

COMPANION DELEGATION FROM THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA VISIT ZIMBABWE

The Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Rev Dr Mark Hanson visited Zimbabwe as guest of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ) from 19 March to 23 March 2013. On arrival at Bulawayo's Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo International Airport, Bishop Hanson who was accompanied by his wife Iona, Rev Dr Raphael Malpica Padilla (Director ELCA Global Mission Unit) and Rev Benyam Kassahun (Program Director for East and Southern Africa in the ELCA Global Mission Unit) was met by the ELCZ Presiding Bishop, the Right Rev Dr Stephen Dube and the ELCZ Eastern Diocese Bishop, the Right Rev John S Moyo as well as ELCZ General Secretary, Munatsi M Dube and Bishop Emeritus Dr Ambrose Moyo.



Bishop Mark Hanson (centre, facing camera) is greeted by Bishop Stephen Dube on arrival at Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo Airport, Bulawayo

The same day, 19 March 2013, the ELCA guests had the opportunity to visit the site where the City Centre congregation is constructing a chapel to solve a problem the city congregation have with statistical growth (congregation has 600 members) which has made it not only difficult, but expensive to rent space for church services every Sunday. The piece of land where the chapel is being constructed was acquired through financial assistance of the ELCA.



Bishop Mark Hanson (centre) listens as Huitsmang Dube, the City Centre Development Chairperson makes a presentation at the site of City Centre chapel under construction

Later in the evening, the guests were treated to a dinner and reception hosted by Presiding Bishop Dube at ELCZ Njube Youth Centre where they were exposed to a variety of ELCZ ministries through presentations by those ministries' representatives. Their evening was crowned by a varied cuisine that included local Zimbabwean delicacies such as *mopani* worms and *amasi* (thick sour milk) among others.



[Rev Benyam Kassahun makes a speech at the dinner and reception on arrival night](#)

On the following day, 20 March 2013, Bishop Mark Hanson and delegation attended a graduation of Njube Infohut students who had gone through a Life Skills and Information and Technology course at the Njube Infohut Centre. The guests were treated to testimonies and presentations by students about how much positive impact the course had in their lives. Some students are now at universities where their background training at Infohut was assisting them resist the temptations that come with the freedoms of university education. The climax of the visit to Infohut was when one of the graduands, Mrs Shava, parent of a former Infohut student, testified that Infohut had molded her once rebellious son into a fine young man who



[Mrs Shava testifies about the life changing impact of Infohut on her family](#)

was now at university and the impact on the son had been so positive that she and her husband had decided to go through the Infohut course and hence she was graduating on the day.



Bishop Mark Hanson receives a t-shirt from Ms Chengetai Mano as a token of appreciation for his visit to the Infohut graduation

While still at Njube Youth Centre, Bishop Mark Hanson's delegation took the opportunity to meet the board members of the Ecumenical Church Leaders' Forum whose Executive Director is Bishop Emeritus Dr Ambrose Moyo and Chairperson of the Board of Trustees is Bishop Danisa Ndlovu of the Brethren in Christ Church. The Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum (hereafter called ECLF) is a grouping of Christian Leaders from Zimbabwe's church umbrella bodies whose vision is to transform and empower the people of Zimbabwe, into a God-fearing, peaceful and just society. The ECLF views itself as the conscience, hands and feet of the Church towards helping the nation to realize the fulfillment of Jesus' declaration: " I came so that you may have life and have it abundantly " (John 10 vs 10). The last two sentences in this paragraph are from the ECLF website www.eclfz.org.

Later, on 21 March 2013, Bishop Hanson and delegation together with their hosts, travelled to Burure where the ELCZ have set up a new mission station that has a primary school and secondary school as well as a newly constructed clinic which is yet to open. However, the group only got to Burure after being stuck a few times in the mud on the notorious 7 kilometre stretch to Burure whose condition had been worsened by rains that fell late on 20 March 2013.



Road to Burure, treacherously muddy as ever when it rains even to “all terrain” vehicles

The traveling party wound up their day when they visited an ELCZ malaria project site at Madzivazvido congregation where they crossed paths with another ELCA delegation that was on a monitoring visit to the malaria project. They engaged the ELCZ community there that is involved in a home based grocery shop whose proceeds are to be used in combating malaria through purchase of mosquito nets for vulnerable groups (children under 5years, the elderly and HIV and AIDS victims).

The crowning of Bishop Hanson’s visit was when on 22 March 2013 he officially opened the classroom block at Burure Secondary School and the Burure Infohut as well as hand over an ambulance to the ELCZ for use by Burure Clinic.



Raphael Malpica standing with two Burure Primary School children in front of the ambulance



Burure Infohut is officially opened

Burure Clinic was at the same occasion handed over to the ELCZ by Bishop Hanson with the request that the ELCZ and community expedite the operationalization of the clinic to curtail suffering by the community since the clinic was complete and only awaited the various permits and clearances to start operating.



Bishop Hanson joins in opening the clinic with the people of ELCZ

Bishop Hanson and delegation then concluded their visit by hosting a dinner for their guests at a restaurant in Bulawayo on 22 March 2013 after which there was a meeting with the ELCZ leadership to review the visit and chart the way forward in the relationship between the two parties. On 23 March 2013, it was time to bid farewell when Bishop Hanson, his delegation as well as the ELCA malaria project monitoring team left for Johannesburg where they would link up with other ELCA malaria projects' monitoring teams (that had gone to Zambia and Malawi) to evaluate the entire trip before proceeding home to the United States of America. One thing that will surely be embedded in the minds of Bishop Hanson and his delegation is the never say die of the Zimbabwean people- a myriad of problems does not dampen their spirits and the experiences at Burure where fresh water is a rare commodity, malaria is endemic, roads are almost impassable and the heat is unbearable bore testimony to this.