HOLY WEEK IMMERSION

During Holy Week, Sunil and Francis joined participants from Latin America and Zambia on the Immersion Retreat. Each day they visited a poor “compound” (that is what a slum is called in Zambia) in Lusaka, met some of the locals and had a glimpse of what everyday life is like. On Good Friday they stood by rubbish dumps and polluted watercourses as part of an Environmental Stations of the Cross. Where the earth is most wounded, poor people suffer most. The week was expertly and creatively led by Br Nsamu Moonga.

SEARCH IN THE WEST

Monday 6th April saw Donal, David and Ruvan set out from Lusaka heading to Western Province, Zambia. It was an exciting moment for the whole team and another milestone on the journey to set up the first Cluster of new OWITF communities. The search team’s fourth member, Br Nsamu Moonga, arrived later in the week. Being Zambian, Nsamu was able to pick up levels of communication not apparent to the others, and helped the whole team interpret more clearly what was being said (or not said). His energy and enthusiasm proved a great gift to the team.

The base for the first two weeks was Kaoma, a small town on the main road west. The search team was warmly welcomed by Presentation Sisters Inez, Virginia, Molly and Terry. The Sisters are well established there, with a wide variety of projects and proved to be wonderful hosts, willing to introduce the team to their many local contacts.

The enormity of our task began to dawn on me. How are we going to find locations?

Journal of Search for Location Sites
With Kaoma as a base, the team visited three villages: Kabanga, Mangango and Luampa. After two weeks in Kaoma, the search team moved to Mongu, a somewhat larger town than Kaoma, where the team was welcomed into the Presentation Sisters community house to stay while the Sisters were away. While in the Mongu area, the team visited three more villages: Limulunga, Muoyo and Senanga.

In each of these places the team met with either the local traditional leader and/or the people already working on the ground.

The criteria that we had drawn up to assess the suitability of the sites were as follows:

**Sites that are relatively under serviced by the Church or religious orders.**

**Sites situated within 6 to 8 hours travel distance by public transport from the hub community.**

**Sites where we would be welcomed by the local community.**

**Sites where there is adequate accommodation and basic services are made available. (Public transport, communication, water, electricity, etc.)**

**Sites where there is potential for collaboration with other religious and NGO’s.**

In each of the villages mentioned above, we found that they fulfilled most of the criteria. The one criteria that challenged the team was that of ade-

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_It seems that this is an area of real need with immense social problems and a fertile area for the work of the Brothers. As Donal remarked, ‘If Edmund was alive today, this surely is the place he would go.’ (Referring to Limulunga)_

**Journal of Search for Location Sites**
The Brothers establishing five communities in his diocese.

It was also very nice to meet Brothers Seamus Reilly and John McCourt in the Mongu community who welcomed us and engaged in a spirited discussion on OWITF.

**LEARNINGS FROM THE LOCATION SEARCH**

Having spent a month in Western Province, the search team has come to realize the great needs of the people in Western Province. The vast majority of the people are very poor, finding it difficult to eke out even a basic subsistence. The needs of the people for community-based education in its broadest sense is obvious, together with the need of people young and old to learn how to manage fully the agricultural resources that are available to them.
Western Province has a total population of 903,074. The levels of extreme poverty have continued to remain high especially in the predominantly rural districts of Western Province. Unlike other regions, results show a sharp increase in extreme poverty in Western Province between 2006 and 2010 from 64.9% to 73.3%, while the average poverty levels are at 83.3% ranking it as the poorest province in the country.

(from Jeremiah Banda’s Needs Assessment Report)

We should also mention that the TST engaged the services of Mr Jeremiah Banda from Caritas to do an independent study of Western Province, and we found his findings confirmed many of our own experiences during the location search.

THE SITES OF FIRST CLUSTER

In the light of the search team’s findings on possible sites for the cluster of communities the TST has come to the decision that the following places will be the locations for the first cluster:

Mongu (hub community), Luampa, Limulunga, Muoyo and Senanga. In July, Declan, Donal and Ruvan will visit these locations to identify rented accommodation, and begin preparing the rented houses for the new communities. They will also seek to identify the land where the permanent houses will be built.

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE BROTHERS

Declan, Francis and Sunil in Lusaka have had many significant conversations with the Brothers in Zambia about the new communities. The South Central District has bravely opened itself to hosting the first Cluster of new communities in the Congregation. A significant number of Brothers from the District have volunteered. This is presenting great challenges and blessings to Brothers and Leadership alike.
TST and the South Central DLT are working in partnership to create a spirit of openness among the Brothers, and engagement with the new direction for the District and Congregation. TST members facilitated an OWITF workshop at the “under 40s Brothers” weekend. There were many searching questions about ministry in the new communities, study opportunities, future governance structures and the process of choosing the Western Province. TST is most grateful to the Brothers who participated for their honesty and engagement in the sessions.

LOOKING AHEAD

The TST will meet with the CLT for a week in June to bring the CLT fully up to date on progress, and to discuss all aspects of the project to establish the four clusters between now and 2020.

The process of discernment continues for those Brothers who have indicated their desire to become members of the first cluster. Each Brother is being dialogued, and is engaging in further reflection, prayer and spiritual direction as they confirm their openness to be invited to the Orientation Program.

David, Francis and Sunil will visit the various immersion sites in July and the TST will, itself, have an immersion experience in August in order to experience what such an immersion will be like for the participants of the Orientation Program.

We sign off with our link to the OWITF Facebook group where you will see regular updates about our work and resources for reflection.

https://www.facebook.com/groups/680213242089884/