

# Zimbabwe

## LAND OF BEAUTY, PEOPLE OF FAITH

*Zimbabwe has a thriving community of Latter-day Saints.*

**By David Dickson**  
Church Magazines

### **The Beauty of Zimbabwe**

Considered one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World, Victoria Falls on the Zimbabwean border is neither the widest nor the deepest waterfall in the world—but many claim it to be the largest in sheer volume of water. More than a mile (1.6 km) wide, cascades of water plummet 350 feet (108 m) to crash on rocks below. The roaring falls kick up such a heavy spray that you can't even see the base of the falls during the wet season.

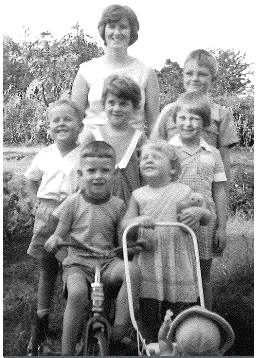
Victoria Falls is only one of many stunningly beautiful sights in Zimbabwe. Located in southeast Africa, Zimbabwe (formerly Southern Rhodesia) lures travelers from all over the world to experience its national parks, wildlife, beauty, and culture.

Whether you want to travel with a wildlife safari or try your hand at white-water rafting down the thundering Zambezi River, Zimbabwe has a lot to offer—including a thriving community of Latter-day Saints.

### **The Church in Zimbabwe**

There are more than 23,000 members of the Church living in Zimbabwe. Membership has grown swiftly in the last 35 years. Prior to 1980 for example, there were just over 1,000 members.

The prophetic declaration issued by President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) on June 8, 1978, that “all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color” (Official Declaration 2) had a positive impact on the growth of the Church in Zimbabwe.



*Primary children in Kwekwe, 1965.*

Many Latter-day Saints have helped strengthen the Church in Zimbabwe. Here is a brief look at some of those pioneers.

**Modern-Day Pioneers in Zimbabwe**  
**Hubert Henry Hodgkiss**

Missionaries were sent to Southern Rhodesia for a limited time in the early 1930s. Yet by 1935 all missionaries were pulled from Southern Rhodesia (then part of the South African Mission) and the area was closed because of the shortage of missionaries and

the distance from the mission home in Cape Town, South Africa.

In September of 1950, eight missionaries were sent to reopen Southern Rhodesia. Five months later, the first convert baptism in the area took place.

Born in England in 1926, Hubert Henry Hodgkiss moved to Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, in 1949. He initially learned about the Church from a friend who was investigating the gospel. Hugh had doubts about the restored gospel and set out to prove to his

TIME LINE

*1927: Two sons of a member who emigrated from South Africa are the first members baptized in Southern Rhodesia.*

*1930: President Don M. Dalton of the South African Mission sends the first missionaries to work in the new Rhodesia District.*

*1935: President Don M. Dalton stops sending missionaries to Southern Rhodesia.*



*1950: In September, President Evan P. Wright assigns eight missionaries to reopen Southern Rhodesia.*

*1951: Hugh Hodgkiss is the first convert baptized in Southern Rhodesia.*

*Latter-day Saints in Harare, Zimbabwe, come together to celebrate a baby blessing in 1985.*



friend that the Church was not true. Instead, after searching the gospel closely, Hugh developed a testimony of its truthfulness and decided to be baptized. "I was wrong," he told his friend. "I am joining the Church."<sup>1</sup>

Hugh was baptized February 1, 1951, marking the first convert baptism in Southern Rhodesia. He enjoyed being around people and made friends everywhere he went. His friendly nature allowed him to make great contributions to the growth of the Church in the area.

In 1959 Hugh became president of the Salisbury Branch. His counselors were also local members. This was the first time this branch presidency consisted of local members. Before this, full-time missionaries had always filled the responsibilities of the branch presidency.



*The Gweru stake young men at an activity in the winter of 2012. The young men and their leaders reaped maize, then enjoyed eating food and playing soccer.*

*1959: The first known missionary to serve from Southern Rhodesia, Jean Wood, serves in the South Africa Mission.*



*1964: Northern Rhodesia becomes Zambia, and Southern Rhodesia becomes Rhodesia.*

*1978: President E. Dale LeBaron organizes the first Rhodesian District Presidency.*

*1980: Great Britain recognizes Rhodesia's independence; the country's name is changed to Zimbabwe.*



*1985: On August 24–25 the Johannesburg South Africa Temple is dedicated.*

### **Ernest Sibanda**

Ernest Sibanda met two Mormon missionaries on bicycles—Elder Black and Elder Kaelin—in December 1978. They left a Book of Mormon with him. Before their visit, Ernest had already spent many years studying religion. In fact, he had been a teacher for his church for nine years and a pastor for three years.

The night Ernest received his copy of the Book of Mormon he stayed up until 2:00 in the morning reading enthusiastically. He couldn't wait to meet the missionaries the following day. Ernest told them that he had learned more from Joseph Smith about Jesus Christ than all the ministers he had ever met. Ernest was baptized shortly thereafter, followed by his wife and children a few weeks later.

Of his baptism day, he wrote, "I felt very free. I felt released from every evil. I found there was love in me for my family. I found there was love within me for the Church."<sup>2</sup>

Ernest Sibanda proved to be a great strength to the Church. He served as Sunday School president, branch clerk, and second counselor in a branch presidency. He also fulfilled an assignment from the South Africa mission president to translate hymns from English to Shona.

### **Edward Dube**

In the April 2013 general conference, Edward Dube was called to be a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, making him the first General Authority of the Church from Zimbabwe. This was only the most recent of many firsts for Elder Dube. He was also the first native stake president, first native mission president, and first native Area Seventy from Zimbabwe. Elder Dube has been a true pioneer of righteous leadership.

Before all that, however, there was another first for Elder Dube: his first day attending church. Two years before he went to church for the first time, he was given a Book of Mormon by a Latter-day Saint man for whom



he was working. Elder Dube read the Book of Mormon and felt its influence and power.

In February 1984 Elder Dube accepted an invitation to attend a fast and testimony meeting at a local branch. He felt so nervous when he entered the chapel that he almost immediately turned around and walked back out.

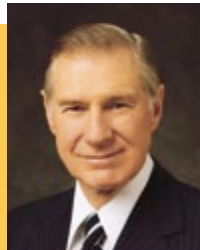
Soon, however, Elder Dube's feelings began to change once the branch president stood and bore testimony of the Book of Mormon. A testimony of the Book of Mormon was one area Elder Dube felt was common ground. He



*In 1994 President Beloved Mundera walked with his family over one mile (1.6 km) to church every Sunday, carrying in his wheelbarrow everything his branch needed for the meetings.*

*1987: The Zimbabwe Harare Mission is organized from the South Africa Johannesburg Mission.*

*1991: On October 25 Elder James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles dedicates Zimbabwe for the preaching of the gospel.*



*1994: The Church Educational System hires Edward Dube as country director. He establishes seminary and institute classes throughout Zimbabwe.*

*1998: President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) visits Zimbabwe and speaks to about 1,500 Latter-day Saints. Several government officials attend.*



stood and shared his own thoughts and feelings of the Book of Mormon after several other members bore testimony.

Soon after that first sacrament meeting, Elder Dube began to investigate the Church in earnest. He was baptized several months later. He then served a full-time mission in the Zimbabwe Harare Mission. Elder Dube married Naume Keresia Salizani on December 9, 1989. They have four children.

Elder Dube has seen many ups and downs for the Saints in Zimbabwe as a result of political turmoil. Through it all, he has relied on the Lord for strength and guidance. “I look back on my life and I truly feel grateful,” he said. “The gospel has been everything in my life.”<sup>3</sup>

“To me, Elder Dube is a Brigham Young or Wilford Woodruff of Zimbabwe,” says President

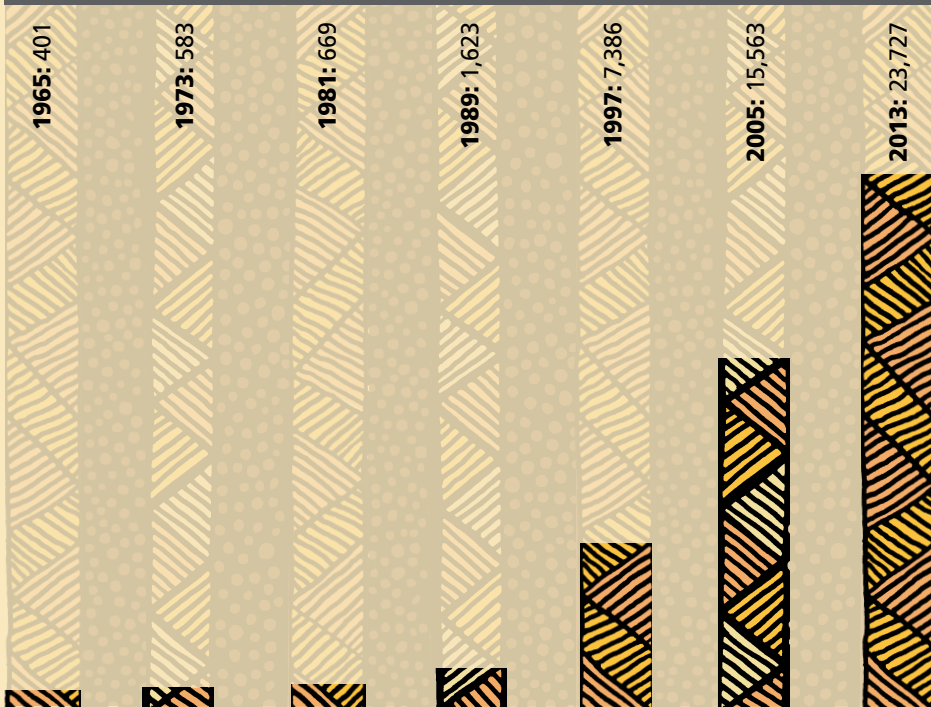
Keith R. Edwards, a former member of the Seventy who currently serves as president of the England Missionary Training Center. President Edwards was mission president of the Zimbabwe Harare Mission from 2000 to 2003 and worked extensively with Elder Dube, who was serving as stake president at the time. “Elder Dube just has a vision of what the gospel is supposed to do and how it is supposed to work.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Missionary Efforts in Zimbabwe**

During his time in Zimbabwe, President Edwards witnessed firsthand the growth of the Church in a land that is embracing the gospel more and more. “The people of Zimbabwe enjoy life,” President Edwards says. “They are happy and, by nature, very spiritual. They’re very easy to teach.”



## GROWTH OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN ZIMBABWE



## CHURCH STATISTICS IN ZIMBABWE\*

Total membership: 23,727

Missions: 1

Wards and branches: 60

Family history centers: 4

\* As of June 2013

1999: Zimbabwe's first stake is organized in Harare. The first full edition of the Book of Mormon is published in Shona, a native language of Zimbabwe.



2007: The triple combination (Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price) is published in Shona.

2009: Edward Dube becomes the first native mission president to serve in Zimbabwe.



2013: Edward Dube is called to the First Quorum of the Seventy, making him the first General Authority from Zimbabwe.

President Edwards explains that the missionary badge—because it has the name of the Savior on it—is one of the easiest ways for missionaries to start gospel conversations with Zimbabweans. Locals often read the name of the Church and perk up. “They say, ‘We’re friends of Jesus Christ too.’ It is an immediate bond,” says President Edwards.

There are more future leaders and pioneers joining the Church all the time in Zimbabwe. “The missionaries are always busy,” President Edwards says. ■

### NOTES

1. From Greg Hodgkiss, Hubert Henry Hodgkiss biographical sketch, June 26, 2012, Zimbabwe country case file, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
2. *All Are Alike unto God*, ed. E. Dale LeBaron (1990), 129.
3. Edward Dube, in R. Scott Lloyd, “New General Authority: Elder Edward Dube,” *Church News*, Apr. 20, 2013, [ldschurchnews.com](http://ldschurchnews.com).
4. From an interview with Keith R. Edwards, Apr. 24, 2013.

Kwekwe Ward leaders and missionaries in 2011.

