



Zimbabwe Council of Churches



VOICES OF HOPE

NEWSLETTER

29 January- 9 February 2024



In Search for peace

(Matthew 8:23-27)

By Rev Dr Mundenda



How can we realize peace in a world filled with turmoil, wars, pandemics, and unnumbered human social ills? The wars in Russia, Ukraine, Israel, and Gaza come to the fore. There is an acute disintegration of families due to economic meltdown and political upheavals, exodus into the diaspora for greener pastures, as well as those deported back to Zimbabwe. There is a severe compromise in morality, human sexuality, and ethics. The fourth industrial revolution has its consequences. These upheavals have a devastating effect. One cannot envisage peace tallying in the world with communities' norms turned upside down by catastrophic factors. A reflection of Matthew's pericope provokes the mind to reflect on Jesus as the epitome of normalizing life turned upside down. Reflecting on wars, turmoil, and chaos globally, I stand with the disciples with Jesus in the boat submerged by the violent sea storms.

Their calling out to Jesus and trust in him were indispensable instruments to stabilize the sinking vessel. The wind rocked the boat, leaving the disciples timid and afraid. The disciples called, "Lord save, we perish. We are sinking and going down.

The boat was drowning. Do you feel the drowning in motion in Zimbabwe? Jesus said, "Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?" (Matthew 6:30).

Jesus rose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and tranquility prevailed. And the disciples marveled, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and sea obey him?" In other words, Where does he come from ?

The wind buffeted the twelve despite Jesus' presence. The wind unsettled the boat, covering it as if it were drowning. When the disciples could not withstand the pressure, they awoke Jesus searching for shalom, completeness (1 Ki 7:51, Neh 6:18), quietness, wholeness (Jn 10:10) or harmony within and without. Peace rested with God the creator. He is the peace, his name is peace (Jdg 6:24), and the prince of peace. Peace woke up, rebuked the wind, and chided the timid and fearful disciples.

The tumults have unsettled the boat, nation or nations of the world, the shelter of safety and security. All sorts of problems have unsettled citizens. The wars, pandemics, moral decadence, disputed elections, and corruption keep unsettling lives. The national and community leaders have tried to speak to the wind through legislation and distinct initiatives.

To the amazement, the mountains and storms continue to hound citizens. Such unsettled times are ideal to call for peace and search for peace from the right source.

The storm, according to Tertullian, was a threat to the boat. The survival of the vessel entangled the disciples. It was incumbent upon the prince of peace, with citizens calling out to him. The disciples searched Jesus for the perfect peace. The storm listened to the voice of the King of kings, who spoke it out of the lives of the hopeless team.

The passage heralds the authority of Jesus over the natural world and initiates Jesus leading the disciples into the Gentile territory. Before the destiny, the winds assessed their faith. They called out

to Jesus, settled the matter, and the journey went ahead unhindered. Jesus lamented why the disciples disturbed themselves with their unbelief.

The text reminisces the limitation that requires the unlimited divine to intervene in human injustice, oppression, and exploitation. Otherwise, calamities continue ravaging humanity (Isa 26:3-4). Peace encompasses realizing the man of peace, who alone can silence and muzzle retrogressive forces troubling humanity.

Let us strive to search for completeness and harmony all the time in the nation. Our history since independence betrays peace sought after by citizens. Development, growth, and sustainability hover around the peace.

Blessed Day!

“To be or not to be“ Election Observation by the ZCC

By Joshua Mhlanga



The Christian community is currently grappling with a profound uncertainty surrounding the active participation of the Church in ongoing by-election processes. This uncertainty has been exacerbated by the recent recalls of opposition representatives from both Local Authority and Legislative positions, a move spearheaded by Mr. Sengezo Tshabangu, the self-proclaimed interim Secretary General of the Citizen Coalition for Change (CCC) party and the resignation of the CCC President, Nelson Chamisa .

These recalls, initially targeting 15 legislators and 67 councilors, whose by-elections occurred on December 9, 2023. Subsequently, Mr. Tshabangu extended the recalls to include 6 more MPs and 21 councilors, whose by-elections were scheduled for February 3, 2024. Faith leaders find themselves in a dilemma, questioning whether the Church's involvement in these controversial elections might be construed as an endorsement of the contested recalling process and the subsequent outcomes of the by-elections.

Recent developments have further complicated matters, with Church organizations, including the Zimbabwe Church of Churches (ZCC), publicly declaring their commitment to accompany the 3 February by-elections.

The ZCC has expressed willingness to extend its involvement beyond this immediate electoral event.

Legal challenges from the recalled MPs were dismissed by the High Court, asserting that only the CCC as a party could make such a challenge. Furthermore, the courts have banned all recalled CCC members from contesting the elections under the same party's name. The Church has publicly criticized these recalls for undermining post-2023 election recovery efforts, disrespecting the electorate's will, and exacerbating political polarization.

The backdrop of this situation is a country grappling with economic challenges, where the by-elections have already incurred a fiscal strain of over USD 5 million for the December 9 by-election. There are concerns about voter apathy especially by opposition supporters, providing an opportunity for ZANU-PF to strengthen its power amid suspicions of constitutional amendments for President Mnangagwa's potential third term in 2028. Compounding the issue is the lack of stakeholder efforts in voter education.

In response to these challenges, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) is gearing up to address the crucial issues at hand. The ZCC, guided by the #iprayivote campaign initiated in 2018, remains committed to mobilizing citizens for informed and effective participation in electoral processes. In observing these by-elections, the Church aims to focus on building awareness and urgency for participation while assessing the political environment's fairness. Additionally, the ZCC intends to evaluate the implementation of August recommendations by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and other stakeholders through fact-based, politically impartial analysis presented in the mission's findings and recommendations.



In essence, the observation of the by-elections by the ZCC aligns seamlessly with the principles and obligations set forth by the #iprayivote campaign. The Church continues to play a pivotal role in navigating these challenging times, aiming to facilitate sustained and inclusive dialogues that connect multiple stakeholders with diverse interests and grievances. The iprayivote campaign remains a beacon of hope, guiding the Church in its endeavors to uphold the values of democracy and justice within the intricate web of by-election complexities.



STATEMENT ON THE 3 FEBRUARY 2024 BY-ELECTIONS

"...therefore brethren, select from among you seven men (and by inference women too) of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task ..." (Acts 6v3)

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), guided by its theological foundations and in accordance with its #iprayivote campaign, diligently observed the 3 February 2024 by-elections. Elections are a process of choosing leadership, a process which is valued by the church as it has biblical precedence (such as in Acts 1:12-26). The Church's participation in electoral processes is based on its love and concern for the country, especially for the poor, the marginalized, the unemployed and those rejected by society.

The 3 February 2024 by-elections were conducted under the provisions of Section 39(2) of the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) and is a response to additional recalls of six (6) Members of Parliament and 17 Councillors affiliated to the Citizen Coalition for Change (CCC) political party on the 7th of November 2023. The ZCC expressed its profound concerns regarding the recalls of legislators and councillors elected in August 2023 harmonized elections.

The recalls disrespected the will of the electorate (voters), intensified political polarization in the country, weakened the legislative capacity and quality of the 10th Parliament, it also grips the nation into a perpetual electoral mode; imposes a heavy fiscal strain on the country and are a threat to democracy as much as they are a significant impediment to the country's post August 2023 development efforts.

Despite all these concerns, ZCC deployed an Ecumenical Election Observation Mission (EEOM) comprised of 85 local observers for the 3 February 2024 by-elections. The decision was informed by our theological mandate and the need to observe the elections for evidence building and to inform the follow-up nation building processes as we journey with the people of Zimbabwe. Our observation also focused on evaluating the implementation of key recommendations put forth by various local, regional and international observer missions following the disputed 23 August 2023 Harmonized Elections.

The ZCC issued two update reports on the election day and following the closing of the polls. This final statement is issued following the finalization of the counting processes and the declaration of results for the elections. The 3rd of February 2024 by-elections were predominantly peaceful, marked by a well-organized, efficient, and effective election-day administration. All the 85 polling stations observed opened on time and had adequate voting materials, security personnel

behaved professionally and maintained peace, the voting and vote counting process was transparent, and no political party conducted an "exit poll survey" nor was there any intimidation antics observed. This is a great improvement from the inefficient administration of the August 2023 Harmonized Elections. The Church commends the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) for the improved administration of the elections.

However, the Church expresses deep concern regarding the widespread voter apathy observed during the elections. According to the data collected by our observers, the average voter turnout for the observed constituencies was 23.2%. Comparably, the 26 March 2022 by-elections were much better as they recorded turnout just below 50%. This shows that the voters or people of Zimbabwe in general have lost trust in electoral processes. Zimbabweans today seem to consider elections as a ceremonial process rather than a democratic way to express their preferences for desired leadership. This speaks to the larger discontent with the nature of our political processes and our democratic trajectory.

The Church strongly asserts that recalling elected officials by individuals or political parties is a disconcerting act that disrespects the will of the electorate. Such actions, driven by a power-focused agenda, blatantly neglect the wishes of Zimbabwean voters and is imposing huge costs to the nation. This not only undermines the fundamental significance of elections as a process designed to accurately portray the will of the people but also diminishes the overall importance of elections to genuinely reflect the collective desires of the citizens.

This regression in constitutional democracy, where elected representatives can be recalled without due regard for the electorate stands as a pivotal factor contributing to voter apathy which was evident during the 3 February 2024 by elections. When leaders are elected by a small segment of society, their ability to truly represent the people becomes compromised. It is deeply concerning that we now have Members of Parliament (MPs) who secured their positions with the support of only 10% of the registered voters in their constituencies. In the Phelandaba-Tshabalala constituency for instance, only 2465 out of the 22,803 registered voters participated in the just-ended by-election, leaving out a substantial 20,338 potential voters whose voices were not heard. Our current context is demonstrating that electoral processes are failing to serve as a process that reflects the collective will of the people.

The 3 February 2024 by-elections have further decimated the little confidence the electorate had in the electoral process in Zimbabwe. The Church urges reconsideration of our political actions and the conduct of our electoral processes. Restoring the integrity of elections is paramount in fostering a democratic society where the voice of the people remains a cornerstone of good governance. This is crucial considering our aspirations for the transformation of our country.





National Dialogue towards addressing governance challenges

By Reginald Ngwenya and Shamiso Saburi



In the midst of complex and interconnected national problems, Zimbabwe is witnessing a growing call for a National Dialogue to address the myriad of challenges facing the country. National Dialogue processes have increasingly gained attention as an effective tool for conflict resolution and political transformation globally.

Reflecting on the deep-rooted and protracted conflicts in Zimbabwe, Sirbert in ACCORD 25 emphasized the importance of national dialogue processes in dealing with state reform and constitutional change. The author stressed that these processes have evolved as in-country tools for political transformation, enabling local and national peacemakers to work together to resolve conflicts and establish peace infrastructures. Zimbabwe has already seen the establishment of various dialogue platforms, including Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD), the GNU, and more recently, the National Election Reform Agenda (NERA). However, there are concerns about the legitimacy, effectiveness, and inclusion of dialogue actors, with a recognition of the risk of elite-driven agendas and exclusive processes.

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) has played a significant role in fostering national dialogue. Notably, the ZCC was involved in advocating for the establishment of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) in 2018, contributing to addressing past human rights violations and promoting national healing.

The ZCC has organized and facilitated several national dialogues, bringing together political leaders, civil society representatives, and other stakeholders to address pressing issues affecting the country. These dialogues have provided platforms for discussions on topics such as electoral reform, national governance, human rights, and socio-economic challenges.

The ZCC has actively promoted peaceful and non-violent approaches to conflict resolution, condemning political violence and urging parties to engage in dialogue rather than resorting to violence. The organization has called for an inclusive framework for dialogue processes, recognizing the importance of community-level dialogues that allow diverse demographic groups to participate.



A Step Towards Economic Development

By Payton Sibanda



The district of Bubi in Zimbabwe has long been known for its scenic landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and vibrant communities. However, one of the longstanding challenges that has hindered the district's progress has been the state of its road infrastructure. This came during the dialogues which were conducted by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches in an effort to advocate for the betterment of living standards in the region.

For years, the residents and businesses in Bubi have grappled with poorly maintained roads, which have not only impeded transportation but also hindered economic growth. Fortunately, recent efforts to improve the road network in Bubi are set to bring about positive change and pave the way for enhanced connectivity and economic development. These efforts came after the ZCC engaged different stakeholders such as Bubi RDC and DDF to spearhead the road rehabilitation which has been on halt for quite some time.

Recognizing the critical need to address this issue, the local government in collaboration with relevant stakeholders has embarked on an ambitious road improvement program in Bubi. The initiative encompasses the rehabilitation and construction of key roadways, with a focus on enhancing accessibility and safety. Through investments in road infrastructure, the authorities aim to stimulate economic activity, bolster agricultural productivity, and enhance the overall quality of life for residents.

Beyond the immediate economic benefits, the road improvements in Bubi are laying the groundwork for long-term sustainable development. Enhanced connectivity opens up new possibilities for investment, tourism, and trade, positioning Bubi as a more attractive destination for businesses and visitors alike. Moreover, improved roads contribute to a safer and more efficient transportation network, which is essential for fostering social cohesion and resilience in the face of future challenges

As Bubi continues on its path towards greater prosperity, it is imperative that the momentum behind road infrastructure improvements is sustained. Ongoing maintenance and expansion of the road network will be crucial to ensuring that the benefits of enhanced connectivity are fully realized. Additionally, continued collaboration between local authorities, community leaders, and development partners will be vital in identifying and addressing the evolving needs of Bubi's growing population. The improvement of roads in Bubi represents a significant milestone in the district's journey towards inclusive growth and sustainable development

Snippets from the 2024 Alternative Mining Indaba

“ The Churches' participation in 2024 Alternative Mining Indaba; seeks to create a safe and inclusive space for diverse stakeholders to engage in meaningful dialogues and analysis of their interactions in the extractive sector - ”

Rev W. Dimingu



Follow the below links to download articles from the Alternative Mining Indaba:

- <https://zccinzim.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/AMI-2024-PATHWAYS-TO-JUSTICE-IN-THE-JUST-ENERGY-TRANSITION-PROCESSES.pdf>
- <https://zccinzim.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ZCC-AMI-article.pdf>
- <https://zccinzim.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/AMI-Theological-Reflections-on-Agenda-Setting.pdf%20>



ENVIRONMENT CORNER



Welcome to the environment corner where we may talk about everything relevant to the environment with me Josphine Munhape. I'd like to give a shout-out to Warren Day Nursery and Junior School in this week's episode. I was just doing some rounds when I landed up at their facility. Hearing their pupils discuss climate change, even at the Early Childhood Development (ECD) level, was very delightful. Their main theme was 'Global Warming', below is one of the many poems that intrigued me. With such a deep understanding and passion for protecting the earth at such a young age, I can safely say the future is environmentally sustainable. Watch out for more poems in the coming editions.

Get in touch

Whatsapp 0715576816

Email: josphine.munhape@zccinzim.org

POEM

By Jayden T. Kabayadondo



Our mother earth is crying,
The Global temperatures are increasing,
People, plants, and animals are dying,
Climate is changing,
Veld fires are ravaging our forests,
All because of this 'Global warming'

When will we STOP?
When will we start to protect our earth?
Ladies and gentlemen, it is high time we ACT,
To PROTECT Our Mother Earth.





Zimbabwe Council of Churches

Editor & Designer - Shamiso Saburi , ZCC Communications Assistant



Chief Editors - Davison Marenga, ZCC M&E Assistant

**Admire Mutizwa, ZCC Director Church, Peace & Just
Societies Department**