

ZIMBABWE REGION

Official Languages: **English, Shona and Ndebele**

Vision Statement

Called by the Triune God from different nations, striving to bear witness to the Kingdom of God and its values.

Mission Statement

We, the Divine Word Missionaries of Zimbabwe, commit ourselves to the integral and effective evangelization of the people of Zimbabwe. Reading the signs of the time and responding to them, we promote: human dignity and respect for the youth and the marginalized; hope for the displaced and those infected and affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic; unity and reconciliation for dysfunctional families and divided society on the basis of ethnic and political affiliation; openness and tolerance for other cultures and religions.

1. Societal Setting

Zimbabwe has a population of 16 million people consisting of 15 ethnic groups. The majority are the Shona and the Ndebele people. English, Shona and Ndebele are official languages and there are 12 other national languages. English is the business language. One feature of the Zimbabwean society is strong family bonds and values.



Zimbabweans are largely a rural people, with 66% of the population practicing agriculture for subsistence purposes. Access to social services is poor in these areas. Even though there is no gender discrimination in the country's legislation, the cultural dominance of men is observable in rural areas with many cases of gender violence and child marriages.

The current ruling party has been in power since 1980. November 2017, saw a huge shift of po-

litical power. Since the year 2000 the country has been experiencing a protracted political and economic crisis and there is no sign of improvement in the near future. The once well-developed agricultural, mining and industrial sectors have since collapsed together with the local currency. The introduction of multi-currency in 2009 stabilized the inflation rate and the availability of goods and services. The unemployment rate stands at more than 60% and the cost of living is beyond the reach of average citizens. This has led to massive waves of migration to other countries, mainly Southern African countries. An estimated 4 million Zimbabweans are in the diaspora. This has created a brain drain. Most hospitals, schools, and industries do not have the best qualified people. Illegal migration, human smuggling and trafficking are growing phenomena.

Even though the literacy rate stands at 91%, the highest in Africa, the quality of education is increasingly deteriorating. Fewer and fewer people can afford quality education. Most hospitals and health centers in the country are understaffed and in deplorable condition. Zimbabwe has the lowest life expectancy in the world at 35 years. Even though the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate has dropped from 30% in 1997 to 15% today, women are much more likely to be infected than men.

Christianity is the dominant religion in Zimbabwe. About 90% of Zimbabweans identify themselves as Christians. There are few Zimbabweans who have not encountered Christia-

nity in some form. Most Christians are Protestants, 76%. There are about one million Catholics (8.5%). African Traditional Religion is 3%, while Islam and other religions are less than 1% of the population.

The political crisis has been sustained by the suppression of freedom of press and speech in the country. Those in the opposition are persecuted. The Catholic Church was particularly active in promoting civil rights and political participation in the late 1980s and 90s by means of the Catholic Commission of Justice and Peace. However, today the Commission is silent and in some dioceses, such as Bulawayo, it has been abandoned.

The economic crisis has widened the gap between the rich and the poor. The Matebeleland area, where most SVDs work, has been the most disproportionately affected. It is drought-prone, less developed and less serviced by the government. Industries have shut down, while schools, hospitals and other social services are in a more deplorable situation than in other areas of the country. It is also the area with the most migrants to neighboring countries, which has left behind the elderly and child-headed families. This area requires our attention as SVDs.

2. Ecclesial Setting

Christianity took root in Zimbabwe at the end of the 19th century and the Catholic Church played a big role in the evangelization and esta-

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ishment of many missions, schools, and hospitals. There are eight dioceses in the country. In all dioceses there are now significantly more local priests and religious. 88% of Catholics are in Mashonaland and most priests and religious are from this part of the country. In Matebeleland, where SVDs are mainly concentrated, the Church population is significantly lower. Church participation is less vibrant. Financially, due to the current economic crisis, the local Church is dependent on religious congregations and donors for most of its pastoral and expansion activities.

One peculiar feature of the local Church in Zimbabwe is religious syncretism, in which many of the faithful associate themselves with traditional practices, especially in crisis moments. Some of the faithful have multiple Church memberships and it is common to find children going to a different Church than their parents, or parents themselves attending different Churches.

One of the greatest positive features of religion in Zimbabwe is that there are no visible inter-religious or denomination conflicts. There is freedom of religion. There is strong collaboration among Churches through the Zimbabwe Council of Churches. The Zimbabwe Bible Society collaborates with Catholics in the translating of the Scriptures into local languages.

Even though Islam is less than 1% of the population, there is panic among Christian Churches as its influence is increasing in the education

sector. Since the government has no resources to build and equip schools, Arab states are coming in with aid. However, the condition for the aid is the removal of Christian education in schools. This has resulted in the scrapping of Bible clubs and the changing of the schools' curriculum to include the Islamic faith more and more.

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)
Parish	14	51.8	63.7
Education	1	3.7	0
Schools	0	-	
Universities	1	-	
Formation/ SVD Vocation	1	3.7	4.5
Administration/ Support	3	11.1	9.0
Other Apostolates	3	11.1	9.0
JPIC	0	-	
Bible	2	-	
Communication	1	-	
Mission Animation	0	-	
Others	0	-	

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	2	7.4	4.5	
Retired/Sick	1	3.7	0	
Others	2	7.4	9.3	

The Divine Word Missionaries came to Zimbabwe in 1987 in the Matebeleland area of Bulawayo Archdiocese. In 2000, we moved into the Hwange Diocese, namely Gomoza, and in 2011 we moved to the Archdiocese of Harare. In all places we have moved, we started with primary evangelization. Most of the places were opened by us, and others were just opened and needed a lot of attention and pastoral care. Our four Characteristic Dimensions are visible. We have mainly been involved in parish ministry and have contributed to the growth of many parishes/missions in the past 30 years. Today, we still focus on primary evangelization through parish and mission work. The places where we work are the latest that were opened in the dioceses. There are 14 confreres directly involved in evangelization through the parish and mission work. Most of these are parishes are on the periphery of the country and are engaged in primary evangelization and social work.

We have contributed significantly to the local Church in the biblical apostolate ministry. We run the only biblical center in the country, which offers biblical courses and workshops to all dioceses throughout the country. One of our mem-

bers is in charge of coordinating biblical activities in the whole country under the Bishops' Conference. The personnel of the center visit schools and parishes for days of workshops, retreats and recollections. There is a Bible camp provided for the Missionary Childhood Association once a year in the biblical center. Over the past few years the Bible center has become well known and the SVD are known as men of the Bible. All credit goes to the directors of the center.

Of late we are engaged in tertiary chaplaincy in the Archdiocese of Bulawayo through which we reach out to students from all over the country. There are plans to build a center for the students where all the activities would be done. We have leased a piece of land from the city council for this purpose.

Characteristic Dimensions

Biblical Apostolate: The noticeable and the biggest achievements were done in the Bible apostolate. There were many workshops done in the biblical center and outside in schools, parishes and missions. We are known as the men of the Bible. There is a full time confrere who completed studies in Biblical Theology and one will start his studies in exegesis this year. We hope in a few years' time the biblical center will have an even greater impact in the Church in Zimbabwe.

Mission Animation: The mission secretary is working with groups of lay associates in three of our parishes to animate them for mission. Once

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a year we appeal to the faithful of the parishes and missions where we work to contribute towards the formation of the Zimbabwe candidates.

JPIC: There is lot to be done but the government officials are very suspicious of anything this commission tries to do. The foreigners who get involved in this commission face a danger of being warned or being sent away. They try to have observers during elections, try to stop human trafficking, and look into it that justice is done in the families when the father dies. They try to insure that the house and property remains with the wife and the children and does not go to the relatives of the father.

Communication: This ministry is very important in bringing the gospel closer to the people. There are two confreres involved, one does the recording of music, filming and taking photos at different church functions. There is a group of lay people participating in recording talks for *Lectio Divina for the Youth*. The other confrere takes care of our website and responds to any questions that the viewers ask about our Society and work in Zimbabwe.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

The Zimbabwe region has chosen five priorities according to the importance of the political and religious life realities:

a) Primary and New Evangelization: In order to be effective in our missionary work to bring the gospel of Christ to the people, we have to

learn and use the local language. Therefore we stress the importance of learning the language and culture of the people. The learning depends on each individual's ability in learning. A significant challenge, most probably everywhere, is the use of gadgets that take the attention of confreres from what they should be concentrating on. Secondly we are aware that we need lay people in our work. Therefore in places where we work, we give training and courses to the lay catechists and pastoral workers to prepare them for their ministry.

b) Family and Youth: The family is a domestic Church. The family is also the best place for the transmission of our Catholic faith. We encourage the parents to play the role of the evangelizers in their families. We also stress the importance of the Small Christian Communities in evangelizing the neighborhood. Visits to families are part of pastoral ministry. Visiting the sick, attending family functions, birthdays, anniversaries, funerals, providing counseling for families in difficulties are done in all places. Every year there are workshops for the youth and children in order to educate them and encourage them to live and persevere in their faith.

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c) Reconciliation and Peace Building: There is lot of animosity in the country because of political, tribal and religious differences. We encour-

rage all confreres to have a commission in the parishes and missions to deal with these issues, and to work at what is mentioned above under JPIC activities.

d) Migration: For the past 17 years the country has been experiencing the exodus of the educated and skilled people to other countries for jobs. This has negatively affected social and family life. Lots of marriages broke up due to migration. Children were often left on their own with no one to guide them, resulting in them becoming indifferent to their faith. We want to take care of such families, especially the children, and encourage them to remain steadfast in their faith.

e) Promotion of the Culture of Life: Our mission is to help people to discover and appreciate the most precious gift from God which is LIFE and live it meaningfully. We teach people about the sacredness and dignity of human life. We work with home-based caregivers who look after terminally ill and elderly people so that they may die with dignity. We try as much as possible to remove the unjust structures in the society that threaten human life like violence, abortion, and other crimes against humanity.

Collaboration with Others

The SSpS are not present in Zimbabwe at this time. We collaborate in the pastoral field with diocesan priests and officials, and with other organizations in the area of JPIC.

SVD Lay Association

There are groups of lay associates in three parishes with the number reaching 30. They meet once a month for prayers and a general meeting. Once a year on the feast of the Founder we invite them for a common celebration. At present the mission secretary works with the leaders on framing a constitution of this group.

4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012
Bishops	1	1
Clerics	25	20
Brothers (final vows)	0	1
Scholastics	1	1
Total	27	23

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012
Average age	41.8	40.5
Nationalities	11	10

Spirituality: We realized that the new forms of prayer, devotions and spirituality will not hold us together. We decided to go back to our roots and promote the spirituality of the Founder. The common Society prayers enrich our intercultural living. Use of the *Vademecum* and Bible sharing are to be practiced in our communities.

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Community Life: A workshop on intercultural living was given by a former SVD. It was well appreciated and enriching. Our communities are international and intercultural. We do not only live and work together but we strive to foster the spirit of mutual sharing and understanding. We desire that everyone feels accepted and loved.

Leadership: A workshop on leadership was done together with the workshop on intercultural living. The leadership of the region encourages confreres to meet every month for two days. The first day is more spiritual and the second is business. We meet six times a year in the districts and six times on the regional level.

Finance: The region totally depends on the support from the generalate. The economic collapse of the country makes it more difficult to do any kind of fundraising projects. The small bookshop run by the SVD in the present situation hardly covers the running monthly expenses. We hope it is a temporary situation and if something changes hopefully the financial situation will

change too. The reality is that there is a shortage of cash in the country as never before. The region is in a process of buying a small farm, and we hope that it will generate funds for the region.

Formation: After almost ten years, the formation house in the region was reopened and is now in its 4th year. Before sending our candidates to study philosophy in Zambia, they spend almost a year in the region doing a pre-philosophy program. We currently have two candidates in pre-philosophy and 7 in philosophy. So far, we have a positive opinion about the initial formation. Having this program in the region gives the confreres a chance to know our candidates better. Vocation recruitment is done in the three dioceses where we work. In terms of ongoing formation for the confreres of the Region, every second year we have our own retreat. The confreres are encouraged to participate in the ongoing formation programs for the priests in the diocese (Bulawayo) that take place a few times a year. Once in three years we also organize our own workshop in the region. The last one we had was on the Bible.