

July 23, 2003

Dear Friends,

Greetings! I am very glad to be writing you at this time. There is so much to be thankful for, and you are a large part of that! Both here and abroad challenges are being met, overcome, and progress is being made!

Let me begin by reflecting on the dire circumstances that we found last fall and winter as our near 1,100 villagers had little or no food to eat, due to the drought and economic instability. We, in the US, didn't know whether to believe the media reports we heard repeatedly saying that food was scarce and people were going hungry.

When I went to the rural areas in January I did find hunger and malnutrition as the ongoing plight, as well as some starvation. The reports we received were real, the scarcity of food impacting everyone, and the situation extremely difficult for people who were already on the survival edge. The normal daily poverty issues were magnified by this lack of nourishment, so that people were justifiably concerned about their children, their lack of crops for both the moment and winter storage purposes, and their personal vitality and well being.

Long term economic hardship takes its toll on a person's health; mentally, emotionally and physically. No food available pushes any possible balance over the brink and breaks that last thread. The number of funerals, that the average person attends, is far beyond your and my imagination. I can't get my arms around it...its too heartbreaking to comprehend, and I can't go there. A part of me isn't sure I could live through it. How do you face continually hearing about your loved ones dying? How do you adjust to the coffin maker being as common as the gas station and the grocery store? Gently holding these people in your hearts, minds and prayers as your own prosperity flows can only help. Our energy here directed towards their hope, healing and happiness serves them on many levels. They are comforted by our efforts, feel dignity from our lack of interference, and are optimistic that things can change.

Some of your donations provided a small supplement of food to many of our near 300 families (22% are single heads of household). There was a designated relief agency (CRS) assigned to our area in Mhondoro that provided the residents with some staples. We supplemented this by providing all the children under 12 years old with 2 cups of mahewu (the traditional corn drink) daily from January through this July, when the next potential crop would begin being harvested. About 70% of our children are under 12. Additionally, the 65 or so preschool children are also provided with 2 cups of mahewu daily as part of a snack which includes peanut butter and bread. These little ones are showing the signs of happy and spirited play, bright and alert focus with impressive skill development compared with other preschoolers in the rural area. The food is one of the keys to their attention span...can one be interested in learning, if hungry?

The Nhimbe Preschool program has certainly strengthened and is blossoming. Donations of blackboards, wooden beads and a couple of used soccer balls helped to round out the materials available to the teachers for the children. Since the program was started on a shoestring, we might say that it is now a strong leather lace but still in its infancy. A most exciting part is hearing about the Nhimbe children from the local primary schools who entered 1st grade this year. The bilingual opportunity we have provided them to learn about languages, creating with writing instruments and playing in an inviting and educational space, has given them an edge that will never be overlooked. Even the poorest of these children who would normally not have a chance, are being given more equal footing with others as

they enter the educational system. Now, when I ask if they will draw something for their helping sponsor in the US, they know how to hold a crayon, and many times also can write their name and draw pictures...this is a definite change!

As many of you know, the educational system in Zimbabwe is in a desperate condition. There is such an immense need for supplies that we can not begin to fill it. We work with the schools and try to help but are not able to take on the role of provider of the school staples. In the Nhimbe for Progress Community Center, we have set up a library with Shona and English books, a small blackboard with tables and chairs, and have a tutor hired to help the children. I've heard absolutely the best in reports about the children's success after working with our tutor. What a blessing for everyone! Nhimbe has sponsored about 34% of the children in the villages. We are paying the school fees for these children and providing them with a school uniform and the families are very grateful, particularly as school fees are competing with putting food on their table.

If you have sponsored one of these 190 children, we have done our best to facilitate communication between you. Some of you wrote to the sponsored child last fall and I delivered your letter. The look on their face was incredible when Cosmas handed it to them. You can bet they are still reading it over and over again, learning English as they do. I have tried to bring each of you back a letter and picture from your sponsored child. We have been fairly successful in that venture. If the child you sponsored last year moved, graduated, or otherwise is not being sponsored this year, you are receiving information about a new child who needs your help and is gratefully now in school. Thanks!

We are continuing to develop a fuel-efficient stove option. Research and development doesn't happen overnight, and materials are scarce, but considering those challenges, we are making progress. This year we made particular strides in helping the women take more responsibility and control of the outcome. Coming from tradition, they weren't feeling inclined or free to step out and take control of their opportunity to have a stove and experiment with that. Although a gradual process, there is a great deal of enthusiasm towards the stove development (an active waiting list of at least 30 families), since it reduces the use of the scarce wood by about half, is nearly smokeless thereby improving health conditions and is quick to use.

Due to our other focuses this last January, we held off on hut rebuilding this year although about 40% of the families need huts due to flooding, lightening, or because of family illness, disability or age. Our last survey shows only 12% of the families have a good well, and only 7% have a toilet. These still remain a concern to us, as health issues are specifically related to clean water and sanitation. We worked on a guest house for visiting physicians or conferences, as well as met with the new Regional Chief to provide him with enough maize to feed all the AIDS patients in his region for the next year.

The intent of this letter is to let you know how important your role is in helping to alleviate some of the suffering of the people in these 7 villages. It may be difficult to grasp that your aid is touching people's lives and hearts and minds, but it is true. Every gesture of friendship that is extended through Nhimbe is received with tremendous gratitude and gradually, people will be able to dream up other options for their lives based on a new hope. Thank you! Cosmas, the Nhimbe village residents, and I continue to feel tremendous gratitude to you for your support, heartfelt concern, and confidence in us. Everyone is proud to be working together, learning new things as we improve the sub-standard living conditions, and developing an action network, which is earning respect.

And again, do you understand that you make this all happen? For the second year, 25% of you created more than \$25,000 year towards these goals. Another 10% of you

volunteer consistently. These gifts of your time and money are an investment towards a better world. We are wishing the best for you and your loved ones during this coming year. Do come see us at Zimfest in Portland on Reed College campus on August 8th, 9th and 10th where the new sculpture and textile shipment from the villages will be available for sale! Come help at the table if you are available!

Always feel free to write or call...Tatenda!

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ANCIENT WAYS  
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Ancient Ways, a U.S. 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, focuses on learning from and preserving traditional ways of indigenous people. Nhimbe for Progress' mission is to promote recognition of our spiritual and human relatedness to rural Zimbabwean people by providing appropriate assistance where the need exists, in an ecologically sound, self-sustaining, and culturally respectful way, and by creating opportunity for cultural exchange which encourages unity and cooperative empowerment. See [www.ancient-ways.org](http://www.ancient-ways.org).