

## **Pilgrims and Partners Testimonial by Jeannie Page**

In June, 2011, seven members of the Emmanuel United Church congregation in Ottawa embarked on a journey to Africa to explore a new global partnership. This congregation has a long history of being “the hands and feet” of Christ in the world, by supporting programs and projects both locally and globally. For many years, youth and adults alike have participated in Habitat for Humanity builds in Ottawa, New Orleans, and many other places. For 26 years, our congregation has had a partnership with the Iglesia Bautista Emmanuel congregation in San Salvador, which also has many projects to help people in El Salvador, from building homes to providing microloans for seeds and irrigation systems for local farmers. Over this time more than 90 members of our congregation have travelled to El Salvador on service learning trips.



*Choir in church*

But this year we chose to travel further afield, to meet with a congregation in Chipembi, Zambia, and explore a partnership to learn more about rural life in Africa. What a rich and rewarding experience this was! We were received with open arms and open hearts in this village which was a mission station of the United Church of Zambia. Everywhere we went we were fed with nutritious food grown locally and met people who are proudly working to support their community.



We toured the local Community Health Centre, and learned how they are coping, though vastly understaffed because of a lack of housing for nurses. This is a country where one in four persons is HIV positive, and though the government provides anti-retroviral drugs for free, many have to walk miles to the nearest clinic for treatment.

*Patients waiting at the medical centre*

We toured the basic school, which also suffers from staffing shortages because of lack of housing for teachers, and where it is difficult to get basic supplies such as exercise books and pens due to lack of funds. We toured the Chipembi Girls School, a boarding school which takes girls from all over Zambia and has produced many women who went on to leadership roles in that country and abroad, and an Agricultural College, which is teaching students practical farming skills, and has a program for adults with disabilities who would otherwise have been left behind.

Everywhere we went they proudly showed us their strategic plans, and shared with us their hopes and dreams for the future. They have found leaders from within who have taken on the challenges of making life better in a country where there is 80% unemployment and so much poverty. They are not looking for outsiders to come in and fix everything, but were overjoyed that we were interested in walking with them in their journey, and perhaps providing some resources to help them achieve their goals.





*Chief and Headmen*

nurture, to bring others from our congregation to listen and learn, and to help them in some small way in their journey to survive and thrive. For seven pilgrims from Ottawa Canada, this was the beginning of a new global partnership in the heart of Africa.

After a time of meeting with community leaders, ecumenical leaders, traditional leaders (chief and headmen), touring institutions and staying in the homes of local families, we attended the Sunday church service of the Chipembwi congregation of the United Church of Zambia. There we met a committed, faithful group of people who shared their music with joyful harmony and made us feel welcome and part of their extended family. By then we knew that this was a relationship we wanted to