

ELCA International Disaster Response HUMANITARIAN CRISIS in ZIMBABWE

JANUARY 2009

Zimbabwe is caught in a complex and critical humanitarian crisis affecting a great proportion of the country's population. The manifold crisis includes a collapsed economy, severe food insecurity, all time low basic service delivery, political stalemate, an underlying and intimidating political atmosphere and internal displacements.

This decline in Zimbabwe has taken a disastrous toll on the country's food supply and medical institutions, including four hospitals of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ).

"Just 10 years ago Zimbabwe was in a completely different place. **The country was known as the breadbasket of southern Africa,**" said the Rev. Benyam A. Kassahun, program director for Southern Africa,

ELCA Global Mission "Everything is now destroyed," he said, due to political fallout, land confiscation and mismanagement.

The situation now can only be described as human disaster. An estimated 5.1 million people are struggling to feed themselves; 30% of those who suffer most are children under five. Another vulnerable group are pregnant women, who do not know if they will be able to give birth just because they are hungry.

Hospitals in Manama, Masase, Mnene and Musome can no longer attract and retain qualified medical staff, afford to purchase food and pharmaceuticals to feed and treat patients, and provide ambulatory services.

The ELCA is committing over one million dollars to stabilize and

restore the service of the four ELCZ medical institutions, to purchase food, seeds and fertilizer for distribution to about 5,000 families in an effort to provide food for today and seed for tomorrow. Funds allocated by ELCA Global Mission came from the ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeal.

The first delivery of seed arrived last month. While the community was helping distribute this priceless resource a bag broke, seed fell to the ground. "People gathered together to pick each seed from the dry soil. When they were done, not a single seed remained," said Kassahun.

In addition to seed delivery, the four hospitals of the ELCZ have been given food supplies so that patients have the nutrition they need to become healthy, and medical workers can continue serving.

"God is calling us to share, to walk with the hungry and, to the best of our knowledge, speak on behalf of

the voiceless. Zimbabwe is only one corner of the world, yet the kind of disaster happening there is happening all over the world," said Kassahun. "We are called to share from what we have, share from what is at our table. That is what the gospel is to me, what I have come to realize. To feed the hungry is where I find hope and where God wants us all to be."



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