

ZIMBABWE SCHOOL SYSTEM and THE PROBLEM OF ORPHANS

Primary School in Zimbabwe is divided into 7 grades. Grades 1 to 4 are compulsory. Because of the increasing fees and the economic situation many parents are forced to stop sending children to school **and they are refused from public school if they lost school years.** In addition to this there are many orphans who cannot attend school and pay school fees and uniforms. This is mainly due to **AIDS.**

Average life in Zimbabwe is about between 15 and 34 years for women and between 20 and 38 for men. AIDS is the main reason of mortality. Usually wife and husband die at a distance of few years (one or two) from each other and children remain orphans of both parents.

Usually children are taken care of from old grandparents that often are ill, unemployed and **need to be helped in first place.** According to Zimbabwe culture they should be taken care of from their uncles but, nowadays, because of lack of work and consequently of economic possibilities, their family does not want or even ignore them. They are aware that children have the same illness their parents died of and that they would become an unbearable weight on their shoulders.

This is why children often live alone and are encouraged by neighbors to go to and ask the catholic Sisters to help them.

WHAT WE DID

We took an immediate decision: **open a school,** admit all orphans and street kids without asking them to pay fees and uniform but giving them pens and exercise books (soap to wash themselves and their dresses, too). We also employed two teachers.

The project had an immediate success. The first children we admitted talked to their friends so that we had 50 pupils we divided into two rooms: in the first room the children from the 1st to the 5th grade, in the second the children from the 6th and the 7th grade.

As soon as the news spread the representative of the ministry of education based in Chegutu came to see our school. He was really satisfied and told us that there are so many orphans, or children who lost school years, that those two rooms are absolutely not enough and that we should build a private school in Chegutu.

After some weeks the Social Assistant of Chegutu came to ask us if we intend to continue our school project because he has so many children to take care of, especially "street kids" that, according to the President Mugabe **need absolutely not to exist.**

We started in February. The subjects we teach are maths, content (general paper), Shona and English. At the moment the children are about 115 and their number keeps increasing