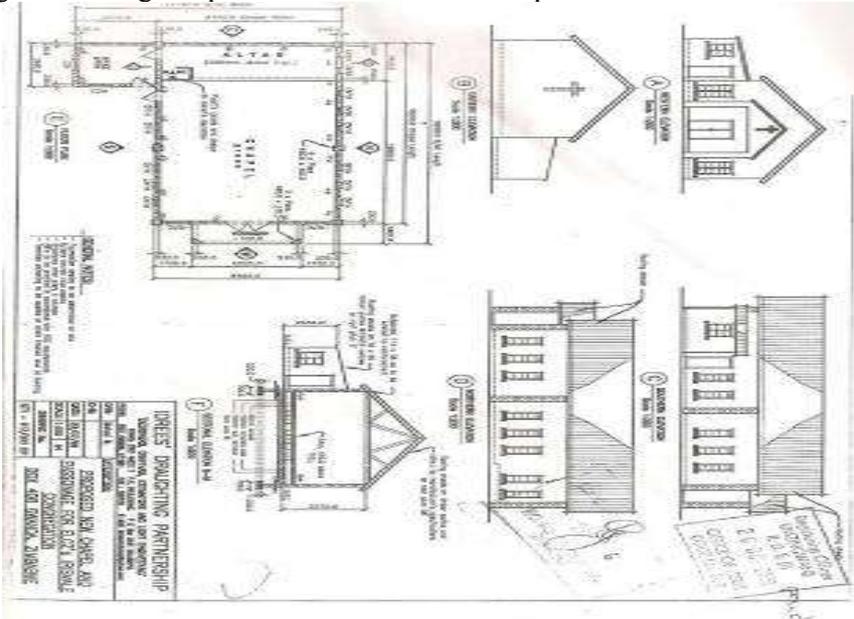


African Reflections – visit of members of Luther-Tyndale to the ELCZ, Western Diocese

In 2005, Sine Ncube a member of Luther-Tyndale Memorial Church (LTMC), persuaded the congregation to make its foreign missions project for 2006 the building of a chapel in Irisvale, Zimbabwe. This is a rural community, part of the Stanmore Parish within the Western Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Zimbabwe (ELCZ). Little did I know what this would lead to in terms of meeting and making friends with brothers and sisters in Christ over 4,000 miles away; not to mention having now been guest preacher in the Irisvale Chapel twice!



The Building Plans for Irisvale Chapel.

It is impossible to appreciate the struggle that the ELCZ went through to actually turn the plans into reality. OK, we provided money, but they worked through raging inflation, lack of materials and diesel to deliver them. As Sine said in a report to LTMC in late 2006 “*My arrival with a car was a blessing to them. There were no bricks, there was no cement, no food for the people who are not working, no petrol, no payment for the builders, and no inspector because the inspector is supposed to be collected and brought back. I went to Egwanda Town for the inspector. I went again for them to Irisvale Town for the plans. I did arrange the transport to collect the bricks from the different areas and brought their cement from Bulawayo. The plans were expensive to pay for. I negotiated with the officials to allow them to work and pay later when they received their money. The plan was the most important thing stopping work. There were some things which they had condemned. Because I was there with a vehicle and could pick up supplies and the inspector, work could begin. The building is finished above the window level. The builders work very fast and only stop when they are short of materials. The economy is very bad and the materials cost for the materials doubles every day. If you find a window frame today you should buy it now because it will be double the cost the following day. Petrol and diesel must be bought on the black market, and since it is needed to build the church, even though it is expensive, it must be bought at the price given.*”

And so early in 2007 the chapel building was completed and Peggy and I were told by Sine we were attending the dedication service on 19th August 2007. So we did.



The dedication of Irisvale Chapel August 2007.



Honoured guests at the dedication of Irisvale Chapel August 2007

What has prompted this article is that 2 years on we visited Zimbabwe again to re-affirm friendships, make new ones and see the progress with the congregation now a parsonage and toilet block have been built with further donations from LTMC.

You need to go there to appreciate the joy of worshipping that is ingrained in the culture. My words can't convey the atmosphere of the welcome we received, the quiet concentration of listening to the Word and the explosion into singing and dancing. This is the excuse for including a lot of photos rather than words, they really do describe the experience better than any words can.

Two years ago we travelled to a couple of congregations in north-western Zimbabwe (400 kilometers up to Hwange and then Victoria Falls) and saw that people would leave work in the middle of the day to attend a Bible Study because the Bishop (Stephen Dube) was in town.



Lunch stop on the road to Hwange.



Prayer meeting at Hwange in member's house

In August 2009 we had an agenda that involved getting to know the congregations within the Stanmore Parish (Swazi, DEMA and Stanmore, as well as Irisvale) – a mere 4 hour cycle ride from one end to the other for the “soon to be ordained” Pastor Moyo currently serving them and living in the Irisvale Parsonage.



Moyo and his bicycle (donated by LTMC)

DEMA congregation has had a church building for 20 years but do not have funds for a roof.



DEMA Chapel August 2009

SWAZI congregation meet in a Secondary school class room.



SWAZI congregation Prayer Meeting on a Friday



Swazi congregation members

Stanmore is more established.

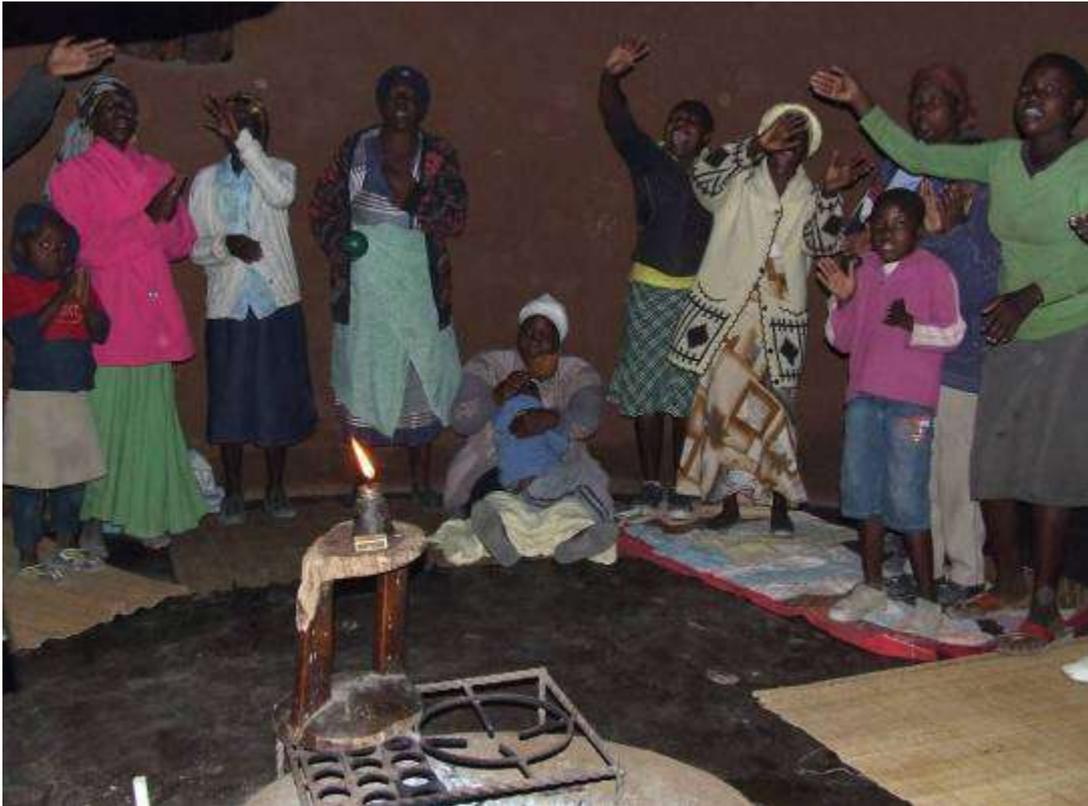


Saturday afternoon at Stanmore

Rather than returning to Bulawayo every evening we stayed a night with one of the families of the Stanmore congregation particularly so we could attend a mid-week prayer meeting where over 50 people crammed into the rondavel that is actually their kitchen for candlelit (no electricity) reading, prayer and song.



Overnight stop



Prayer meeting in the kitchen

The highlight of this visit, as 2 years ago, was the Sunday service at Irisvale. It was again presided over by Bishop Dube and we could share in welcoming 3 new members of the congregation through baptism.



3 new members at Irisvale

I presented a message based on 1 Corinthians 3: 8 to 11, then 16 and 17, which seemed appropriate; the church buildings may not be immaculate and to us appear unfinished and pretty rough and ready (metal railway sleepers on bricks for pews?) but the real church is not the physical buildings (verse 9) *“For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building”*. In this respect the people of the Stanmore Parish can teach us a thing or two.

But why is this? They have in general no material wealth. It is a daily struggle to survive, money and food are scarce. There is no infrastructure in the country to speak of. Yet they travel miles to attend a service or Bible Study and then worship with a joy and exuberance that, with our solid German Lutheranism and British stiff upper lip and reserve, would not recognise or feel comfortable with.



Holy Communion in Irisvale

The message, based on the scriptures, is the same. The liturgy is the same. The difference is in the context. We have so many distractions and much material wealth, beyond their imagining, and the church is no longer central to our lives.



Irisvale congregation with Bishop Dube



Irisvale congregation relaxing after the service



Leaving for home



Final farewell (until next time)