

GREETINGS
FROM
HIGHLANDS
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN ZIMBABWE



On behalf of our ministry team of Rev. Mark Philips, Mike Ward, Elisha Gobvu and Mike and Sandy Wilcox, and on behalf of the elders and members of our congregation, we send warm greetings from Highlands Presbyterian Church in Harare, Zimbabwe to all the members of Polmont Old Parish Church in Falkirk, Scotland. We are delighted to be entering into a church twinning agreement between Polmont Old Parish Church and Highlands Presbyterian Church. So that the members of Polmont can get to know us at Highlands Presby a little better, here is some background on our church.

Highlands Presby is situated in the hilly residential suburb of Highlands, 5 kilometres from the centre of Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. Highlands started to develop as a suburb of Harare in the 1950s. In 1957 members of the Harare City Presbyterian Church decided that it was time to build a Presbyterian Church in the new suburb. A Mrs Ballantyne was a generous supporter of the new church both with financial assistance and with a donation of land for the new church manse. Our church hall was named after her and became the meeting place for the new church while funds were raised for the new church building. Mrs Ballantyne was only one of many members of Highlands Presby at the start of the new church with strong ties to Scotland. Among other members in that early period were Campbells, Donaldsons, Logies, Forbes, McKays, McKinleys, Macintoshes, Stewarts and many others of Scottish origin.

In the early 1960s sufficient funds were raised to build the lovely church building that we still use for our church services today. This can seat just over 400 hundred people (at a squeeze on Christmas Day!) Today, just over fifty four years after Highlands Presby was established we are blessed with a membership of just over 450 members. Our membership has broadened from our initial foundation of “hot Scots” to a large contingent of Zimbabweans, South Africans and English, with a sprinkling of Americans, Australians, New Zealanders, Dutch, Koreans and

other nationalities thrown in for good measure. We are still blessed with surnames such as Craig, Fraser, McLeod and McGregor in the congregation, but it is also common to hear surnames such as Gwata, Gobvu, Mapondera, Mamvura, Kobus, Van Der Merwe, Van Der Veen, Phillips, Smith, Wilcox and Lee.



In October 2007 Highlands Presby celebrated its fiftieth year as a church serving the Christian needs of Harare and Zimbabwe. We are now in our fifty fourth year of existence. God has richly blessed us as a church during these fifty four years, both in good times and in bad. During this time Zimbabwe has suffered political turmoil and war, and in more recent times an economic meltdown that led to some of the highest inflation rates ever experienced in the world. In 2008 there was a One Hundred Trillion Zimbabwe Dollar bank note briefly in circulation in Zimbabwe (that’s 100,000,000,000,000 in figures). While sounding like an incredibly valuable bank note, this note was only worth a few Pence Stirling. According to one estimate, inflation spiked at 87 sextillion per cent. Many Zimbabweans lost their entire bank savings during this period.

Despite these trials and tribulations we have always benefitted from a strong body of Christian believers with whom to fellowship and worship our Saviour God. We have benefitted from good Christian teaching from the various ministers that have served us, and in those few times when we have been without a minister we have been blessed by Christian brothers and sisters from both within the congregation and without who have ably come forward to teach us. During both good and bad times we have been sad to see good friends and members leave Highlands Presby to move to other countries around the world. However, we rejoice that many of these friends have become valued members of other churches and that during our bad times they and their

churches have been able to support us spiritually in prayer and also in the provision of physical needs. We rejoice that God continues to add to our membership with new converts from Harare and its surrounds and also with people who have moved to Zimbabwe from other countries. We rejoice that through our twinning agreement with Polmont we can make new friends and new ties with Scotland and together we can support each other in the promotion of God's word in our respective cities, countries and wherever God may choose to send members of our fellowship.

Highlands Presby currently has four church services on a Sunday. Our 7.30 am service is very popular with many of the senior members of our congregation. Our 9.00 am service is popular with young families as we have a junior church (Sunday school) that runs alongside. At 2.00 pm there is a service for our Shona speaking members of the congregation while the 6.00 pm service is popular with our members in their teens and twenties and with members who are not able to come to one of the morning services. Highlands Presby also organises church services once a month at three homes for senior citizens.



During the week there are a number of home fellowship and bible study groups which meet regularly while we have active men's and women's fellowships which meet for breakfast on a Saturday morning once a month. Our youth of high school age have a youth group called "BLAST" which meets on a Friday evening for fellowship, a light meal, Christian teaching and volley ball. From all accounts from my daughter they have a great time together. One of the most active and popular groups within the church is the ladies "Body and Soul Exercise Group" which meets in the hall three times a week for fitness training to Christian music, followed by a short time of devotions. This group is blessed with ladies from their twenties to eighties. Many ladies

from other churches in the Highlands area attend as well. For many years we have supported a feeding scheme for very poor people in the Highlands area. The need for this has fallen away in recent times as the economic environment in Zimbabwe has improved significantly. However, there is still much need for Highlands Presby to support the elderly as many have lost pensions, savings and the support of family members who have been forced to immigrate to other countries for economic reasons. We have also supported for many years a small pre-school, which meets on the church premises from Mondays to Fridays, for thirty two young children from impoverished backgrounds. We are suspending this pre-school from December 2011, while we look at how we can expand and improve the premises used by the pre-school. Our vision is to turn this into a community outreach centre capable of being used by both old and young alike.

We are blessed to be able to support two missionaries in the field. Cathy Stokes heads the work of Operation Mobilisation in Zimbabwe. This organisation encourages churches in Zimbabwe to send members out in to the missionary field. Cathy was for seven years a missionary in Kazakhstan. Vicky Graham works in the remote and undeveloped Siabuwa area of Zimbabwe spreading the word of God to the Tonga people who live there. Vicky is a trained nurse and she also does an incredible job ministering to the medical needs of the people who live around Siabuwa. Thank you to the congregation of Polmont for your generous support to the missionary work done by Vicky.

Through this twinning agreement we hope to develop strong bonds of fellowship and support between Polmont and Highlands Presby. We will regularly uphold you in prayer and encourage our members visiting family and friends in Scotland to call in at Polmont. We hope to keep in regular contact and look forward to welcoming warmly any members of Polmont who are able to visit Zimbabwe at any time.

With best wishes and blessings on behalf of all at Highlands Presby

Andrew Lorimer
Twinning Leader
Highlands Presbyterian Church

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel" (which means, God with us).

Matthew 1:23