

The Base Church Plant.

Catalysts to the church plant.

In the mid 1990's New Covenant Ministries International began to work into Zimbabwe through a partnership that grew between Samson Ndlovu (Lower Gweru) and Brendan O'Connell (Bryanstone church, Johannesburg). Bernie and I were on a number of trips with Brendan in those early days (working from a church we had planted in Johannesburg in 1994). Many of that early work being around Bulawayo, Gweru and Raffingora. The apostolic influence of Brendan O'Connell and Ian McKellar, from New Covenant Ministries International, began to draw in many churches who had similar vision, values and an appealing biblical culture of church planting and partnerships.

Towards the end of 1998, Ian began to sense a grace was lifting for the church he and Bernie were leading in Johannesburg and that they should move to Zimbabwe and plant again there. The question was where? Being of Zimbabwean heritage the easy move would have been to Bulawayo, a town they knew well. The journey between the 'how' and 'why' of God's workings are often a long process, so that detail is excluded here, but in 1999, Ian and Bernie scouted out the land and in 2000 moved to Harare. The process was complicated by the fact that they were no longer citizens of Zimbabwe, nor did they have residential statuses. Ultimately two applications to work into the country took 3 years to process – and the result was a negative response.

During the year 2000, as conflict began to touch the nation, Ian and Bernie brought the drama presentation 'Heavens Gates and Hells flames' to Harare. All but one of the salvations and recommitments were handed over to other churches in the city to model a Kingdom heart. Early relationships had developed between PJ And Ashleigh Smythe of River of Life Church and Ivan and Stacy Ronald of the Vineyard church. Both of these churches played a role in the birthing of the church - 'Gateway to the Nations Church'. Norman Rich and Kevin and Cheryl Gaynor were also key in the birthing of the church and the launch meeting was held on the 26th July 2000, on the outside verandah of 'The Mission Base.' The subsequent Sunday meeting was held with 4-5 people in the congregation and slowly the church began to grow in size. Early meetings being held in the 'Mission Base' dining room and then later in a dormitory – and occasionally under the trees when the dormitory was occupied!


Being a little short of gifted and anointed leaders Bernie, by default, began the children's ministry. Ken Clark, with his two children, attended one of our meetings and his kids loved the Sunday school. Ken was leading another church at that stage. Ken came back and Janette followed soon after. Without question, with the call of God on their lives – and as the church grew- Ken and Janette and Adrian and Melissa Lister were brought onto eldership, and a little later Norman and Jenny Rich.

In September 2007 Ian and Bernie, through government intervention, had to leave Zimbabwe and so they handed the church over to Ken and Janette, using the email service to do so! The following emails show something of that process. One of the most difficult church meetings we have ever attended was our final meeting – in the Alex Park school hall – when the congregation stood together

around the Lords communion table and we held our last meeting with people that had won our hearts like no other.

The rest is history, and Ken and Janette must pick up the story from here.

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ZIMBABWE
DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION


Notice to Visitor

To WEEDEN IAN KYNASTON
Address in Zimbabwe 75 KING GEORGE AVE
HARARE
Period of visit: From 29-08-07 to 11-09-07
EXTENSIONS FOR DEPARTURE

TAKE NOTICE that, in terms of section 10 of the Immigration Regulations, 1979, you are required—

(1) to report to an immigration officer at BETBRIDGE EXIT on EXIT
OR
(2) to report to an immigration officer at at intervals
of from the date of issue of this notice;
AND
(3) To surrender this notice to an immigration officer at the place of your departure from Zimbabwe.

WARNING: It is an offence for any person entering Zimbabwe as a visitor to take up employment unless he/she has been granted a residence permit or a temporary employment permit.



.....
Signature of Holder

.....
Immigration Officer

Notice surrendered to me

.....
Immigration Officer

OFFICE DATE-STAMP

-----Original Message-----

From: Ian & Bernie Weeden [mailto:weedeni@mweb.co.zw]

Sent: 16 September 2007 18:30

To: Ken/Janette Clark

Cc: Marcus/Adele Herbert

Subject: Some things - urgent

Importance: High

Dear Ken and Janette,

Think of you guys all the time. We feel as if there has been a death in the family and we are in a grieving process. When people ask us what we are going to do Bernie has a good illustration. She says it is like

her husband has died and is lying in the lounge and people want to ask you what you want to do! You have not even dealt with the body yet.

We arrived down here with our few possessions truly feeling a bit like refugees. The Cornerstone house was offered but has others staying in it too, so we stayed the last weekend with Ed and Heidi where we learnt that they are taking over London road church. As Bernie explained in her email someone from Cornerstone heard of our plight and offered us a room. It is not ideal as it is in an office complex with people around all the time but, for now it is home.

I have come to realise that a life of serving God means many prices. I think of Paul how often he writes about what he wanted to do but could not for one reason or another. Here is the position as of now and I would appreciate you and Janette giving me your input.

This has to be one of the hardest things to work through. We are passionate about the church in Zim and feel the pain of this season intensely. We have been in the Zim fight from the beginning and, together with guys like you, have been where we felt God would have us. It is so hard to move away from that. Being here we feel, in some way, deprived. In material things Zim has nothing but in terms of Christians living and working together it has what few other nations have. We have worked with true heroes of the faith.

The feeling is that you and Janette are the ones that can continue to lead the church ... The hard thing, for now is Cornerstone church only focus on East Africa and they would want us to primarily help them there. Our hearts are also in Zimbabwe, however, but we will have to lay Zim down for now...You can imagine the trauma that causes us!

The difficulty for us is how GTTN will take this. Too many leaders have deserted Zim and we would not want to be one of those stats. Have events unfolded as they have because there is a change of season for all of us? It does seem that way to me.

Our primary concern is for the church and its people. We know that you guys can do the job, but can we be released into what God may be calling us into, without hurting Gateway to the Nations church? The church is first, last and always people. The decision must be made now, and communicated soon, as the longer it is delayed the more difficult it becomes for you, for us and for GTTN. We believe that this is right even though our hearts just want to be back with you all. How do you feel?

Do you have the call to lead GTTN and do you think we can be released from Zimbabwe?

...There is much for us to work through but I urgently need your input.

In principle this is the way it is going. I need your perspective and your input.

Appreciate you guys greatly

Ian and Bernie

----- Original Message -----

From: Ken Clark

To: Ian & Bernie Weeden

Cc: Marcus Herbert

Sent: Sunday, September 16, 2007 10:45 PM

Subject: RE: Some things - urgent

Hi Ian and Bernie

I have sent you a copy of the email I have sent out to the Church.

Janette and I had already seen that this might be coming. As Janette said, she knows it is right in God, but worries about being ready. We love GTTN church and really believe that God has placed us here for this season. You have trained the Church well, with everyone doing their part. I feel a bit like Peter in the film "Chronicles of Narnia" where he is about to ride into battle leading hardened fighters and soldiers. He feels inadequate but knows that Aslan has placed him in that position and equipped him for the task.

I saw this even in the verses that God led you to read at the last Communion you led at the church in Paul's final speech. You kept saying "this does not apply", when in fact I felt maybe it did.

Ian, I see you as my Father in the faith. I have grown so much in Christ under your leadership and training. But I know as well I had grown comfortable in the role of assisting you, and that God is now stretching me again. I also know that I saw you as the Father to a number of other churches in Zimbabwe and really believe that God is expanding your ministry into a more Apostolic one.

Because of the way you led I believe that the people in the Church will transition well. I just pray like Solomon for the Wisdom to lead well as Christ directs. I would like to continue to make myself accountable to you and to Marcus for the Church and to speak into both the church and my life.

I am not sure of the next step. I am really going to miss connecting daily with you.

Much love

Ken and Janette

Ken,

This is a letter I will cherish always. Thanks for your affirmation. I have never had the privilege of working with a couple of your integrity and calibre. We have been greatly blessed. We will help you as best we can.

At least we can keep an eye on your precious daughter for you!!

Blessings

Ian

Handing over Gateway to the Nations church (GTTN) to Ken and Janette Clark.

Dear friends,

You have been our family for many years and we have loved you dearly. We have loved this church and its people like no other, perhaps because of all we have been through together. We have always been so proud of you and have learnt much from you. We have known that there could come a time when we would not be permitted to stay. As we all know, life in Zimbabwe is not easy, yet Bernie and I would have not have chosen to be anywhere else.

In a non-fiction film (called "Glory"), that has many parallels to our Christian lives, the army major writing home to his mother says "I am proud to be part of such a great company of men." That has been an absolute truth for us too in our relationship with Gateway to the Nations church.

On arriving in South Africa, we felt like refugees with our two suitcases and no home. We were unsure of where to start or where to go. Now having few resources and no place of our own to stay, it is obvious that our move to Cornerstone Church is best for us. Our last application to the Zimbabwe authorities took one year to process. We cannot live in that state of limbo and have had to make a decision about our circumstances. We trust God with our lives, and with your lives, and let God be God. God's call is strong on our lives and we cannot just sit around. Cornerstone have asked us to join their Eldership team and, in accepting that, we recognise that we must serve them well for however long that season will be. God has clearly told me that we are to commit ourselves to bring value to Cornerstone. To do so we must commit ourselves fully to them and must lay down our vision and dreams and embrace theirs. We understand that we must now give our best to them and what God has called them to do. We cannot expect them to take us in and then have us leave suddenly. There is no honour in that.

The truth in the saying that 'if you love something you are to let it go' is relevant here. We love you all but in order for the church to continue, we cannot lead from a distance; it is unfair on the Eldership and the church. The church must be given the chance to continue and to do this we must release it. I want you to understand this clearly. My concern is that our people grasp this. We trust that you will appreciate that we cannot always dictate how things turn out and that in every season of our lives we are to trust God fully. As much as we may want to, we cannot live this season of our lives on 'pause' and nor can the church stay on 'pause' to wait and see what comes about. It could be that our permits take months (it has been two months already) ... or even a year. I cannot return until the authorities have made a decision.

We do not know for how long this will be, and we understand that the early approval of our work permit will now not mean an early return to Zimbabwe. There will be those who do not understand this and I ask that you help one another at this time. I read often, in scripture, how Paul the apostle writes of how desperately he wants to be with people he loves but he is prevented from doing so at that time. I confess I do not fully understand the workings of God but I do know that we love Him dearly and fully trust Him.

It is both unhealthy and unwise for the church to be without a lead visionary. In consultation with the apostolic team, their advice is that we should hand over the leadership to one of the pastors and to give the church freedom to carry on in our absence. It is obvious that we cannot continue to lead from over 1,500 km away. So, it seems good to us and the Holy Spirit to ask Ken and Janette to take over with immediate effect. In some ways they are 'reluctant' leaders but I see that as a positive, as they understand the great responsibility they will now have. Transition is always a difficult time. We ask that you will give them and the eldership your complete support. Show them and communicate this to them.

I remember my last 'preach' to you in which I included Dallas Willard's saying that 'Nothing irredeemable can happen to the Christian.'" (Rom. 8:28) Do you believe this?

Please stay in contact with us. Bernie may try to get up there before I can return. She does not have the same restrictions on her. However, once we are permitted to return, Bernie and I will come up and, with your new leadership's permission, take the church service – it should help to bring some closure. In our 'position' I know of not other way of communicating this with you and I trust that you will understand.

We have been greatly encouraged by the many reports that we have had of you all serving the church well and 'pulling in.'

It will take us some time to get over the loss of serving alongside saints such as yourselves but God will take you on, and further than we would every have done. We will do our best to serve God in Cornerstone with passion and commitment, as we ask you to serve Him there. We will accept the many challenges and opportunities we have in God, but be assured that we will never forget you. We hope to see you soon.

Our love to you all

Ian and Bernie