

# Zambia Newsletter

Zambia Missions

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The coronavirus is spreading throughout Africa, although the number of cases continues to be less than expected. The pandemic is having a serious effect on the economy of Zambia. Nevertheless, our Bible College continues to operate as normal as we have managed to maintain containment since March. Our Primary School, however, remains closed as the government has ordered all schools closed since March.

## Report: Bible College

The Bible College was allowed to reopen in late-April (after about 8 weeks). We resumed classes and have been able to return to normal operations. We will conclude the second term and begin the third term in August which will allow us to complete the school year by the end of the year.



As I mentioned in the last Newsletter, we were able to replace Sis. Boniface (who retired for health reasons) with two of our teacher's wives. Sis. Violet Mbelelwa (pictured on the left) and Sis. Fridah Mwale (right) have now assumed the teaching responsibilities of the women's program. It would appear they are doing a great job as the Director of the Bible College told me that he is seeing great improvement in the spiritual and marital life of the female students.

## COVID-19 and the Zambian Economy

It is difficult to assess the spread of the coronavirus in Zambia. As in the USA, the pandemic has become a political issue. Reports about the virus have become infrequent, and we have reasons to believe that the reports are not accurate.

The government may also not be fully aware of what is going on within the country. Zambia does not have adequate testing capabilities (especially in the rural areas) and like most African countries, the median age of Zambia is quite young (meaning that many people may become infected without ever knowing it). There are reports of dead bodies being brought to the hospitals and morgues whose cause of death is unknown.

Zambia has several things working in its favor: youthful age and lower level of travel (people don't travel very far from their homes). However, Africans are a group-oriented society (socialization is much higher). Trying to get Zambians to practice social distancing would be like tell Americans not to watch TV. Despite all the warnings from the government, Zambians are not practicing social distancing at all!

One thing is very clear. The pandemic (along with the national debt) is seriously hurting the Zambian economy. Food prices have increased dramatically. The cost of electricity has tripled (with power outages for 8-12 hours per day). And, people are not getting paid on time. The kwacha has fallen 30% in value since January (which has increased inflation). The U.N. has predicted that the number of people in Africa in extreme poverty will double this year due to the pandemic (from 37 to 71 million), an increase not seen since the Great Depression.

## Our Response to the Economic Consequences.

We have taken several steps to address the situation in Zambia. (1) We have switched from electricity to butane gas for cooking, and we are giving our staff one cylinder of gas per quarter. (2) We have stopped charging our staff half-price for the mealie-meal that we give them each month. (3) We are buying mealie-meal to give to some of the families of our Primary School children and families that are providing care for the children in the Kerin's Kids program. We invite you to contribute to this effort, if you would like to provide food for families and children in Zambia [mail check to Zambia Missions (the address at the top of page 1) and write "Benevolence Program" on the memo line]. (4) We are going to expand our Primary School (see below).

## Responding to Extreme Poverty in Africa

I have been struggling for a long time about how best to develop our Primary School. The Bible College is our primary ministry and

it will continue to be so, but we have two other very important ministries: Kerin's Kids and the Primary School. The question I have wrestled with for several years has to do with what, if anything, God would have us to do in response to the extreme poverty that we see in Zambia? My conscience has deeply troubled me for years as I try to reconcile our prosperity with the extreme poverty I see in Africa. How can we justify living in such comfort when they suffer so much?

Biblically, I am convinced that God would have us do something more than just ministering to them spiritually (evangelistically). The Gospels all testify to the fact that when Jesus came to earth, he came preaching and healing (ministering to the physical needs of people). Paul took up a collection for the saints in Judea. And, there are plenty of passages that teach us to help the poor and oppressed (e.g., 1 John 3:16-18, Mt 25, and many other such passages). I cannot justify a ministry in Africa that does not respond to the physical needs of the people.

As I think all of you know, I am strongly against giving money or anything to people for free as this only fosters dependency and dehumanizes people (along with fostering irresponsibility). If we are not careful, we can hurt people by trying to help them. So, how can we best minister to the people of Zambia?

It has been our philosophy that the best way to help people is to **empower or equip people to solve their own problems**. I think the best way to help people is to equip them with the training and resources (tools) that they need to take responsibility for themselves and solve their own problems. There are two exceptions: (1) If people are unable to help themselves (e.g., children), or (2) if the situation is in response to a crisis (e.g., temporary assistance in a natural disaster). Our children's ministry (Kerin's Kids) is an example of helping those who are powerless and cannot help themselves. Our benevolence program mentioned earlier (providing mealie-meal temporarily during a pandemic) is an example of the second exception.

Our Bible College is built on this philosophy. We are providing training to equip our students to serve as self-supporting spiritual leaders (and they support themselves through agriculture while attending our program). There is, however, another way that we can respond to the extreme poverty that we see in Zambia. I believe that one of the best things we can do is to equip the future generation with a good education that incorporates critical thinking skills. Our ministry is a training ministry, and the Primary School fits our philosophy and overall mission statement.

### Primary School (K-7).

Education is very poor in Zambia. The teachers are poorly trained, and the educational system is centralized in the federal gov't. There is no local accountability, and the schools are poorly managed. Corruption robs the schools of their funding. Schools are seriously under-staffed, and teachers frequently fail to report to work. One would think that a poor country would value education as their primary means of escaping poverty, but they do not. Schools still follow the old British rote system (i.e., students are taught to regurgitate knowledge and memorize information to pass exams). The thing most needed is the teaching of critical thinking skills, but this is totally lacking.

Lorie (who has a Masters in Education) and I believe that Zambia needs to develop village schools (where there is local accountability) and incorporate critical thinking skills as a main component. This is why we started our Primary School at Daybreak. Lorie has been training our teachers a more effective educational strategy that includes critical thinking skills. Also, we are training our Bible College students and their wives in how to start village schools and serve as community teachers. We also provide our school children a nutritional lunch since they are seriously malnourished (which undermines their academic performance).

However, our effort has been undermined by the extreme poverty of the parents. Our school charges a very small fee (\$5 per month) since we have tried to make the school self-supporting. Unfortunately, most of the families in our area cannot afford to pay this small fee. We have tried everything we can think of to solve this problem (e.g., offering scholarships), but only a few students in our area can afford to pay the fee. Our Primary School doesn't cost much money to operate as we only have to pay teacher salaries, and the collection of fees doesn't really make much difference.

**We believe that this is one of the best ways that we can minister to extreme poverty in Zambia.** Giving people food is only a temporary solution; but equipping the next generation with a good education and critical thinking skills (with a Christian foundation) is something that will make a long-term difference.

Thus, we have decided to invest more into this ministry. (1) We are going to reduce the fees to \$! per month (as we believe people need to contribute something to their own solutions). (2) We are building more classrooms and hiring a few more teachers so that there will be one classroom per grade (currently we have two grades in each classroom). (3) We have hired a school administrator who has proper training and can work with Lorie to run the school more effectively.

### Kerin's Kids (Orphans).

Zambia has one of the highest numbers (per capita) of orphans. 27% of Zambia's children have lost one or more of their parents. It is not clear as to why this is true for Zambia, but I suspect it is due to three main reasons: (a) Zambia is the most malnourished country in Africa. (b) About 20% of Zambians have HIV-AIDS from which many die. (c) The healthcare system is very poor in Zambia (people die due to the lack of medicine and adequate medical care).

This is why there is such a great need for Kerin's Kids Children's Ministry. The mortality rate for children who have lost one or more parents is extremely high due to malnutrition. It is even worse for infants whose mother has died or is too malnourished to nurse them.

**How You Can Help.** We have three main ministries that minister to the spiritual and physical needs of Zambia: Bible College, Kerin's Kids, and the Primary School. Two of these focus on children (the most vulnerable). If you want to make a difference in the world, here are three low-cost ministries to which you can contribute.