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## I am Thankful!



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It is with much joy that I share with you the great things for which I am so thankful for during this Thanksgiving season. Since June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, I have served as the newly appointed Area Director for Africa as well as maintained my position as Director of African American Mission. From October 27<sup>th</sup> through November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014, I was on a mission trip in Africa, the first one since I returned to this position. This mission trip highlighted the blending of my love for these two ministries. First, by leading a mission trip of African American pastors from Cleveland Baptist Association; and after, by travelling to both Zimbabwe and Zambia to revive and strengthen our partnership in mission with our partners in those countries. Both projects went well and I would be remised not to thank God and my colleagues, both here at home office and our partners on the mission field, for their success. I am THANKFUL!

**CLEVELAND BAPTIST ASSOCIATION (CBA)**  
**and**  
**The UNION OF BAPTIST CHURCHES IN BURUNDI (UEBB)**

In 2001, we started relationship-building between CBA and UEBB, and in 2002 a covenant was signed between the two organizations. However, due to a change in leadership in CBA and new priorities brought in by the new administration, relationships between the two bodies did not grow to the expected level. When Rev. Yvonne Carter accepted the call to serve as Executive Minister early this year, we discussed a possibility for her to reset the partnership with UEBB. I made all the necessary logistics and we planned a trip to leave Cleveland on October 31<sup>st</sup> to arrive in Burundi on Saturday, November 1<sup>st</sup> and stay there until Monday November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014. I arrived in Burundi ahead of the team in order to make sure that everything is in place for the team to arrive. The four of us preached in four different churches on Sunday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, which was a tremendous experience. On Monday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, we attended a meeting with UEBB leadership to discuss a proposed new covenant. In the afternoon, we started our mission of visiting local churches (we also did the same visitations on Tuesday and Wednesday, November 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>). We were very fascinated by the warmth of the welcomes in every church we visited; we received kind words of welcome and food for our bodies and in exchange, they expected us to share the Word of God, the food for souls. On Thursday, we left Bujumbura, the capital city, and went to the interior of the country. We visited Musema Baptist Church, the first protestant church to be established in Burundi, back in 1928. From Musema we went to Kayanza in the north where we visited two other churches. On Friday the 7<sup>th</sup>, we met board members who were meeting at Rubura, the second oldest church in the country. After the talking with the Board, we returned back to Bujumbura to get ready for the closing service on Sunday November 9<sup>th</sup>. We, all the missionaries, met at one church: the Kinama Baptist Church. The sanctuary was packed and Rev. Yvonne Carter delivered a powerful message, exhorting Burundian Baptists to be "prayer warriors." On Monday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, the team from Cleveland left Burundi, and I remained behind to continue my mission trip to Zimbabwe and Zambia.

**ZIMBABWE**

Tuesday, November 11<sup>th</sup>, I left Bujumbura, Burundi for Harare, Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, due to the flight delay, I could not arrive in Nairobi early enough to visit our Partner, PHARP (Peace building Healing and Reconciliation Program). I wanted the opportunity to see our prospective missionary, Mrs. Marilyn Raatz, who is currently doing her practicum with PHARP. My visit in Zimbabwe ended up also being much shorter than anticipated. At the Harare airport about 2:00am, I was met by Bishop Peter CHIBINJANA, the head of the United Baptist Church of Zimbabwe. Along with him was his deputy, Rev. Dhube. We spoke briefly before I retired for the night.

In the morning we have had a fruitful discussion. Rev. Dhube shared with me the church's current evangelical status, church planting, and involvement in Christ-like ministries. IM supported the UBCZ with milking goats in order to help HIV-AIDS orphans. Providentially, I was in Harare when Mr. Caiaphas NGALIVHUME, the HIV-AIDS project manager, was passing by on his trip to Malawi, and able to brief me on the project.

In our discussions they expressed deep appreciation to IM and the way we assisted them during a time when HIV-AIDS was at its highest level in Zimbabwe.

During our discussion, they shared with me their need for personnel; they need teachers (professors) in their Bible College—the only institution that prepares pastors for the Convention. They also called for medical personnel in their hospital at Rusitu. Rusitu is a big center where the Church has its hospital, a high school, Bible College, and is where missionaries from abroad have lived while in the area. Currently, they have a South Korean doctor based at Rusitu. As we all know, Zimbabwe is a country in misery. They are facing a severe hardship caused by the misunderstanding between the government of Zimbabwe and Western governments. In that type of situation, local poor peasants are the ones to suffer.

## ZAMBIA

Thursday afternoon, November 13<sup>th</sup>, I left Harare for Lusaka, Zambia. At the airport, the leadership from the Convention was waiting for me. After visiting an orphanage sponsored by the Baptist Convention of Zambia, I went to check in at the Lodge. On Friday, we spent day discussing the possibility of a resumed partnership. Before traveling to Zambia I had gathered a great deal of information regarding the conflict between the current administration and some of the key leaders in the Convention. The issue that brought division was in fact a gift we, ABCOTS and IM, gave them: a building that we purchased from a mining company that was going bankrupt. This was purchased to serve as an educational center. The Convention decided to make it a theological college and we (IM) helped them by supporting future lecturers to come to the U.S. for training. Seven men graduated one with DMin and six with MDIVs. Back in Zambia, however, a group that included several lecturers decided to make the Center/School independent of the Convention (with obviously very good reasons) but the Convention felt insulted by the idea. The Convention wants to remain the sole owner which is why churches members of the Baptist Convention of Zambia have supported, and continue to support, the current administration.

The BCZ leadership has expressed to me a very deep appreciation for the ministry of Dan Buttry. They have benefited greatly from his training in the conflict transformation seminars—especially the training in Zambia early this year. They would like IM to consider resuming our partnership and sending more missionaries and want IM to consider appointing a missionary pastor to train their pastors on associational level. They pointed out that it was in fact what Rev. Charles West had planned to do and they still have that need. The church planting has continued to grow and has blossomed from 350 churches 10 years ago to 800 churches today. Unfortunately, most of pastors of those churches do not have any biblical training let alone a formal theological education. They have need for a traveling missionary that would plan an intensive course on a specified topic to be run for 4 days in a given area to train church leaders. Pastors from that association would meet for those four days being taught specific subject matter such as Christian Stewardship, Spiritual Gifts, etc. etc. The length of teaching could be 4 to 5 days and every other week, the missionary would go to a different association.

Women's Ministries has also expressed a need for a missionary woman to help them build up the Women Training Center. They have already purchased a large plot of land (3 hectares), have installed already a borehole for water supply, built a small shelter for the caretaker, and want to develop this land into a Training Center able to train local women and

girls but also for it to be used as a meeting facility for women across the country. This land is located just outside the city of Lusaka, about 15 miles from the City Center.

## **CONCLUSION**

I am truly thankful for the good people God has given me to work with. I always think about the men and women called by God to serve far from their native lands. In the case of Africa, I praise God for those who dare to go even when the world would suggest otherwise. Our missionaries have been on the front line in the battle against HIV-AIDS, Ebola, and Poverty and have been on the front lines fighting against ignorance by presenting the uncompromising gospel of Jesus Christ. I know well that even the mission fields I have visited in Burundi, Zimbabwe and Zambia that it is a fruit of somebody else's labor before us. I praise God for our partners in ministry both in US and in Africa.

It is my hope and prayer that our mission trip with the Cleveland Baptist Association team will add value to the ministry they have in Cleveland. Surely, the Burundi Baptists have been blessed and so has the team from Ohio. Our brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe and Zambia have a remarkable gratitude for what IM has done with them. They call upon us for more engagement for the furthering of the Kingdom.

As we celebrate Thanksgiving this year, let us be thankful to God for His faithfulness:

Great is Thy faithfulness  
Great is Thy faithfulness  
Morning by morning new mercies I see  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me

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