



## SPREADING THE GOSPEL IN **ZIMBABWE**

For more than twenty years, **Renewal Ministries** has supported the **Emmaus Center**, a Catholic community within Uganda that bears much fruit for the Lord. The following report outlines the Ugandan Emmaus Center's recent outreach to another Emmaus Center in Zimbabwe. This outreach was funded by the generosity of **Renewal Ministries' supporters**.

**By Joseph Aonu Okiror**

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### AN INVITATION

In 2018, Bishop Paul Horan of the Diocese of Mutare in Zimbabwe, the newly appointed president of his country's bishops' conference, visited the Emmaus Center in Uganda. The Emmaus Community in Zimbabwe was going through difficulties, and he wanted to learn from us. The late Fr. Collier, OCM, started the Emmaus Community in Zimbabwe in 2006 after completing a Life in the Spirit Seminar in Uganda. Afterward, Fr. Collier asked us to help him start an Emmaus Center in Zimbabwe. Sadly, he died before he could lay a solid foundation for the community.

Bishop Horan invited us to Zimbabwe to offer a priests' retreat, strengthen Zimbabwe's Emmaus Community,

and provide formation to Catholic Charismatic Renewal leaders. Since Zimbabwe is struggling due to a long-stretched economic war, he also asked for help raising funds for the priests' retreat.

During a bishops' meeting in Uganda in 2019, we met Bishop Horan again, and he repeated his request for us to provide Life in the Spirit Seminars for all his priests. We suggested that Renewal Ministries might consider his request, and in fact, they agreed to provide the necessary funds. Unfortunately, the unforeseen challenges of Covid lockdowns required us to postpone the retreat until May 2022.

### THE CHALLENGES

A six-person team traveled from Uganda to Zimbabwe for the priests' retreat and leadership training. Coming from a hot environment, we found ourselves struggling with the cold winter weather; however, we managed to persevere with a smile each day.

Fr. Roy, the priest in charge of renewal in the diocese, briefed us upon our arrival. The facts were very disturbing. Only three percent of the fourteen-million people in Zimbabwe are Catholics, and many Catholics have joined other religious sects and cults. One of these cults has more members than all the Catholics and yet it is only recruiting Catholics and others.

Fr. Roy's report was rather bleak; however, he encouraged us to be ourselves and offer what God had laid on our hearts, including playing instruments

to make the worship more lively. We even bought a guitar, which helped greatly during praise and worship. The priests joined in the dance, clapping their hands and singing freely.

Although the bishop wrote personally to invite every priest, only thirty-four out of sixty-three priests attended, including the bishop, who was there the entire time. We suspect many did not want to have anything to do with the Charismatic Renewal and so found reasons to not come.

We discovered that some of the participants were very critical and cautious about the Charismatic Renewal. As the retreat progressed, though, they all came to love it. The participants needed healing and forgiveness, as they had deep issues among themselves. Thankfully, they experienced genuine reconciliation before the end of the retreat.

### ADORATION AND INTERCESSION

**We attribute the success of the priests' retreat to the fact that the diocese organized twenty-four hours of adoration and intercession before the Blessed Sacrament during the program.** The Holy Spirit's presence was evident through anointed talks, sharing groups, and the celebration of the Eucharist. Even those who were skeptical about the retreat grew to deeply appreciate what was happening. We prayed for the baptism of the Holy Spirit for everyone and commissioned everyone, including the bishop, who wanted to be commissioned afresh.

We noted many areas of growth in participants throughout the retreat:

- Many priests admitted having had no personal relationship with the Lord Jesus until the retreat. They openly shared that they had a lot of intellectual knowledge about Jesus but lacked personal experience. They came to understand how Jesus' sacrifice on the cross needs a personal response in order to activate the faith.
- The priests came to better understand the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.
- Adoration motivated the priests to spend time in prayer.
- Participants said they were deeply blessed by the example of the facilitating team's unity.

In his homily for the closing Mass, Bishop Horan exhorted the priests to be open to the Holy Spirit, who allows us to be effective witnesses of the Gospel. He also thanked Renewal Ministries for making the retreat possible, and he encouraged the priests to offer many prayers for Renewal Ministries and its collaborators. He hopes other dioceses also will allow their priests to do Life in the Spirit Seminars for deeper Christian living.

We also spent four days training Renewal leaders by teaching from portions of Patti Mansfield's book *As by a New Pentecost* and Ralph Martin's books *The Urgency of the New Evangelization* and *A Church in Crisis: Pathways Forward*. This training was well received by both the priests and the leaders.

## BEARING FRUIT

We observed with humility that the reason Uganda is ahead of most countries in Africa in terms of evangelization and formation is that Renewal Ministries has invested many resources in the country over a long period of time, sponsoring programs for priests, seminarians, and bishops. International priests' retreats have borne fruit in this area, as well as Life in the Spirit Seminars for priests and major seminarians. We are seeing many positive fruits, such as great openness to the baptism of the Holy Spirit by many priests and bishops. In fact, many new bishops participated in a Life in the Spirit Seminar, Unbound, or other leadership formation program at the Emmaus Center when they were still priests. Today, they form a ring of support for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

Recently, a bishop who had attended a Life in the Spirit Seminar at Emmaus with his fifty parish priests testified on its positive impact. Providentially, I was able to tell him that Renewal Ministries had approved funds for another batch of his priests; he was very happy and commented that this is the way to go for priests.

With Renewal Ministries' help, the Holy Spirit has started strengthening Christian leadership in Africa and building God's kingdom by bringing many people to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is our humble prayer that God in his generosity will enable this work to continue.



## LEAVE A LEGACY OF FAITH

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One significant way you can help ensure Renewal Ministries' continued work of Catholic renewal and evangelization is to join the St. Catherine of Siena Society by designating us as a beneficiary in your will or trust.

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The Zimbabwe mission concluded with the leaders praying for the baptism of the Holy Spirit and commissioning all participants (pictured at right).

