

Driven out of the Church by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP)

24/11/09

Dear friends,

We are writing to ask for your continued prayer support for the Anglican Diocese of Harare CPCA.

Yesterday, the dean the very Rev'd. Mutamiri, Rev'd. Matyatya, Rev'd. Mutukwa (priest in-charge of Mangwende Mission district), my wife Faith and I went to St. Clare's Mission to meet with our members and conduct a Eucharist Service. When we got there groups of people were seated outside the Mission campus because they were afraid of being harassed. The people at St Clare's were very happy to see us. They had not received communion for a very, very long time. We found that the church was conveniently occupied by pre-school children who were literally locked in. We believed that this was to prevent us from going in. The Kunonga priest Chaparika at this Mission told us we should have given him enough warning so that he could confer with his bishop about our visit. We told him that we were neither answerable to his boss or himself and therefore we did not need to give notice to him. He refused to let us use the church and told us he was going to call his bishop and ask if we could use the building. In the mean time we decided that if we could not use the church building we could have an open air service. But before we started the service I decided that we should just inform the police lest they are told a different story as to what we were doing.

The dean, one of the Church warden and I drove to the police station where we met with the officer in-charge. He told us to go ahead and have our service outside. Just before we started the service the children came out and we decided to move into the church. There was much jubilation as they had not been able to hold services in their church for a very long time. My team of clergy and I took turns to encourage the congregation during the sermon slot. The intercessions were led beautifully by the dean.

As I was doing the thanksgiving prayer the dean noticed the police walking outside and he went out to see them and was not allowed back in the church. He and the churchwarden who had accompanied us to the police were detained in one of the police vehicles. There were about 10 policemen and 6 of Kunonga's priests.

Just before we distributed the communion elements the police walked in and started driving people out of the building. They also asked us to vacate the building and so we quickly and unceremoniously cleared the altar and went outside. I tried to ask why they were driving the people out of the church but they just kept doing it. It was very humiliating indeed. I remembered the Passion of Christ and in particular his humiliation. I said to myself this is nothing compared to what Jesus went through. They started accusing us of refusing to listen and breaking the law. Even the officer in charge who had told us to go ahead with our service joined in accusing us of not listening to advice. The Kunonga priests who had come from Harare started hurling insults at us and me in particular. The dean and Rev'd. Matyatya advised me not to respond to their insults because they were seeking to provoke me to say something

that they could then use against me and perhaps have an excuse to start a riot. The commanding officer continued to accuse us of breaking the law and did not want us to explain anything. He also said he would have tear-gassed us if he had wanted to and that we would not be able to appeal to anyone because the police Commissioner Chihuri was aware of what he was doing. This greatly surprised me. It certainly gave me the impression that he had been sanctioned by higher authority to disturb our service. Equally surprising, as I was getting into my car he called me back and said, "Its politics". At this point I could not keep quiet any longer and so I asked him to explain what he meant by saying "it's politics". He just kept repeating the same thing and I kept asking him to explain. The dean then came and again advised me to just keep quiet and leave which we did.

Our departure looked and felt very much like a "triumphal exit". The Mothers' Union, men and youths were singing "Onward Christian Soldiers" joyfully leading us out of the Mission station and marching on either side of the road with our cars in the middle (as if to protect us from the police) and the police convoy was right at the back. The police wanted to make sure that we had left. Members of the congregation kept telling us not to lose heart because they were not losing theirs over the incident. If anything they were greatly encouraged that we had come and they are prepared to come again if we ask them to. The Mangwende CPCA members converged at the St. Clares' Turn Off from where they continued with their church administration thereby exposing themselves to danger of being knocked down by passing vehicles on the busy Harare/Mtoko road. Some of the people had brought a goat to give me after the service and the Kunonga priests and the police wanted the goat for themselves but the people refused to hand it over to them. They were able to give me the goat at this Turn Off.

Please pray for:

1. Rev'd. Mutukwa, priest in-charge of the district. He was followed home after we parted and harassed by the Kunonga priests. He is a tough priest operating in a very difficult district.
2. The Anglican Christians at St. Clare Mangwende who can't use their church building.
3. The authorities in Zimbabwe to stop the police from harassing our peaceful people who simply want worship their God without interference from the police.
4. The clergy of the diocese who are ministering in very difficult conditions.
5. Our lawyers who are helping us fight our cause in the courts.
6. Wisdom in all our activities in the diocese.