

The good news from Zimbabwe



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John Matsika is the national director of Life Ministry Zimbabwe.

John Matsika is a humble, quiet man with a great sense of humour. I only met him recently, but he has already had a great influence on my life.

John is a Zimbabwean. Although he has been through many difficulties, he does not talk about them. He decided to be part of the solution rather than the problem.

John works for Life Ministry Zimbabwe (known as Campus Crusade for Christ – CCC – in South Africa). He was appointed the National Director of the ministry in the early nineties. At the time, he was the owner of a farm (inherited, not repossessed, he makes it clear!).

Seeing his staff struggle financially, he decided to make his farm work for all. This was in 1993. There were 32 staff members at the time, including amongst them the gardener and cleaning lady. John provided them with food from his farm. He gave them maize, vegetables, eggs, milk and occasionally meat.

This tangible assistance from their leader not only helped sustain the staff, but enhanced the unity of the team.

At the same time the South African ministry of CCC provided money to buy food for the Life Ministry staff.

In the difficult times that Zimbabwe was experiencing, these efforts were a model of Christian love which made the ministry more attractive to others and drew people closer to the Lord.

As time went by, this vision of John's developed and he decided to devote more time to it. He therefore resigned as the National Director of the ministry while staying on as a staff member, and started church planting in 2004.

Planting self-sustaining churches

He started with the churches in the cities, and asked them to allow him and his team to train their members in church planting and then send them out to plant churches. This strategy was very successful, and 146 churches were planted in this way.

But food and housing remained a problem and consumed a huge chunk of the ministry's resources – people, money and time.

So John made a plan. For every church that was planted, he and his ministry provided roofing, windows and doors, which he acquired by partnering with aid organisations worldwide. People in the village themselves made mud bricks and built the walls. He had other partners from the West come and drill boreholes for water.

Then, from his own farm, John provided seed and animals – goats, chickens, and pigs – and taught the community how to do effective subsistence farming. Each one of these churches was given the task to plant five more churches in exactly the same way, all in a circle around their villages and within a 20 kilometre radius.

John and his team trained the pastors, and each new church had to give away seeds and animals from their own farming industry, just as John had given to them.

At the same time John had a vision of providing orphanages in the rural areas. One is already in functioning.

He has five such orphanage houses, self-built, and each house has "house

parents" and a number of orphans. These orphanages are to become self-sustaining in the same way that the churches did.

Orphans raise chickens

The orphans themselves are also being taught all the farming and housekeeping skills. Each child does chores on a rotating basis, so that they will grow up able to sustain themselves. Some of the food and seeds still come from John's farm; some come from the US via GAIN (Global Aid Network, a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ).

If an orphan has any relative, be it an uncle, cousin, whoever, John prefers the child to be with his or her relatives. He would then rather help the relatives to come together in groups of ten families or so. John then provides them with chickens. He teaches and helps them to begin an egg and chicken business in order to sustain themselves.

He gives them the money to start the first cycle, and the profit they make they plough into the second cycle, and so on. Only when the fourth cycle is completed do they need to pay John back his money. This money he then uses to start off another family group.

So far John has helped over 300 people with seed to start their own subsistence farms. He also gives them money. All he asks for is 20% of the proceeds to be returned to him, so that the process can keep on revolving. He does not take anything for himself. In his own words: "I want to stop this 'give me, give me' attitude."

If John could have a tractor or two, everything will go so much faster – he would then go from village to village and plough their lands so that they can farm more effectively and make enough money to eventually buy their own tractors.

All the time, of course, the Gospel is being preached. Each orphanage is provided with a pastor and has an in-house discipleship programme. The children attend a church of their choice in the vicinity. All orphans also attend a public school.

Now of course, all of this activity in the rural areas of a famine-stricken country drew a lot of attention. John and the other Life Ministry staff have appeared on local television a number of times. John could not even tell me how often – he has stopped counting!

Being somewhat famous by now, John faced a new problem: Many people, seeing what went on, wanted to join the staff of Life Ministry Zimbabwe. Life Ministry however, is a mission organisation, and the staff members are supposed to raise their own salaries by inviting people and churches to contribute financially to the ministry. This was often

very difficult to do and hampered the process of getting more people as staff members.

So in June 2009 John went to see the government. They knew him. He was the man who was uplifting the country and feeding the people while leading them to Christ.

John asked the government for land. And they gave him land – in Harare! Life Ministry was able to divide the land into 347 1000 sq metre plots. Each Life Ministry staff member, even the tea lady, was given a plot to build a house and grow a small vegetable garden in order to continue the subsistence motif.

Already the first stage roads have been built (by hand, by the staff members themselves, so it is slow-going), water has been laid on, and they are currently working on the sewage system.

Now the staff of Life Ministry need less money to sustain themselves, as housing has already been taken care of.

John is a visionary. He does not see problems, he sees opportunities. We need leaders like him in Africa.

Let us all follow his example and stop complaining about crime, corruption and all those things we keep on complaining about. Let's do something about it – like John!

Bevry tot diensbaarheid (van bl 15)

Ek is wéér gedwing om grense oor te steek. Die situasie was totaal anders as dié van 'n hospitaalpredikant wat in opdrag van 'n kerk pastorale besoeke aan lidmate van die betrokke kerk moes bring.

In hierdie tyd moes ek leer wat dit beteken “om voete te was”. By wyse van spreke moes ek die toga uitrek en die Bybel en preeknotas by die huis los en eerder tasse dra, koffie maak, ontredde mense ondersteun en begelei. Maar só het ek die wonderlikste geleentheid beleef om die hoop wat daar vir ons in Christus Jesus ons Here is, met ander te deel, deur dit uit te leef – selfs sonder om 'n woord daarvan te sê. Hierdie diens het met die tyd gegroei tot 'n trauma-ondersteuningsdiens wat by vyf privaathospitale funksioneer.

In sommige van die privaathospitale, brei die diens steeds uit na meer as dienslewering by die eenhede vir trauma-ongevalle. Betrokkenheid by alle pasiënte en hulle naasbestaandes behels sorg aan sterwendes en hulle naasbestaandes, betrokkenheid by orgaanskenking en -oorplanting, fasilitering van skakeling en kommunikasie tussen dokter en familieledes, betrokkenheid by etiese besluitneming oor die aard van die behandeling (of nie) wanneer die verloop van die siekte onomkeerbaar geword het.

Voete-was is om diensbaar te wees, die minste te wees, ander te aanvaar, al kook hulle vrese en onredelikheid ook oor in aggressie. Dit is om verby die verskille in taal, kultuur, ras, godsdiens en kerkverband te kan kom, dit te begryp, te respekteer, te waardeer en te akkommodeer. Dit is 'n bevrydende ervaring!

Hierdie bevryding word gebore uit die ervaring van diensbaarheid. Dit is onbaatsugtige toewyding oor grense heen. Dit skep nuwe geleentheid vir diensbaarheid.

Dit is waarom die Woord van 1 Korintiërs 9:19 ev my so aangryp: “Ek is vry om te doen wat ek wil doen, maar ek het besluit om 'n slaaf van almal te word, sodat meer mense in Christus kan glo ... Ek probeer om soos almal te wees, sodat ek miskien party van hulle kan red. Ek doen dit alles vir die goeie boodskap van Christus, sodat ek self ook kan kry wat Hy in sy boodskap belowe (*Die Bybel vir almal*).

Dit beteken dat ons die grense moet oorsteek na ander mense. Dit vra onvoorwaardelike erkenning van die menswees van ander. Wanneer ons Christus só met mekaar deel en mekaar dien, gee dit sin en betekenis aan ander, en ook aan ons eie lewe.

Oor die grens van eie godsdiensdigtheid

In die kliniese omgewing kom daar al hoe meer waardering vir die spirituele of geestelike dimensie van menswees. Die betekenis van spirituele sorg in die genesing en helingsproses, kry steeds groter erkenning.

Hierdie erkenning van spiritualiteit maak deure oop. Dit stel jou ook voor die grense van dogma en kerklike tradisie. Dit het my uitgedaag om méér grense in die gesig te staar as net dié van verskille tussen kerkgenootskappe of van gereformeerdes en ander groepe. Dit het my by die grensvraag gebring: *Wie is God?*

Vir my kon dit nie 'n akademiese vraag bly nie. Dit het 'n eksistensiële worsteling geword, 'n geloofs-onderskeidende reis onder leiding van die Heilige Gees!

Het die apostel in 1 Korintiërs 9 bedoel dat hy die geloof in Jesus, die Christus, moet verloën? Sekerlik nie, want hy wou dan juis Jode en heidene tot geloof in Christus lei!

Ek kan nie en wil nie 'n teologies-akademiese antwoord probeer gee op die worstelvraag na wie God is nie. Ek weet net dat ek in my betrokkenheid by mense van ander godsdienste en gelowe (soms selfs geen geloof), die grens waarbinne ons God soms in die Christelike godsdiens inperk, moes oorsteek. God is groter as my “beskrywing van God” en my ooreenkoms met my eie geloofstradisie.

God is nie Joods, Christen, Moslem of Hindoe nie. God is God. God is groter as die voorstelling van 'n bepaalde godsdienstige tradisie. Hy is ook groter in sy betrokkenheid by mense as wat hierdie mense God se liefde, wil en handeling kan verklaar.

Om die beeld van 'n legkaart te gebruik: Hoe begin ons gewoonlik om 'n legkaart te bou? Deur eers die hoek- en randstukke uit te pak en dan na die binnekant die stukke by mekaar te probeer bring, totdat die prentbeeld van die legkaart gaandeweg sigbaar word.

Ek kan nie anders as om binne die raamwerk van die hoeke en kante van die Christelike geloofstradisie tot 'n ontmoeting met die lewende God te kom nie. Maar God is groter as al ons pogings om iets te verstaan of te beskryf van wie Hy is. Die teenwoordigheid van God in die lewenskonteks van mense, veral wanneer lyding mense verstom, groei uit die legkaartstukke wat nie maklik in plek gelê kan word nie ... sonder dat die hoek en randstukke daar is.

Bevry tot diensbaarheid en deur diensbaarheid tot bevryding: Hierdie bevryding het my deur my eie geloofsdroogtes gedra toe die tradisionele manier van dink en antwoord gee nie altyd wou werk nie. Aan God die eer en dank, want ek kon self ook deel kry aan dit wat Hy in sy boodskap belowe!