

April 2026

Dear family and friends,

Greetings and we wish you all a joyful spring. We are grateful for warmer, longer days and the beautiful sight of blossoms and budding trees.

We returned from Zambia near the end of March and are 'right side up' again, and life is back in the fast lane, it seems. Our time in Zambia was also in a fairly brisk lane, though, evenings were quiet once supper dishes were done. Much of our time was spent in discussion between ourselves, and discussion with every layer of folks we could think of, to outline ZMFC's plan to eventually "retire". We have established the date as December 31, 2030. This gives us plenty of time for all to consider what the gaps will be and how best to fill them. The sponsorship program can carry on as is for several more years and the more students that can graduate between now and then – the better. Most challenged by our departure will be the schools: Siabalumbi, Butale and Nalubumba - where about half of the teachers are supported by grants from ZMFC. Our hope is for a gradual slide from our legs supporting the schools, to the communities and the Ministry of Education's legs supporting them. This is the goal!

While still in Zambia the newsletter below was written – enjoy.

Dear family and friends,

Greetings on this warm, sunny, tranquil afternoon. Doors and windows are open to the breeze, a few insects are buzzing around, birds are singing and cattle are grazing nearby. We are nestled into Canaan House in the heart of Seven Fountains farm. The house could be compared to a weekend cottage – a few bedrooms, a verandah that stretches across the front, a cozy living room and a kitchen with an old double desk for a work counter. (You would be amazed at the meals and baking coming out of this small space.) It has been nearly two weeks since our arrival and it is time to share a few bits and pieces of life in Zambia.

The sounds of morning come around 5:30 starting with birds, then cattle, followed (on weekdays!) by little children arriving across the lane for a 7:30 school start. The rains have been plentiful this season and shades of green are everywhere. Thank you Lord. Cattle are happy, farmers are happy, and there will continue to be food to eat for the year.

There are about twenty families living here at Seven Fountains and most residents work at a neighbouring farm either in the labour-intensive tobacco business, or with cattle. The sandy soil of the region is suitable for both tobacco growing and cattle grazing, and many farms in the area are similarly invested in these two agricultural venues. Wages are small, though employers must provide housing, and ZMFC continues to boost educational opportunities for the children of low-income workers. Parents here are like parents everywhere.... hopeful their children can thrive and have more choices in life than they have had.

We have visited Siabalumbi and Butale schools thus far, and met with their senior staff, church leaders, Headmen, and the Parent-Teacher committee. We began last year to bring awareness to the schools and communities that we need to plan for our eventual exit and are targeting the end of 2030 for that reality. It is hard for them, and even for us, to imagine our "retirement", but just as we prepare our children to be independent, we need to do the same for the schools. Our meeting was interrupted several times by heavy rain pounding on the metal roof, making it near impossible to hear. During each deafening cloud burst, Derek Phiri lead a song or two to pass the time. When the meeting wrapped up we were quietly informed "we have prepared food for you". We dashed to a classroom block under umbrellas and dished up nsima, chicken with 'soup' and cooked rape. Absolutely delicious.

To reach Butale we drive through Kalomo town. Town is about 10 km from Seven Fountains and the contrast between our peaceful digs at Canaan house and the bustle and congestion of Kalomo is stark. It is hard to capture in words, but imagine a sea of people, a narrow passageway for a vehicle, and a road surface that might have been level years ago but now is more like moguls on a ski hill. Women skillfully carry all manner of things on their heads and it is so commonplace that we almost don't notice these days...until yesterday when we passed a woman carrying an old Singer sewing machine on her head. How I wish I had taken a picture!

Today, Steve went to Kalomo town to get a hair cut. For \$7.35 he got a good hair reduction, and I got a good laugh and a few pictures.

Our verandah serves as a place to sit outside for tea and to welcome visitors. A real treat is when local children come by to see what we might have for them to play with. We assign Steve to greet them, and he brings out the roll of paper, pencil crayons and the farm "Snap" cards. The kids pick a card with an image they like – possibly a tractor, or a horse – and draw it on their paper.



Some are quite talented! We try to chat with them, though their English is limited, and our conversations are partly verbal and partly charades. If we have cookies in the house, we share with these young ones. Today, Richard – a retired teacher - gave five of them an English language lesson.



Early each calendar year, after a new crop of Grade 10 students are added to the sponsorship program, and we are present here in Zambia, a gathering of all sponsored high school students takes place here at Canaan house. We have the privilege of meeting them in person – no longer simply names on a spreadsheet – they are lovely, eager, young people aiming to complete high school.

They are grateful for your help.



At the end of our gathering two students requested baptism, and the nearest body of water was a cattle trough. With much trust and confidence, the youngsters got into the murky water and joined the family of those who believe in Christ as Saviour and Lord. A group of cattle came along, curious as to why we were in their watering place, and as soon as we departed they quenched their thirst. We could not help but smile at the circumstances - it was a lovely afternoon!

Blessings on all of you back home. We wish you could join us to hear what we hear, see what we see, and

greet all the lovely people we get to visit with.

With love,

Joan