

Presbytery of Zimbabwe Statement on Cyclone Idai

March 2019

The Origin and Path of the Cyclone:

Cyclone Idai originated on the 4th March and has taken a two week journey of destruction into south-east Africa. The cyclone hit Mozambique causing catastrophic damage with whole towns left destroyed and underwater in and around Beira. The cyclone moved into Malawi and into the eastern part of Zimbabwe, a completely landlocked country. Idai reached its peak with maximum winds of 195 km/h (120 mph)!

According to statistics from the news, Cyclone Idai has claimed the lives of hundreds of people and affected more than 1 million others. The death toll so far is at:

- 150 in Mozambique
- 98 in Zimbabwe
- 56 in Malawi
- 7 in South Africa
- 3 in Madagascar

The Destruction in Eastern Zimbabwe:

Many roads are underwater, damaged and rendered impassable, whole villages have been totally sunk under the flood waters, and bridges have been compromised. The result is that many communities have been left trapped because there is no way of getting into their areas and no way for them to get out. This includes boarding schools that are also trapped with children in them.

A new problem is the resultant lack of electricity in the affected areas. This means that communication has been cut off because even cellphones and internet connection require electricity to be usable.

Ironically, there is "water water everywhere but not a drop to drink," because the water everywhere is actually mud water. In addition, there is a dire need for food, shelter, clothing, blankets - everything that a person needs to survive. Fuel also is needed for helicopters to take provisions to affected people and to airlift the ones who need to be taken to hospitals.

The Response of the People of Zimbabwe:

Zimbabwe has been experiencing a build-up of negative experiences: from the prevailing economic difficulties, to the semi-drought situation of this last farming season, to the January public riots, demonstrations and violence, to Cyclone Idai and its destructive effects.

Yet the people of Zimbabwe have responded overwhelmingly by putting aside their own hardships and instead putting together aid for the victims of the cyclone. In every town and city there are collection centres that have been set up by companies, churches and non-profit organizations where people are giving food, clothing, medical supplies and money for the victims. Many are offering their labour as they do the job of sorting, packing and loading trucks full of supplies going to eastern Zimbabwe.

A major collection centre for receiving and distributing donations has been set up at St Columba's Presbyterian Church in Mutare. From there, the goods will be taken into the affected areas with the help of helicopters and planes. In Harare, Highlands Presbyterian Church has also been set up as a major collection centre loading goods onto haulage trucks headed for eastern Zimbabwe.

We are witnessing a measure of the Matthew 25 community: *"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me"* (Matthew 25:35-36).

Our Call:

- Ironically the cyclone was named 'Idai' which in Shona (a Zimbabwean language) means the instruction, the imperative or the command to "love!" We are calling on the people of Zimbabwe to continue to love those who have been affected.
- The Presbytery of Zimbabwe affirms the united ecumenical, inter-faith, and diverse efforts that are already taking place in the country to send aid to the victims.
- The Presbytery is calling on every single person in the Presbytery to take their place in helping the victims of Cyclone Idai: we can encourage our school children to collect goods, congregations to organize assistance in whatever creative ways they can, citizens to raise awareness, and those in companies to raise funds, because we all can and need to do something.
- We call upon all to take advantage of the collection centres that have been set up in each and every city and town, waiting for our donations and/or our labour.

In summary we are calling on everyone, inside and outside Zimbabwe, to come alongside us to engage in 3 C's:

1. **C- Care:** Care for the victims by giving material help & solidarity messages.
2. **C- Comfort** Comfort the victims psycho-socially, and raising awareness.
3. **C- Cover** Cover the disaster and all the humanitarian aid efforts in prayer.