

ENCOURAGEMENT

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The vast majority of us need, and indeed, welcome encouragement.

We often show encouragement to others in various ways with kind deeds such as food parcels, providing meals, hospitality, encouraging words, and serving others in a variety of ways.

In Luke 8:40-56, we are given a clear understanding of how to encourage others through the actions of the Lord Jesus Christ as he encouraged the down-trodden and the ruler of the synagogue.

Verse 41 reads; *'A man named Jairus, ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus feet.'* Then Verse 42 explains that just after Jairus had witnessed the miracle of Jesus casting demons out of a man he received the news that his only daughter was dying.

In verses 42 to 44 Jesus continues on his way through the crowd. As many people surround Jesus, a woman who was bleeding for 12 years touched Jesus' cloak and her bleeding immediately stopped. It was at this time Jesus asked; *'Who touched me?'* Peter explained; *'The crowd was pressing against you.'* Verse 46 Jesus says: *'Someone touched me; I know the power has gone out of me.'* Jesus' words 'who touched me' are the key. Jesus then waits for her to speak. He wanted to hear her story and having done so, affirms her story and speaks the words in verse 48; *'Your faith has healed you. Go in peace.'*

By communicating with the woman, Jesus has encouraged her and taken her a further step in her faith.

As Jesus continues along the way with Jairus to heal his daughter he receives the news that his daughter had died. In verse 50 Jesus says, *'Do not be afraid. Just believe and she will be healed.'* Here Jesus once again is encouraging and lifting Jairus up in his faith.

We are able to see in this passage, desperate people who did not have super faith. Jesus encouraged them; listened to them, and wanted to hear their story. He did not discount them.

In the same manner, Mothers' Union does not discount the people of Zimbabwe, a country which has been at the fore-front of our prayers for so long. For many months on TV news we have heard of atrocities such as murder, enforced starvation, and the collapse of the entire economy resulting in mass unemployment and uprooting of people as extreme poverty grips the land. Cholera outbreaks have spread across the country and there is no vaccine supply as hospitals become empty, schools close, and people hide to protect their families from recurring life-threatening episodes.

However, what was not given TV air space was this: During this time, with all the suffering and violence, Mothers' Union in Zimbabwe did not disintegrate and collapse; rather, it strengthened. Under these extreme circumstances, Mothers' Union has grown in grace, along with an unmovable hope in the future. Such is their faith in the knowledge of what God's love can do.

Albertina, Mothers' Union President of Masvingo says: *'It was indeed a difficult year, but Mothers' Union members throughout the diocese did not lose heart. Prayers, working together, comforting each other and offering the little help we could kept us going. Mothers' Union is a backbone of our churches. Wherever one goes, one is welcomed by women in blue and white blouses and black skirts singing and dancing to music accompanied by drums.'*

An Archbishop's appeal for Zimbabwe was launched in February this year. Only three months later, the fund has already brought in over 300,000 pounds and Mothers' Union will play a key part in the distribution of the money. One of the main areas targeted is Food Distribution Centres in schools. Money is also being allocated for buying drugs, gloves, and medical supplies to replenish depleted Clinics.

Mothers' Union members have also received training and counselling for assisting in longer rehabilitation programs, water purification and agricultural methods. In addition, there are two main areas of outreach: essentials in both mental and physical health care to be provided, and the re-introduction of agricultural processes to a starvation-ravaged country that used to be one of Africa's major food suppliers.

These members will pass on their training to others, ensuring that the information will remain on-going, providing much-needed information and expertise to people at the grass-roots level.

At present, the Anglican Church and Mothers' Union are working together with a Zimbabwean Organisation called Farming God's Way. Together, all parties concerned will train participants to undergo specific steps to change farming from just sustainable farming, to highly profitable farming.

We see a new beginning in this country. There are new workers in the dioceses of Masvingo, Mataberland and Harare who we hope will be a part of the ever-growing sharing of God's Love and service that Mothers' Union members provide.

Too often we want to express our opinion and place our values on people instead of concentrating on the person and accepting their opinion just as Jesus did to the woman who was bleeding for 12 years, and just as he did for the ruler, Jairus, who went to Jesus after hearing the news of his daughter's illness.

Both went away with faith, and were encouraged.