

Article on the Great Masvingo Feast

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The first Sunday in March saw the congregation at Southwark Cathedral celebrating their relationship with the Anglican Diocese of Masvingo in Zimbabwe in the presence of Bishop Godfrey Tawonezvi and Bishop Christopher. This culminated in the second Great Masvingo Feast, which included a well attended lunch served in the Cathedral's nave accompanied by music from the Zimbabwe Fellowship Choir and contributions from Bishop Godfrey and Bishop Christopher.

As Father Nicolas Stebbing CR emphasised in his earlier sermon, the people of Zimbabwe have faced considerable difficulties in recent years which has made ordinary life a real struggle. Hyper inflation, food shortages, disease, a lack of healthcare and periodic violence have all played their part in severely testing their fortitude and resolve. This included a period in which the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe was specifically targeted for persecution, leading to the confiscation of churches, clergy accommodation and church schools and health clinics.

This challenging background has not prevented significant progress being made in the Diocese of Masvingo in the period following its establishment in 2001. Clergy numbers have increased from 2 to 25, with 6 due for ordination in the near future. New church buildings have been constructed in rural areas, often through the hard work of local church congregations. The church has also established local income generation and primary healthcare projects, notably to address the continuing threat posed by HIV/AIDS and malaria.

Crucially the Anglican Diocese of Masvingo has been able to recover confiscated church property following a judgment of the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe last November. This has allowed churches to be rededicated to worship and control to be regained over the Diocese's schools and health clinics. Bishop Christopher commented on his recent trip to Zimbabwe (which included time spent with Bishop Godfrey in Masvingo) by emphasising the tremendous hope in adversity of the people and the wise stewardship of Bishop Godfrey in the face of many apparently insurmountable difficulties.

While recent progress in the face of so much adversity is little short of miraculous, it is clear that Bishop Godfrey and his team are not resting on their laurels, having identified some key challenges ahead. They include supplying more motorcycles to priests to facilitate effective ministry across a large rural Diocese as well as providing additional support to local congregations involved in building new churches and priest houses. In this regard, Bishop Godfrey sought the continuing prayers and support of the Cathedral's congregation.

The Great Masvingo Feast demonstrated the growing relationship between the Cathedral and the Diocese of Masvingo, as evidenced by the work of the Cathedral's Masvingo Link Group and the connections between the Cathedral School and the primary school at Daramombe. Canon Bruce Saunders brought the Great Masvingo Feast to a close by outlining the Cathedral's intention to support Bishop Godfrey's plan to develop the Diocesan infrastructure in Masvingo by providing additional education and healthcare facilities and clergy motorcycles. It was hoped that the Cathedral would be able to meet its commitment to provide an annual amount of £10,000 to the Diocese of Masvingo so that further positive progress could be made.