



A View from Zimbabwe

Beauty Mainzanise

There are many contemporary issues that our church is going to deal with during the 2008 General Conference. Although the issues are many, I have a few which I deem important for the African church.



Beauty Mainzanise

First, one of the challenges for the church in Africa is that the general church many times starts good programs and after a while they are stopped. Good examples are the "Butcher Shop in the Backyard," "Africa Church Growth and Development," "Missioners of Hope," to mention a few. I saw these programs lifting the church by equipping the powerless through evangelism and giving hope to the hopeless. These programs are dying natural deaths and new ones are being introduced. I strongly believe that such programs need to be revisited and strengthened to empower the African church in this century.

Coupled with the above situation, the UMC, when coming from outside, has a tendency of making an agenda without consulting the people they want to help.

For the global church to have a better understanding of how to work with the UMC in Africa, there is a strong need to pay attention to the needs of the people. Bishop Eben K. Nhwatiwa as resident bishop of the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area (during his first four years of term, 2004-2008) started a program which I believe our church needs to pay more attention to when they think of doing missions. He introduced the program called Chabadza (a Shona word for joining people who are working and work with them without taking over). Local churches are starting programs and visitors choose programs they like to join hands in. **I hope that the global church will pay attention to this holistic approach and not impose new programs which are foreign and very difficult for the locals to maintain in the future because they will remain foreign to them. Cooperating with the locals assures the church that the program will continue because they are the inventors and will be proud of their achievements.**

The African Bishops at their historical roundtable meeting, September 10-13, 2007, at Africa University had a chance to look into issues that affect their church and society. Many thanks to the Council of Bishops and the General Council on Finance and Administration who gave this rare opportu-

nity to our African Bishops. In order to fully empower the church in Africa, there is a great need for an annual meeting of the African Bishops. This will further help the UMC to develop and enhance a uniquely African vision of mission.

The **second** issue can be seen in the central discussion at the above roundtable on poverty that is haunting Africa. Professor John Z. W. Kurewa, E. Stanley Jones Chair of Evangelism at Africa University, lifted up three paramount theological issues in relation to poverty. First, the poor were at the center of Jesus' ministry. Secondly, there is need for the UMC to look at the poor from a material point of view. Thirdly, he said the cross and the resurrection of Christ are inseparable. Hence the relationship increasingly needs to be celebrated "through the power of the Holy Spirit, the victory, joy and even hope for prosperity of the African Continent that comes from the message and experience of the risen Christ." When the global church looks at this issue with the same eye through which Africa sees, then we will start to speak the same language as a church.

The **third** issue to be understood relating to poverty eradication is the need for holistic education. This approach helped Old Umtali Mission during its early years to produce leaders who were

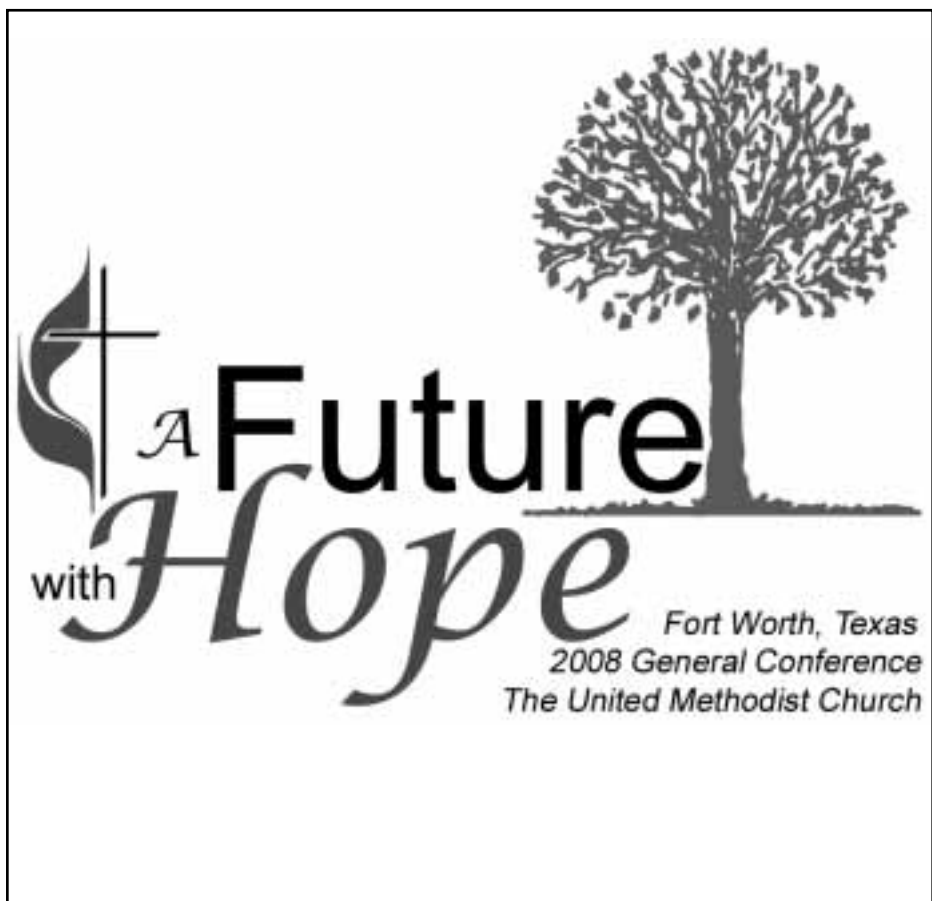
not only pastor-teachers, but also agriculturalists, builders of better houses and church buildings, and also leaders in their communities. The education at Old Untali was for the “mind and hand,” said Professor Kurewa. Without equipping the African church with the knowledge of the “mind and hand,” the church in Africa will always be a begging church.

The **fourth** issue our church needs to pay attention to is that the church in Africa is faced with a challenge of food and health crisis. Professor Fanuel Tagwira, the Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources highlighted that many diseases Africans are suffering from are nutrition related. If the nutrition situation is taken care of, then some of the health issues will be resolved. He stressed that there is need for the church in Africa to initiate food security projects. The church needs to go back and be involved in the agricultural sector, which they used to do in the 1960s. There is need for dual training for people as it was in the beginning of missionary work in Africa so that people can be equipped through practical studies and be ready to fight the prevailing challenges in Africa. The African church needs to be strengthened through agricultural and health-care programs.

The **fifth** challenge is more personal. Issues concerning women and the girl child are at the center of my heart. When the general church does statistics on the work of clergywomen, the African’s voice is silent. African clergywomen are continuing to struggle to find their voices in this male-dominated church. A good example is of the two female DSs in my conference, Revs. Tazvionei Musanhi and Tsitsi Madziire. I have come to notice a lot of male counterparts who still do not believe that women can be in top leadership positions. Some people think that the bishops appoint females as a favor. I believe our church can help clergywomen in Africa by taking the initiative in addressing issues of patriarchy, then acknowledge the clergywomen, and give them support so that they don’t feel it’s just their battle. **Women have the right to lead and the girl child has the right to all human rights.**

These issues and more are affecting the church in Africa and need a concerted effort of the general church to promote a healthy church on the African Continent in this century. □

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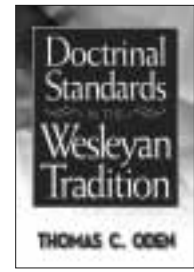
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