

FROM THE PASTOR'S PEN



March 2010



Zimbabwe

FIRST FRUITS MISSION

February 10 through February 17

Troy J. Onsager

Two years ago, when we prayed for Josh and Virginia on their last Sunday with us – many of you came up to me after the service and said, “if it were ever possible for our church to partner with them on a mission trip to Africa, we would heartily support it!”

Well, half a year later, Josh and Virginia, moved by the poverty and the starvation in particular villages surrounding the capital, were moved to begin using their tithe money to feed hungry people. A connection was established with a village and conversations began with their small group bible study here at the church concerning support. This blossomed into a church-wide effort to send money monthly to the Giddens', who would, in turn, purchase food-packs and deliver them to the church. We called this mission: First Fruits Zimbabwe.

A year later, one of the mission elders, Dick Nelson, approached Jeff Jarchow (who has facilitated the First Fruit ministry from the beginning) and myself and encouraged us to take a trip to Zimbabwe, to see how the mission was working on the ground, to encourage and support the Giddens (who have had difficulty connecting with a local church), to explore new opportunities to serve and to see if a future mission trip there would be feasible and helpful.

Jeff had been desiring to go to Africa for some time now (you can read this in his article inside) and I had been deeply desiring such an opportunity after the years of exposure to the need in Africa that I learned about through the Global Church Conference we partner with at First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley. In fact, the former senior pastor of FPCB, Mark Labberton had encouraged me early on during

my time in Escalon to do what he has done - to make a yearly habit of getting overseas to visit the poorest and the most troubled regions of the world and to enter into their struggle. He said I would not be an effective Christian pastor otherwise.

At this year's Global Church Conference, entitled “Overflowing Joy and Generosity in a World of Pain and Scarcity,” Greg Foulke was able to join our mission team in attendance. At the closing Question and Answer session, we both listened to the powerful appeal of Mr. David Zac Nringiye *Assistant Bishop, Diocese of Kampala, Uganda*, who, when asked the question about what idols he sees in the American Church, responded:

Safety and security. This is the antithesis of the Gospel... following Jesus is not safe!

I sometimes find prayer as a cop out when you actually could get on with it. I know that this church [FPC Berkeley] organizes trips to the Congo. Stop praying about it. Go. Just stop praying. Why do you need to pray about it? Your brothers are experiencing it. Go and see them. Make the choice to go to the risky places – you will meet Jesus in a way you have never known him.

God is speaking, how else do you want God to speak? I have a struggle with prayer, prayer, prayer, when God is speaking. Get out of here. Save money. If you have it, just take the next flight.

His words floored us and Greg leaned over to me and said: “I know you and Jeff are going to Zimbabwe in the spring. If you're willing to have one more, please let me go.” Realizing that God was speaking to Greg, (*how else do you want God to speak?*), and knowing that Greg's organizational skills facilitating many mission trips through Habitat for Humanity (see his article inside) would be of essential value for us in considering a future mission trip to a country with very few mission organizations presently on the ground – well, the decision, quite frankly, was easy. Now, a year and a half after the Giddens left, we're sending three to Zimbabwe.

One of the caveats the good bishop gave us was that the church in America needs to move beyond its inability to listen. Putting it all together, this is what we learned at this conference: the church in Africa doesn't just want resources (though they desperately need them), they want partnerships, and they want churches who are willing to listen to them, to enter into their struggle, rather than simply prescribe for them what we think is best. In many ways, on this trip, we will be going to enter into their struggle and listen to them.

To be clear to our church—the funds used for this reconnaissance trip are not from the monies you have donated to the First Fruits Ministry to Zimbabwe. We also have not requested permission from Session to engage in extensive fund-raising from the trip – the majority of it will be raised personally from key mission partners here and elsewhere. If God opens the door for a future mission trip to Zimbabwe, then at that point we will ask for your partnership – for it will be an extension of First Fruits, our partnership in ministry with the people of Zimbabwe.

What we do ask of you is that you pray for us now as we prepare for this trip and as we go on this trip. Pray for the Giddens. Pray for the people of Zimbabwe. Continue your support of First Fruits. As for the three of us – well, we're just taking the next flight.

Zimbabwe

E P C F I R S T F R U I T S D O N A T I O N S :

- From April 2009 through December 2009: \$12,236.00
- Foodpacks Delivered: 585 (65 per month—2,000 lbs per month)

Zimbabwe

The Call To Go, Listen, and Partner

By Troy
Onsager

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