

# **African Training Schools Report**

by Jerry V. Hogg

*Avondale Church of Christ* - Harare, Zimbabwe

During the last 15 years, the nation of Zimbabwe has become well-known throughout international news programs. Their history has not been good. Corruption and violence have been the rule of the day. Outside governmental ranks, the people of Zimbabwe are wonderful, with a deep conviction of right and wrong. They have looked with a strong anticipation toward a better day that, from their point of view, is surely to come; they have never given up. Within the midst of daily struggles, the leaders of the church have continued to faithfully serve the Lord and at the same time move forward, making evangelistic plans to help congregations develop and grow. The church has never lost sight of the absolute need for ongoing training of local preachers and leaders to take the church into the future regardless of the political or economical situation in which they find themselves.

The elders of the Avondale church in Harare invited me to assist them in an evangelistic seminar at the end of March. It was their effort to encourage and train some local brethren to become even more evangelistic at Avondale and in other congregations. I presented lessons on leadership, along with a couple of local preachers, to help the congregations better understand the God-given directive to “...preach the gospel to every creature...” Another reason for my visit to Zimbabwe was to explore the possibility of working with the Avondale congregation to develop a training program. I have visited with several from the congregation from time to time about establishing a training program in the area of Harare under the *SIBI* umbrella. However, I never dreamed that the need would become so pronounced and so evident during the weekend that I spent in Harare.

The Saturday program started early Saturday morning and finished about 5:00 that evening. Later in the day, I was told by Washington Mhanga, an elder at Avondale, that he had left early that morning to pick up a group of Christians from an outlying area who did not have transportation to get to the seminar. I then met some the 60 + new Christians from the area called Caledonia. Their village is about 25 miles outside of Harare. As I visited with them, I became thoroughly impressed with their dedication and desire to study the Scriptures.

A bit of background is now necessary. About 3 years ago, government forces, with all their might, including their bulldozers, came into the area where they were living at the time. It was on the opposite side of Harare from where they are living now at Caledonia. Their village had been long-time supporters of the political opposition party. In the eyes of the present government, they were part of the wrong party. The police and army officials began issuing orders, demanding and forcing the people out of their homes. The bulldozers then went to work, destroying their homes and everything they had accumulated.

It was not long until the whole village was destroyed. Under cover of darkness, the army and police then loaded the people into their trucks and took them to a former “white-owned farm” called Caledonia. It had been a large, very productive cattle farm that employed many local workers and supplied meat to feed others until the government ordered the owner off his farm a few years ago. It was then given to a government official. It is no longer a productive farm. NOW, it was to become the new home for those who had lost everything by government forces.

When the government trucks arrived on the back side of the farm, they off-loaded the people onto

the side of a path that ran through the farm. There were no roads or driveways that would take the people on into the farm. There were no buildings! No homes! No place for them to sleep until they were later able to build small mud-brick huts with thatched roofs they have called “home” for the last three years. With virtually nothing and with every reason to totally give up, they have built a way of life that has led them to the Lord.

A few months ago, someone from the village met a gospel preacher from Harare (who had been assisted financially by funds from the Asbury congregation in Knoxville, TN). This preacher “preaches” to everyone he meets. His contact with this man from Caledonia resulted in a serious study of the Scriptures. It was not long until he was baptized and as we might say, “*the rest is history.*” There are presently about 60 or so Christians meeting at Caledonia. Some visited during the evangelistic seminar at Avondale, and I became very interested in the Caledonia brethren. But, that was only half the story. On Sunday afternoon, brother Mlhanga took me to Caledonia to meet with the church. He took 100 bags of mielie meal (corn meal) to them in his truck. The road that took us to their meeting place was very rough. At one time we got stuck in a hole in the road, and the brethren came running to push us out. The church had built a small building for their church building. See photo to the right.



Another small building still under construction stood next to their “meeting place.” See photo below.



When we inquired about this building, we were told “*this is going to be our library and study room.*” They only have 3 or 4 books, including Bibles. (Notice the brother in the picture holding a book that will become part of their library and study room!) They are planning on doing a lot of study! My heart was touched, even a tear rolled down my cheek as I witnessed their desire to study. Unbelievable! I left the brethren at Caledonia with a strong desire to serve more fully, study harder, and help these brethren, and others, existing in a harsh, difficult land to fulfill their dream of seriously studying God’s Word.

### **Highlights for the proposed study program in Zimbabwe:**

1. The brethren at Avondale and Caledonia have a strong desire to study
2. Excited about a Sunset Satellite School. This will be held at the Avondale church building.
3. In spite of a devastating history, the brethren are so keen on learning.
4. The Avondale church will continue to help these new brethren.
5. In addition to the Avondale and Caledonia brethren participating in the study program, other preachers in the area will also be involved.

**Present Needs for the Zimbabwe brethren:**

1. To establish a Satellite Study program at the Avondale church.
2. Funding to help with set-up costs, including DVD study material and player.
3. To help the Caledonia brethren to improve and upgrade their meeting place.
4. To look at the possibility of purchasing a tent to use for a meeting place at Caledonia.

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