



St. Justine Catholic Church, Zambia

HOW ACCESS TO SANITATION FACILITIES CREATES RESILIENT CHURCHES

Mr. Goodwell Ishikaseba is a founding member of the St. Justine Catholic Church in the Chibombo district of Zambia. The 81-year-old resident is a respected and admired leader who can easily inspire his neighbors and mobilize change. However, his community has struggled against a long-term water crisis.

He shared, “Many years back, we had a lot of challenges. Our church used to worship under the trees on the church grounds because we didn’t have a building. The constant exposure to different weather conditions, such as wind and dust, caused us to suffer from a lot of respiratory infections. After some time, we were able to come together and construct a proper church building that we use to this day.”

With access to a new building, the church leadership envisioned a bright future for the congregation; one where the church was a sanctuary for the entire community. Despite their determination, the church faced another hurdle: a lack of sanitation facilities. When they constructed the church, the community members knew that they would need a safe place to relieve themselves while at church, but they didn’t have the capacity to build a sanitary latrine. Instead, they had no choice but to dig a shallow hole in the ground behind the church.

Mr. Goodwell elaborated on their experience: “The toilet we had could not provide any form of privacy to the congregants. Even the [regional] priest wouldn’t visit us regularly because of the state of our sanitation facilities. The latrine was in a dilapidated state and a danger to all of us because the wood was rotten, meaning it could collapse at any time. Many of us opted to relieve ourselves in the bushes, but when the grass was cut, it became a challenge.”



The community mobilized to build this church and keep their congregation safe from the elements.



The church congregation tried to construct a latrine at the church, but the hole is too shallow, and the roof is caving in.

Mr. Goodwell and the rest of the church leadership were determined to find a solution to their lack of sanitation facilities. They'd come too far from their days worshipping under the trees to give up now. When one church member heard about the work Living Water was doing in a nearby community, they knew their prayers had been answered! They invited the Living Water staff to visit their church and see the dire need for sanitation and hygiene facilities. The Living Water Zambia staff determined that, in order to holistically overcome the water crisis, the church needed not only a new and sanitary latrine but also a safe water source to safely wash their hands.

The church community shouted songs of praise when the construction was complete. Finally, their dream of having a safe and sanitary place to gather had come to fruition! Mr. Goodwell explained the community's excitement: "The provision of the water point by Living Water has really changed our story, and we are now happy. The newly constructed toilet gives us dignity and privacy, and we don't feel ashamed now in the presence of the priest. The best part is that we don't have to reconstruct the toilet every year like we did before. This has also helped us to stop the use of trees for construction, and that will help us protect our environment. Finally, we are also making income for operations and maintenance of the water point from those paying a small fee to pump water from the church."

Mr. Goodwell feels accomplished knowing his leadership helped create holistic change across the community. With access to safe water and proper sanitation facilities, the church and community are moving forward toward a brighter and more sustainable future, fostering unity, health, and prosperity for generations to come.



Mr. Goodwell washes his hands in front of the new latrine building.