the people he has gifted.

Mrs Judy Mkwandawire shared her experience of being a minister's spouse. She drew the attention of the Probationers to her experience that when the minister speaks the truth to the congregation, a reaction may set in which is directed at the spouse rather than the minister. She also advised ministers not to bring their counseling skills into the home. Rather, a spouse needs to be loved!



(Rev Baldwin Kandinda with words of welcome to Justo Mwale Theol. University College)

Rev Allan Mchulu, minister at St Columba's Lusaka shared the emphasis of his ministry being taken from Acts 6: 1 - 3. The "Word of God" is not to be neglected.

Rev Dillon Zulu shared on the challenges he experiences in Lundazi, which is a rural congregation close to the Malawi border.

Some of his challenges are:

- i. witchcraft and the grip of fear it has over people.
- ii. polygamy and the many problems it causes.
- iii. long distances and poor road systems. Dillon travels extensively by bicycle and takes a blanket, candle, bible and soap with him.
- iv. Dillon not only experiences the isolation from friends because of distance but also a sense of being "forgotten" by fellow ministers. He values it greatly when an sms is sent.

On Sunday 16th August all the Probationers were taken to one service or another in Lusaka.

A moving experience for us all, was the visit on Monday 17th Aug. to the rural outstation of Kasenga. We were welcomed by the 75 years old evangelist Peter Mwale. He challenged the prospective ministers to not only go where others had already worked, but like the early missionaries, they should also go to places that are "nowhere." We met for a time of sharing and prayer in a small mud walled church with a sparsely covered grass roof. The communion table also entirely made of dried mud. We were then taken to Peter Mwale's home where he explained and demonstrated the art of bee-keeping which, amongst other things, supplements his income.



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Welcome by Rev S Mtonga to the UPCSA Church in Kasenga

Later we visited Kanyama Congregation, in one of the poorest townships in Lusaka, where our Probationer Lazarus Chirwa ministers. Their "Macedonia Choir" welcomed us over. Despite all the social consequences of poverty, a spirit of hope, faith and love prevails in this congregation.

Before leaving Lusaka for Harare, the Probationers shared that God was truly opening their eyes and minds to seeing God at work with *all people*. A further testimony was that God is taking us away from the tensions of former "this" or former "that" to being a united UPCSA.

Tuesday 18th August involved the trip from Lusaka to Harare via the Kariba Dam. The walk from the Zambian border post over the mighty wall, to the Zimbabwean border post was another first for most Probationers. Ministry often involves the crossing of borders!



In Harare, Rev Max Chigwida, Mr L. Kuvheya and Mr G. Manyangadze shared on the impact and challenges of the Zimbabwean situation over the past 10 years.

Rev Chigwida shared on areas such as the Constitution, Economy, Agronomy and general Infrastructure of the country. For Max the sign of hope that still remains, is the presence of God's gift of the Victoria Falls. They are beautiful and majestic and they were there long before anyone saw them and they will continue to be there long into the future. The Government of National Unity may not be perfect, but at least something is moving. There is hope!

(Rev Max Chigwida explaining the complexities of the Zimbabwean situation)



Mr Manyangadze gave an incisive overview of the tensions and mistrust and suspicions that infect the church when the society is manipulated by crafty politicians. No-one is able to know who to trust anymore yet all sit together in a service to worship God!

Our visit to Masvingo on the 20th August was a fitting conclusion to all the presentations and experiences. The Elders of the Masvingo congregation spent 2 hours bearing testimony to the fruits of the ministry of Rev Don Enslin who died on 3rd December 2000 in what appeared to have been a car accident. The recurring phrase concerning Don is that he was a man of vision (*God's vision*). The testimony concerning the legacy that Don Enslin has left, was a moving realization of the reality of the resurrection and a fitting climax to Luke's "*Journey Narrative*". The journey *to* Jerusalem (in the gospel) changes to the journey *away* from Jerusalem (in Acts), on the day of the resurrection. The two men meet the resurrected Lord for the first time, while walking *away* from Jerusalem.



Austen, the Evangelist trained under Don Enslin's ministry. Still walking tall with the Lord!

We were left reflecting on what possible legacy and signs of the resurrection we would leave behind, after our departure from this world.

After our return to JHB, all Probationers were once again scattered far and wide as they returned, tired but inspired, to their various places of ministry.

Probationers of 2009:

- Jaco **Bester** (Alfred County, Port Shepstone)
- Lazarus **Chirwa** (Kanyama, Lusaka)
- Steve **Dunnet** (4Ways United, JHB)
- Natalie **Hayes** (St Stephen's, Vanderbijlpark)
- Ndumiso **Khalipa** (St James, PE)
- Thando **Mpambani** (St Andrews, Kimberley)
- Garikai **Mufanebadza** (Mutare, Zimbabwe)
- Solomon **Surumwe** (St Marks, JHB)
- Shona **Van der Lingen** (Vryheid)
- Vuyani **Zepe** (Madadeni, Newcastle)
- Sibusiso **Zungu** (Umlazi, Durban)
- Maurice **Matyityi** (Parys. Completing PAT from 2008)

