

The beginnings and current status of the Ameva Project, Zimbabwe

August 2010

Beginnings

John Valentine originated from Liverpool, UK. He was apprenticed in the timber trade to "Charles Stewart" on the docks, and then worked for a multinational group before going into the ministry fulltime.

Celia was brought up in the London area but was working for Liverpool Social Services when she met John.

They were in Nigeria for a few years and then moved to Zimbabwe in 1981. Both worked with Benson Idahosa in Benin City, Nigeria. John was principal of the All Nations for Christ Bible College. There were over 300 students, mostly from West Africa, however three students came from Zimbabwe and one, Philip Gobvu, asked them to go over to Zimbabwe, (having just received its independence from the UK) and set up a Bible College.

In 1983 The Ameva Project, (the charity name in the UK) purchased an original disused tobacco farm and subsequently aided the building of a Bible School, Primary School, (now 420 children) and a Secondary School, (now 380 children). There is an ongoing work with orphans (now around 150) and until May 2010 a primary health care clinic (closed due to lack of medical personnel).

The Bible College ran a two-year residential course until 2004 but had to be suspended due to the economic and political situation - they could not provide food for the students. ■

The way forward

Jesus said, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"

Whilst Jesus was fulfilling His earthly ministry He demonstrated great commitment of purpose. Praise God that John and Celia have remained firmly focused on the vision given them to 'preach and teach the Gospel whilst caring for the poor'.

This alone makes it important for us to continue to support them prayerfully as the crisis continues to destroy lives.

In spite of much opposition from the enemy they have succeeded in being respected and trusted by many. On a number of occasions, at any time of day, John has been asked to intervene in difficult and dangerous situations because of his reputation as an unbiased man of God. This alone makes it important for us to continue to support them prayerfully as the crisis continues to destroy lives.

Although news coming out of Zimbabwe is scant, in this update you will read of all that is happening, in the Bible College, with the container, and other areas of work. The continuance of these works is a miracle in itself.

Already John and Celia are planning for the future of the work, including the developing of the schools and children's work, getting the farm up and running again, providing meaningful employment for the



many unemployed, supporting the Church through the current pastors and the training of others through the Bible College. The opportunities are immense.

After years of difficulty gathering supplies together and maintaining safety on the farm there is now an urgency to update some of the buildings and facilities at the College. With this in mind we are provisionally planning for a number of skilled people to go out in 2011. Our mandate would be to work alongside those already at the farm, to refurbish and upgrade the College facilities, to have opportunities for outreach and overall be helping the people of Zimbabwe. ■

A weekly Ameva update is available by contacting amevaweekly@gmail.com

Or by writing to Terry and Frances Watson, 4 Eltham Green, Eltham, London, SE9 5JZ. UK

Jim and Margaret Bailey, 70 Congreve Road, Eltham, London, SE9 1LN. UK

Bible Studies and Church ministry

There are a number of weekly bible studies. Elsie Gibson holds one in her own home on a Tuesday morning. Some of the remaining white farmers and white teachers hold regular meetings in their own homes on a Tuesday evening. There are also numerous opportunities for visitors to preach in many of the churches established by the trained pastors throughout Zimbabwe. ■

College Library

The Ameva Project plans to refurbish the library that is situated on the Ameva Bible College site. A gift has already been received which will help towards this facility. They are hoping to arrange for books to be made available to the students to take home so as to continue their studies. If you have any good study books that would enable them to do this please let us know. ■

Financial support

The Ameva Bible College is part of a charitable trust registered in Zimbabwe and in the UK functions under the umbrella of Eltham Green Fellowship Trust (registered charity). In May this year a 40-foot container costing around £8500 was sent out.

This consignment consisted of 367 assorted lots weighing 5727 kgs (Over 5.6 ton). Articles ranged from clothing to school equipment, farm machinery to stationery, and much more. ■

Local difficulties

Since 2000 the farm has suffered from illegal raids, however Ameva Farm is seen as "church land" so there has been no trouble on the farm over the past 4 years except at election time. Originally quite a few expats worked with John and Celia, from all countries and denominations, both short and long term but visas were not able to be renewed. Miraculously John and Celia Valentine have permanent residency, they still hold British passports - this was a real work of the Lord. ■

John and Celia Valentine

John and Celia are not as young as they were. John is 72 and Celia is 62. They were very pleased when their daughter Grace (30) decided to come back and help them. She also has permanent residency and is fluent in the local African language, Shona. Grace has completed a law degree and has a project with AIDS orphans and vulnerable children in Chegutu. She is working part-time in Chegutu to support herself and married a local Christian farmer, Bruce Campbell, in September 2009. ■



Grace and Bruce's Wedding

The orphans

There are over 150 orphans currently being supported by the Ameva Project. They receive daily food and have their school fees and exam costs paid. These fees currently cost in total US\$2000 a term plus exam fees of US\$250. The teachers receive US\$150 per month from the government and are also supported by the Ameva Project. This added support amounts to about US\$500 per month overall. Transport is also provided to bring them from the town to the schools. At Ameva the older children do some work on the farm in the school holidays and Saturdays and earn credits towards school fees, shoes, toiletry etc. They actually love being part of the gang, all of them - even the little ones turn up to work, although they are not encouraged. They get a meal of rice every time so that may be part of the attraction. ■

Former difficulties improving

Over these last few years there has been a great deal of hardship for the people. With the farms being taken people have lost, not only their wages, but also their homes. Many have been at starvation limit. John and Celia have difficult situations presented to them nearly every day. During the bleakest time one elderly lady hadn't eaten for 5 days and was surviving on wild berries. There is only so much John and Celia



Contents for the container

The Ameva Bible College restarts

In November 2008 the Ameva Bible College resumed with five two - week intensive non - residential intakes, spreading over a period of 18 months. Initially these Bible College classes were for local people in Chegutu but in July 2009 students were welcomed from outside this town and provided with some food and accommodation.

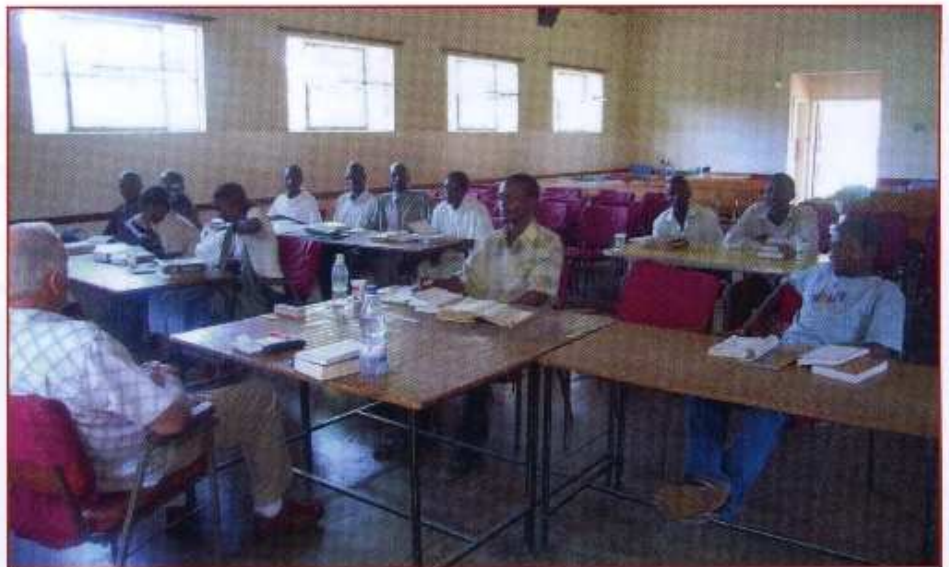
The Bible College is interdenominational. The teaching material used is provided by Dennis J. Mock, Bible Training Centre for Pastors. The course is basic bible teaching not too academic as the original vision was to train bush pastors. (Information as regards the subjects taught can be resourced on the Internet). ■

On-going training

Currently there are 13 National and 6 local students in training and they have completed 8 of the 10 modules. The final two, Teaching Principles and Methods and Church History will be completed this August 2010.

These students will be graduating May 2011 subject to the completion of all of the assignments set in the 10 modules. In November 2010 there will be a new intake of both National and Local students. Some of the current students graduating in May 2011 are pastors' wives, whose husbands have already trained at the College. ■

For those who may be used to a 20mb speed Zimbabwe still enjoys 28k per second when there is power.



Recent visitors

Terry and Frances Watson, Peter and Shelagh Gray and Peter and Sue Moffat returned mid June from a very challenging and profitable time with John and Celia, and others involved with the work at the Ameva Bible College and Farm.

This alone makes it important for us to continue to support them prayerfully as the crisis continues to destroy lives.

They were immediately introduced to power cuts, making normal routine extremely difficult. For visitors it means an adjustment from everyday life in the UK but for John and Celia it creates many on-going difficulties. No water can be pumped, no lights during the hours of darkness, having to cook on portable gas stoves and of course limited Internet and email services. (For those who may be used to a 20mb speed Zimbabwe still enjoys 28k per second when there is power.) ■

Visiting lecturers

John and Celia have been very encouraged by the number of brethren who have made themselves available to teach at the Ameva Bible College. Any

who feel that they would like to be included should contact Terry Watson. The dates of these two week sessions are April, August and November each year. Due to very limited accommodation lecturers would spend about two and a half weeks in Chegutu, which would normally cover three Sundays. Bryn and Sue Vaughan are there at the moment. Brian Rainford and Graham Davies start the new term in November of this year. ■

Pastors Conference and Graduation Day May 2010

The Pastors conference, which proceeded the graduation day, drew together over 80 delegates. Those lecturers who were involved in the morning training sessions were privileged to have sudza with meat or beans for lunch. (The basic food of the Africans)

Graduation day was full of excitement as students and families gathered together. The day began at 8.30am and concluded around 9pm. This year 11 students graduated and received certificates and prizes. John slaughtered one of his beef herd and the local butcher had the job of cutting it up. The women made a delicious meal for around 200 people. Where there is food the people gather! ■

can do, but what is provided by the Ameva Project has been a lifesaver to many. There was a feeding programme (US and German Aid) going on in the school but it was closed down for political reasons. The farm has been growing sweet potatoes, cooking them and giving them to the children. There is currently 80% unemployment.

During the cholera epidemic in November/December 2008 the death rate in Chegutu was extremely high. In one day alone 50 people died. During that week a further 150. On the farm, although there were no deaths, over 400 people with diarrhoea were treated during this time. The problem subsided after the rains washed the ground. ■

Inflation

During the late 2008's inflation was 2.6million percent. When the Watson's arrived in Harare in December 2008 1US\$ could be exchanged for 1million Zimbabwean dollars when they left three weeks later that sum had risen to 300million for each US\$. A sandwich in the Borrowdale area cost Z\$1.2billion and a can of Coke 600 million dollars.

Please pray for this and the need for medical assistance. The hospital in Chegutu is open again but with only one doctor who has recently qualified.

Since the Zimbabwean government abandoned the Zimbabwean \$ and adopted the US\$ prices of Maize, the staple diet of Zimbabwe is now sold at US\$200 rather than the US\$800 when inflation was at its height. Most essentials can be bought in Zimbabwe now if you have Rand or US\$ which many folk do not have. There are still signs of malnutrition amongst the elderly and children. ■



Clinic

The clinic

Due to the last team's late arrival, the Volcanic Ash cloud delaying them 9 days, the clinic only opened 3 times during their stay. The patients made the most of the time and they had an attendance of over 350 people in all. Fortunately the team were able to take in extra medicines to cope with this number. There was a particular flu going round but still a number of general diseases as an on going need.

Please pray for this and the need for medical assistance. The hospital in Chegutu is open again but with only one doctor who has recently qualified. Terry and Frances took one elderly man to hospital who had come to the clinic for help. This was only possible because they paid for his fees and transport. They were told that the doctor was busy that day. ■

Food programme

Over the past two years food has moved from being totally unavailable (2008) to be available, purchasable with the introduction of the US\$. During the middle to the end of 2008 when inflation of the Z\$ was 2.6 million% food parcels were being purchased from South Africa and distributed to pastors and those who were

starving. £25,000 was spent during this time. Buying food parcels finished in June 2009. Now that the country has discontinued the Zimbabwean dollar and is using the US\$ our food support has switched to distributing funds to those in need.

The current food programme also buys mealie meal (the Zimbabwean staple diet) and mahewu (a high protein drink) which is being provided for the children and orphans. Over the past 6 months £3500 has been made available for this. If you have been sending regular support for food parcels please note the change in circumstances in the country. ■

Farm

The farm continues to maintain itself on a limited basis. Ameva Farm has 150 beef and 25 dairy cows. A few acres of the 3500 acres are farmed so that it will not be taken away by the government. It is cheaper to buy mealie meal from South Africa than to grow it on the farm. None of the tractors work as there is a lack of spares and mechanics. John really needs a good local mechanic before he invests more money in the vehicles. ■