

I first visited the Monastery of Christ the Word in 2000 just as the HIV/AIDS pandemic was becoming widespread.

The monastery was established in 1996 in a property owned by the Order of Precious Blood Sisters, who had established a school for girls on the Monte Cassino Mission.

It is geographically situated in a rural area, near the village of Macheke, some 100 kilometres from Harare. The monastery continues to be the home of Benedictine monks from Ampleforth Abbey.

During an Easter Vigil service I shared a reading with a boy named Gift Biasi. He read with clarity and expression. His guardian grandmother, had made certain the school fees had been paid. I met children of various ages eager to engage and learn but economic prosperity was in decline and money was short. Farms were being taken over and employees dispersed.

On my return to Ampleforth I was asked to give an account of my experiences. During that talk I suggested that Education was a priority. All people rural, urban, poor and rich need to develop skills which will enable them to evaluate their political, economic and social circumstances. Giving the gift of literacy was the first step towards renewing Hope in the future.

The **ZIMBABWE EDUCATION FUND** came into being.....

We began by concentrating on PRIMARY aged children. In 2002 £30 would educate a child for a school year. The value of the ZIM \$ was in freefall and the continuing instability of the currency has made it difficult to offer support to all the students who could benefit.

Today's Inflation means fees rise.50 US \$ covers a single term. Frs. Richard, Barnabas and Bro Placid liaise with the parish council in Macheke and the Headteachers of the Government schools to seek advice when allocating funds at Primary and Secondary levels. Fr Richard established the practice of overseeing reports and pupils were made aware of the opportunity they were being given. Some students have progressed into Tertiary Education. Through sharing information about the academic gifts of the most able students other donors have supported particular individuals. There is evidence that by sowing the "education" seeds in Macheke we can rely on a strong and varied harvest.

Incidentally Gift Biasi is 25, has a wife and 2 children. He works as a Computer programmer in Harare. Each year since 2001 between £4,000 and £6,500 has been donated to coincide with the start of each academic year in January. By attempting to meet this deadline we help Fr Robert and the community to decide how they can administer the funds for the year. Those donors, who are able, can GIFT AID because this account was established in the beginning as "FRIENDS OF CHRIST THE WORD" (Ampleforth Abbey Trust.)