

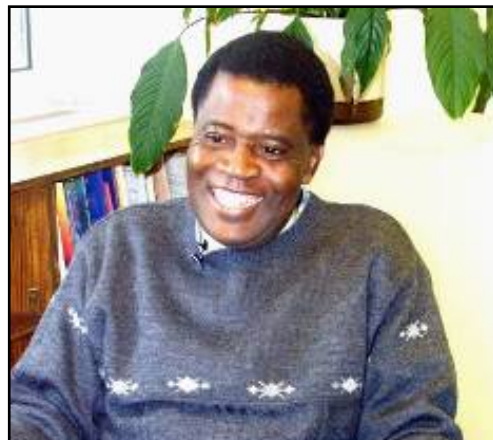
LATEST NEWS # 458, November 27, 2007

The following news concerns Zimbabwe.

Registered users of the UBS Intranet can find more news about Bible Societies' work under *Latest News* in the Communications section

‘Creating opportunities at the edge of chaos’ in Zimbabwe

ZIMBABWE — “Our warehouse is completely empty of Shona* Bibles,” said Edward Mutema, General Secretary of the Bible Society of Zimbabwe. “We had between 60,000 and 70,000 delivered last year but every single one has gone.”



In a country where most people cannot afford even the most basic necessities of life it seems almost unbelievable that Scriptures are selling so fast. And yet the Bible Society is being inundated with requests from churches and individuals for more Scriptures.

“People are making big sacrifices in order to buy Scriptures,” commented Mr Mutema. “It doesn’t make sense but that is exactly what is happening on the ground. Rural people cannot afford anything, but city churches are buying copies and taking them out to their sister churches in rural areas because they know people are suffering and need hope.



“We only wish we had enough stock to satisfy this great hunger. A consignment of 15,000 Shona Bibles is on its way from China and is expected to arrive in time for Christmas, but so many more are needed. Ideally, we need about 150,000 Shona Bibles a year.”

The Bible Society has also run out of Scripture-based HIV/AIDS materials, including the *Good Samaritan* booklet and video. More videos have been ordered and the Society is hoping to start printing the booklets locally. They are much sought-after resources in a country with one of the world’s highest rates of HIV/AIDS prevalence and the lowest life expectancy – Zimbabweans can only expect to live to 37. But HIV/AIDS is just one of many problems facing the country.



“Zimbabwe is in a state of chaos – political, social and economic,” said Mr Mutema. “People are really struggling to survive – even finding food or clean water is a problem. But they are holding onto their faith in God more than ever before, which has been so encouraging and inspiring to see.”

Over the past few months Mr Mutema has been touring churches in the UK with the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) to raise awareness and support for Bible work in Zimbabwe. The theme of his talks is ‘Creating opportunities at the edge of chaos’ because he wants to encourage people to think positively about the situation and even to see it as a window of opportunity.

“Even people in the most desperate circumstances are optimistic and that is because they are trusting in God – that he will turn the situation around and bring good things for Zimbabwe,” he noted. “We need to follow their example. If we do not have hope, we’re finished, so I am asking people in the UK and other countries to pray positively rather than focusing on the bad things.

“Wherever Jesus went he created opportunities, bringing good things from bad. We need to provide Bibles for Zimbabwe so that people can read those stories about Jesus and hold onto the promises in Scripture.

“BFBS’s Scripture passage for their Bible Sunday celebrations in October was taken from Romans 15. Verse four says, ‘For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.’ (NIV) These are the three essential ingredients for Zimbabwe right now – endurance, encouragement and hope – and they can only be found in Scripture.”

Mr Mutema also spoke of the commitment of the staff of the Bible Society who are continuing to work in very difficult circumstances.

“The situation in our country has gone beyond what we thought possible. The inflation rate is soaring. In October it climbed to nearly 15,000 per cent, up from 8,000 per cent in September. Prices increase daily and the average salary is no longer enough.

“The cost of transport to and from work outweighs most people’s salaries so many people have had to leave their jobs. But our staff are continuing to go to work. They get up before 5.30am in order to catch the state-sponsored buses, which cost about half the normal rate, but they have to queue as there is a huge demand. Then, when the office closes at 4.30pm, they have to queue again, sometimes for hours, in order to catch the bus home. They often only get home between 7pm and 8pm.

“In addition to that, it is now very hard to find food so people have to constantly be vigilant. If they hear that a particular market has some goods, they have to immediately dash over there because otherwise they would not have food for their families.”

**The vast majority of Zimbabweans speak Shona as their first language.*



Photos (from top to bottom):

(All photographs by Bible Society of Zimbabwe/ Edward Mutema, unless otherwise indicated)

ZIM06DJ-5: Edward Mutema, General Secretary of the Bible Society of Zimbabwe. [Photo: United Bible Societies/Julian Phillips]

ZIM07DJ-2: A delighted customer who was able to purchase some Scripture booklets at Bible House in Harare. There is a huge demand for Scriptures despite severe economic hardship in Zimbabwe but the Bible Society is struggling to meet the needs.

ZIM07DJ-1: Angela Mutakura, who is HIV-positive, reads her Bible outside an HIV/AIDS conference in Harare. Zimbabwe has one of the world's highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates.

ZIM07DJ-3: Wilson Matongo, Business Manager of the Bible Society of Zimbabwe, stands by the empty shelves in the bookshop in Bible House. There is a huge demand for Scriptures despite severe economic deprivation in Zimbabwe but the Bible Society is struggling to meet the needs.

ZIM07DJ-4: A young Zimbabwean girl.

For further information please contact comms@ubs-wsc.org

