



An African Adventure



The Grand President's Tour of African Circles Sept/Oct 2007

A small party led by Grand President Phil Gidman visited our Brothers and their families in Zimbabwe, Zambia, and South Africa. The party, ably led by Phil and Arlene included their daughter Tracey; the tour organiser, Past Grand President John Fry; John Hall, Director of Province 12; Tony and Kelly Godden, Director of Province 16 and International Development Officer; and Past Provincial Presidents Gerry and Margaret Walsh, and John and Valerie McDermott.

When we told friends and family we were going to Zimbabwe the reaction was occasionally "You are mad". However the professional and friendly welcome we received from the Immigration Officials at Bulawayo Airport, the warm welcome from the Bulawayo and Harare brothers and their families, and the friendliness of the people of Zimbabwe put us at our ease. Eight of the group had taken part in previous Grand Presidents' visits to the Region. You have to experience Zimbabwe and the Region to start to understand what is happening there.

My first impression of Zimbabwe was of thousands of people walking along the roadsides, men, women and children. We saw a queue of 800 cars at a filling station in Bulawayo, it would take them at least one and a half days to reach the fuel pumps and then be limited to 20 litres. We saw bread queues, water queues, liquor queues and just queues. We spoke to a priest who had just queued for two hours to buy two rolls of toilet paper. There is a serious shortage of water, frequent power cuts, and food shortages.

Despite this life goes on and on our first night in Zimbabwe we entertained our



Province 12 Director John Hall hands out felt tip pens to pupils of the Shamrock Hill School for the Deaf in Harare.



"Ladies with attitude". The Party are greeted with music on Cape Town's waterfront

host families to dinner at the splendid Bulawayo Club where Circle President Patrick Nyathi welcomed Grand President Phil to Zimbabwe.

In the month before the visit members of the visiting group collected some £8000 from Grand Council members, circles and brothers in their Provinces and the proceeds of the raffle at the Inaugural Meeting of the Market Harborough Group two days before the party left for Africa. Partly as a result of this the itinerary was amended to allow the group to visit a range of children's homes and schools, Cheshire Homes, the Mater Dei Hospital, a Home run by the Mother Teresa Sisters and a project to get children into, and keep them, in school. Donations were also made to the SVdeP Feeding Programme in the Archdioceses of Bulawayo and Harare.

Our first visit was to a Children's Home and school catering for children referred by Social Services. Kelly Godden found her sunhat had been "adopted" by a little girl who was already showing the signs of Aids. The little girl's smile of gratitude was just wonderful as were the smiles of all the children at each of our visits who received pencils, pens, paper, sweets and other small gifts from members of the group. At most of our visits the children sang and sometimes danced for us. The singing by the children, particularly the African Anthem "Nikosi Sikelel i Afrika" (God Bless Africa) was simply haunting and unforgettable.

We attended the Bulawayo Circle meeting followed by a magnificent bring and share supper provided by the ladies of the Circle. The following morning we ventured out to John and Wallis Sullivan's farm in the Matopas National Park where we had an open air Mass celebrated by Fr Martin Schuff, the recently appointed Administrator of the

Archdiocese of Bulawayo - a wonderful, spiritual experience.

Following this we had a family braai, a walk for the more intrepid in the heat of the afternoon and John Hall jumping into the cold fresh water pool four times! In the evening we had a relaxing time at home with our hosts and other Catenian couples. During the evening Grand President Phil and a local brother made a speculative call on Archbishop Pius Ncube who had just resigned as Archbishop of Bulawayo but who remains a Bishop. He had told his Diocese he had resigned as their leader in order to fight the Government inspired charges against him. Phil found him to be relaxed and he spoke warmly of the support Catenians give him and his priests.

The following day we headed off by mini bus to Victoria Falls, encountering seven police road blocks on the way before arriving at the splendid Victoria Falls Safari Lodge where we had dinner in the restaurant overlooking the large water hole. We had a relaxing day walking to the Falls or flying over them by helicopter followed by a "sundowner cruise" on the River Zambezi and spotting the wildlife before dining on the terrace at the historic Victoria Falls Hotel.

An early start the next day saw us drive to Botswana for a morning river safari followed by an afternoon land safari in the large Chobe National Park. There was wildlife galore and John Fry stopped counting after spotting 29 giraffes. We saw hundreds of elephants, as well as impala, kudu, buffalo, warthogs, crocodiles, hippos, two prides of lions and numerous species of bird including eagles and the ever present vultures. And, if that wasn't enough, we came across a pack of endangered Wild (or Painted) Dogs on the way back to Victoria Falls.



Pictured after a meeting of Harare North Circle are, front row, left to right, Valerie McDermott; Kelly Godden; Grand President Phil Gidman; Arleen Gidman; and Margaret Walsh. Back row, left to right, John McDermott, Haywards Heath Circle; Past Grand President John Fry, Luton and Milton Keynes Circles; Province 12 Director John Hall; Arthur Douie, Vice President, Harare Circle; Jacob Muchochomi, President, Harare North Circle; Province 16 Director Tony Godden; Gerry Walsh, Manchester North and Middleton, and Manchester Circles and Kim Robertson, President Harare Circle

We flew from Victoria Falls to Harare with Air Zimbabwe to be met at the airport and transported by our host families. We attended a candle lit meeting of Harare North Circle ably chaired, in the circumstances, by President Kim Robertson although some brothers had some difficulty reading their reports and in recognising some of the members on the other side of the room. The power was restored in time for the ladies to join us for a splendid dinner and a relaxed evening. It was the start of an enjoyable and full four night stay. In Harare we visited a specialist residential school with 300 primary and secondary age pupils where half the families cannot afford the school fees. Following our visit the head teacher emailed to thank us for our visit and our donation. She said the school's water bore holes are powered by electricity and the cable had blown at several points so they currently have no borehole water. Thanks to our donation they are able to buy the cable and pay for the labour needed. We

later visited other children's homes and some joined Fr Ronnie McAinsch on a tour of his parish of Tafara, a less privileged suburb of Harare, which gave a disturbing insight into the problems he faces daily in his work and reminded us of the difficulties of life for so many of the people.

Grand President Phil, accompanied by Circle Presidents Jacob and Kim, Arthur Douie and Tony Godden paid a courtesy call on Archbishop Robert Ndlovu. The Archbishop acknowledged that Catenians are performing valuable roles for the Archdiocese. In response to an invitation to call upon the Catenians whenever he needed help or support, he responded with a twinkle in his eye saying "I will remember and say I recall the moment".

On the Friday evening we entertained our host families to a meal at a Portuguese Restaurant in Harare.

On Saturday most members of the group, accompanied by members of both Circles, visited the HQ of African Distillers for a tutored wine tasting and lunch



Pictured on a courtesy visit to the Archbishop of Harare, the Most Rev Robert Ndlovu are, left to right, Harare president Jacob Muchochomi; Grand President; His Grace; Harare North President Kim Robertson; and Harare Vice President Arthur Douie

organised through Columbus Guyo who is the Production Operations Director. This gave the group the opportunity to show how discerning are we Catenians when it comes to drinking wine. After tasting two white wines, given a red and asked if he could notice a difference in the appearance Tony Godden commented "Yes, this one is red". John Fry when asked what bouquet he could identify said "I don't smell too good" in explanation of the fact he has no sense of smell! It was an enjoyable morning and gave the group the opportunity to relax and get to know more people over the buffet lunch. However, two members of the group, namely Grand President Phil and John Hall, volunteered to miss the wine tasting and forced themselves to play in the England v Zimbabwe golf tournament at the Royal Harare Golf Club. The locals, keen as ever to defeat England, fielded two young, fit and outstanding golfers which hardly seemed sporting. We will not mention the ill assorted clubs loaned to Phil and John. Despite all the odds England came a good second!

The Harare Circle meeting and dinner took place at the Harare Club in the evening and President Jacob Muchochomi presided over both with his usual efficiency. The dinner was graced by the presence of the Papal Nuncio, His Excellency Archbishop Adams, and Grand President Phil spoke about the founding of the Association, its relevance today and urged brothers to support the Church and each other in these challenging times.

Sunday saw us head to a joyous Mass at the Chapel of St Michael's School, celebrated by Fr Enright SJ, the Secretary to the Archbishop of Harare and the son of a Catenian. The Mass was attended by members of both Circles along with many members of their families and followed by a braai in the grounds of the school at which Grand President Phil presented Cyril Dewhurst with a Scroll marking his 48 years of membership of the Association. The evening saw a number of us dine and enjoy much conversation at the home of Arthur and Mildred Douie. Arthur, who will be President of Harare Circle during our Centenary Year and the 50th Anniversary of the founding of Harare Circle, is a stalwart of the Association and did much work in getting the two Circles to plan for our visit.

The three Circles in Zimbabwe are in remarkably good health considering the problems facing them. Their faith is very strong; Bulawayo Circle has a Rosary Meeting every evening during the months of May and October and brothers take it in turn to host.

The Monday saw us head off to the airport for our flight to Lusaka. After



Grand President with children of the Cheshire Home in Lusaka, Zambia

settling in to our hotel we visited a craft market before attending Mass at St Ignatius Church before dining in the garden of President Willie and Mwanza Mubanga's home with good numbers of Lusaka brothers attending the Mass and dinner. On Tuesday we visited the new Cathedral of the Child Jesus in Lusaka before moving onto a Cheshire Home, one of ten Cheshire Homes/Hospitals in Zambia and the Italian Orthopaedic Hospital both of which owe much to the organisational skills, contacts and persuasive powers of Enzo Rossi. Grand President Phil recorded a 30 minute interview with Yatsani Radio, the local Catholic Radio Station which was broadcast the next day. The Station was established with initial funding from Vatican Radio and CAFOD.

After a well deserved lunch at Lusaka Golf Club we visited a Home run by the Missionaries of Charity. The 18 nuns and other helpers look after 125 abandoned children, 44 of whom were in cots, the youngest being two weeks old. Many of these children are HIV-positive. They keep the children in the Home until they are 16, if necessary, although some are reclaimed by grandparents. We heard on another visit of a baby being placed with its great grandmother. The Missionaries of Charity also look after 90 HIV-positive men in the same home. The men live in a large room with 50 beds so some have to sleep on mattresses on the floor under the beds. Another room houses 50 HIV women, some of whom were very ill.

The children in the Home sang to us including, in English, "thank you for visiting, now leave us alone". May God bless them all.

The Lusaka Circle meeting took place at Enzo Rossi's hotel where we also dined. Grand President Phil congratulated the Circle on a well conducted meeting and at the end of the meeting President Willie invited each member in turn to say something about the Circle, the Association and the future growth of the Association in Africa.

The last day in Zambia saw the group visit the Chaminuka Game Reserve and give us another chance to take photographs before taking our Zambian friends to a restaurant in the evening.

Another good evening, where

the Lusaka brothers talked about expanding the Association in Zambia, their desire to home host the visitors on the next Grand Presidential visit, and the intention of some of them to attend the Manchester Centenary Conference.

On to Johannesburg, to be met by the local brothers and torrential rain, the first for seven months. We enjoyed drinks in our hotel with the brothers who had transported us from the airport and pleased our ladies by agreeing to visit a replica diamond mine and shop the following morning. This was followed by lunch with the Johannesburg Catenians and their wives. In the afternoon we held a two hour informal meeting with President Henry Alley and other brothers. Henry is keen to revive the Circle and we offered advice on how a recovery plan can be achieved.

The evening was spent with the Jo'burg brothers and wives at a restaurant overlooking Mandela Square. After more goodbyes in the morning nine of us flew to Cape Town to stay at a hotel on the V&A Waterfront. It was a great way to end our visit - taxis to Mass, good restaurants on our doorstep, even more retail therapy and a full day sightseeing as a discreet group heading down to Cape Point and the Cape of Good Hope - more wildlife, only this time it was penguins.

Grand President Phil and Tony Godden had a meeting with Archbishop Lawrence



Province 16 Director Tony Godden and Grand President flank the Archbishop of Cape Town, the Most Rev Lawrence Henry

Henry of Cape Town, following on from the meeting the Archbishop held with Jim Kelly three years ago. He asked why we had not made progress in the Cape Town area in that time and we explained that we lacked a permanent catalyst in the area. When Phil asked what he could do to help start a Circle in his Archdiocese he replied, "I will be your catalyst". We look forward to working with His Grace to establish a Circle in Cape Town.

After this, there was just time for Tony and Kelly to visit Robben Island before the mad rush back to the airport and our flight home.

Thus ended a successful, enjoyable and exhausting visit to our brothers in Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa. We were blessed throughout our visit enjoying safe journeys, wonderful hospitality, the opportunity to see for ourselves the decline in Zimbabwe, the economic growth in neighbouring Zambia, and the nation of contrasts that is South Africa. We cannot adequately express our thanks to our host families in Zimbabwe for the way they went out of their way to look after us in what are difficult times for them. We were blessed to experience the spirituality of the Masses we attended and were fortunate to meet such outstanding Archbishops, priests and sisters and we thank God for the friendliness of the people we met on our journey.

We thank brothers for their generous contributions to the children and the infirm in Zimbabwe which will make a real difference to their lives.

We thank Phil and Arlene for their leadership and company throughout the visit and thank organiser "par excellence" John Fry for his experience and skills in putting together his fifth Grand President's tour of Africa.

Tony Godden

International Development Officer

Prayer for Zimbabwe

The following prayer is said in unison at meetings of Harare North Circle:-

*O Lord and Father of us all
We call upon your name
And know that you always hear us
For each day you are the same
Hear our plea we ask you now
To heal our turmoiled land
This land is so richly blessed
By your Almighty Hand
So many problems plague us
So many fears we face
Help us Lord to share your love
With each and every race
We live together in this land
So bring to us salvation
That we be joined in love for you
To make this a peaceful nation.*