

MORAVIAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

HOME AND OVERSEAS

FEBRUARY 2020

World Day of Prayer Service on Friday 6th March 2020 (written by the Christian women of Zimbabwe)

When asked about the country of Zimbabwe many people will think of historical Rhodesia, of the turbulence of independence and then of the rule of Robert Mugabe. At the same time, there may be memories of violence and bloodshed, of the killing and eviction of white farmers and further unrest as the country struggled to assert itself. These are all still quite fresh in our minds having followed the various news stories in the media. It has been a challenge to prepare for this year's service, to see things through the eyes and experiences of the women living there and try to understand their struggles to keep their families together and hold on to a hope for a better future.

Zimbabwe's Story

It was in the 1890's when Cecil John Rhodes arrived and saw the rich natural resources of the country which became Southern Rhodesia. With his British South Africa Company he set about colonising – at a huge cost. Thousands of lives were lost during a systematic purge of the indigenous population in order to dispossess them of their land and extract its richness. Then, when Britain refused to grant independence as mass nationalism grew in the 1960s, all resistance was violently quashed and Ian Smith, as Prime Minister, declared independence – under white minority rule.

In 1979 Ian Smith formed a unity government with the African National Council, and the country was christened Zimbabwe-Rhodesia.

In 1980 Zimbabwe became an independent nation led by Robert Mugabe. What high hopes the people had for a better future! But problems and grievances continued and living standards deteriorated. In 2000, they embarked on a land reform programme with the aim of redistributing land, resources and wealth which people felt had historically been taken from them. This was the time when white farmers were forced off the land and there were horrific stories of killings and brutality, with a subsequent native take-over for which they were ill-prepared.

The ensuing years have been of a deteriorating economic situation, huge inflation and continuing unrest. Most recently in 2018 when elections were held, despite contested results, Mnangagwa became the newly elected President (with only a 50.8% majority). The hopes of the people have been revived and, with the right leadership, the country has indeed so much to offer in its wealth of natural resources.

The reality of life today

With galloping inflation and resulting poverty, for the average family life is a constant struggle. For the women, responsibility to care for their means trying to sell what little they can grow from a small vegetable plot in order to feed their families from day to day. Following the severe drought, this alone is a mammoth challenge. The men are quite often absent – seeking a better life and work elsewhere – whilst Zimbabwe also has the highest incidence of AIDs in southern Africa. This, together with cervical cancer and the continuing threat of typhoid and cholera, means the reality of the early death for many women, resulting in older siblings frequently acting as heads of their families. Despite so much reliance falling on the women, they still face many barriers – to education, of early marriage, domestic violence and gender discrimination. Combined with poor obstetric and gynaecological care they have so much to pray for.

Christianity in Zimbabwe

The majority of the population is Christian and the churches have played a large part in Zimbabwean life, both in the past and present day. British missionaries were present in Zimbabwe even before the establishment of colonial rule there. They built schools, hospitals, churches and small industries, many of which are still seen today. During all the recent unrest the churches and ecumenical movements monitored the political transition, organised vigils for peace and promoted peaceable talks between groups and leaders.

The World Day of Prayer in Zimbabwe was begun in 1962 when a Methodist minister and a Salvation Army Major formed the first interdenominational prayer meeting. These two women stood up for social justice and for women's rights. The movement has grown and has spread from churches to schools, to universities and to girls and women's organisations around Zimbabwe. They take prayerful action very seriously, providing childcare, women's support groups, foodbanks and clothing in some of the most rural areas.



The Theme of 'Rise! Take your mat and walk'

is one of reconciliation, peace and love with the underlying one of hope for the future. The women of Zimbabwe ask us to uphold them in our prayers as they struggle to make themselves heard above the noise of political unrest and turmoil; to answer the question of Jesus: 'Do you want to be made well?'



This is my last paper as the Moravian representative on the World Day of Prayer national committee. I had been hoping to be able to name my successor and hand over to her, but as yet no one has been appointed by the PEC.

To my knowledge this, sadly, is the first time that we have not been a presence. Over the last nine years, I have 'grown into the job' and it will be something I will sorely miss in the next months. Being involved in anything ecumenical can always be enriching and enlightening, rewarding for ourselves and for others when we work together and share many things together, united as women and by faith - whatever our differences in practise. I will always value the friendships I have formed and the times spent learning from each other as a member of the national committee.

I am happy to talk to anyone who may like to find out more about what it involves and I urge all of you to pray for someone to take up the call for our continued Moravian participation.

Wendy Hopcroft