

SPRING 2026



thirdmill

# Rising Above Obstacles

The Mugaris in Zimbabwe

**PLUS:** Training Rural Pastors



# Rising Above Obstacles

## The Mugaris in Zimbabwe

They were a group of students from different denominations—teenagers to 80-year-olds. Most came from extreme poverty.

One student believed God had called him as a prophet, but he had never read the Bible.

Another, a bishop, showed up with a large number of certificates that testified to his desperation to get more training, but none of these programs had taught him what he needed to know.

They all found their way to pastor, teacher, church planter and missionary, Jorum Mugaru and began a training journey using Thirdmill's programs that would change their lives.

Jorum and his wife Evah are from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. In 2016, after completing their college and graduate studies, they returned home and began working to bring theological education to pastors and other Christian leaders, especially in Zimbabwe's rural areas.

Jorum is part of the Presbytery of Bulawayo and a missionary with Mission to the World. He teaches at the Theological College of Zimbabwe and serves as a visiting minister with Cure Children's Hospital, where he also trains Cure's staff. He's one of two teaching elders at Living Hope Church, a church plant near National University of Science and Technology (NUST).

Evah leads the women's ministry of the Presbytery of Bulawayo and

started a small group for the women in leadership after recognizing their great hunger to learn.

**"There is no budget... Thirdmill resources allow us to teach [the Bible] for free."**

"The status of theological training in Zimbabwe is ... quite at low ebb," Jorum told us. "People are coming to Christ in droves. Churches are being planted, left, right, and center. And these churches are mainly headed by men and women who have never been to a theological institution."

A lack of theological training can lead to a multitude of issues, including syncretism with local religions and spreading false doctrines, such as the prosperity gospel.

The need is tremendous. But so are the obstacles.

One of the great obstacles to theological training comes from the government itself. In an effort to make educational institutions more accountable, the government of Zimbabwe began requiring that every institution offering theological education align with a secular university and submit to its oversight.

But how does a secular institution oversee and create standards for



Thirdmill Seminary graduated its third class of masters degree recipients. The presbytery in Bulawayo held a simultaneous ceremony honoring both Seminary and Institute graduates.

courses in spiritual formation? Or in discipleship? How does a secular institution determine how to teach God's holy Word? The answer is, they make it so worldly and unspiritual that it becomes irrelevant.

“Our colleges have been forced actually to make themselves look professional, but at the same time, we are no longer producing the kind of leaders that the churches need,” Jorum told us.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle is poverty. Zimbabwe has over 90% unemployment. According to Evah, most people are just trying to survive, especially those in the rural areas. “There is no budget, there is no ‘extra resources’ for learning.”

But a lack of resources and watered-down instruction doesn't eliminate the need for trained pastors. So, the Mugaris turned to Thirdmill.

“Thirdmill resources allow us to teach for free. We begin with ... the certificate programs, and then we use the diploma programs.... We then advance [those who are qualified] to the master's level through [Thirdmill] Seminary.”

Using Thirdmill's resources, the Mugaris are working to change the face of pastoral training in Bulawayo and beyond.

In addition to 45 students who recently completed the Institute diploma program, and another 48 who already graduated, 25 new students just began studying Thirdmill.

Evah's small group recently hosted a conference where 80 women gathered to discuss theology and the way forward in theological education. Several of the women who attended are preparing to lead their



Top: Mugaris's graduating class with City Presbyterian Church, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe  
Below: Some women's conference attendees at Living Hope Church in October 2025

own learning communities for women in their respective churches.

The student who believed himself a prophet, “has been changed from a non-Bible reading prophet to an evangelical preacher who loves his Bible and seeks to be guided by it rather than by prophetic messages he assumed he used to receive from God.” After receiving his diploma from Thirdmill Institute, he is now enrolled with Thirdmill Seminary, working on a master's degree. He has also planted a vibrant church that God is using to change a community.

And the bishop with the many certificates? He received three new certificates and his diploma from Thirdmill Institute. But this



time, the certificates didn't leave him desperate. Instead, “You can ... tell the smile, the confidence that he has, that now, ‘I am a bishop with training.’” He, too, is enrolled in the master's program with Thirdmill Seminary.

Yes, the Mugaris say, “the need for theological education in Africa remains ... urgent.” But by God's grace, government regulations and poverty will never be able to thwart God's plans.

### Please join us in praying for the Mugaris, that:

- God will provide strategies to translate the Thirdmill resources into even more languages to reach even more people.
- Four separate conferences planned for over 120 pastors in the rural areas of Zimbabwe will be successful.
- The church in Zimbabwe will continue to grow.
- Their students will come to love Christ and his kingdom more and more.
- God will continue to provide financial partners.
- They will have peace as they navigate being empty-nesters for the first time.

# A Total Game Changer

Training Rural Pastors with New Life Association of Bible Schools



**DR. STEPHEN RUSSELL** had a very clear directive from God: He was to start a Bible school on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where he lived with Dalene, his wife of 40 years.

Prior to coming to Cape Cod, the Russells lived in South Africa for many years, establishing a church and Christian school, and teaching in other parts of Africa as well. They then ministered on Cape Cod at New Life Christian Center for more than 20 years.

## But this was something different.

This Bible school was to be a gift to the broader Christian community. It would not just train pastors but anyone who wanted to learn, without the price tag or restrictions of a traditional seminary.

After looking at several curriculum options, they discovered Thirdmill Institute's three-year certificate program. And in 2022, Foundations Bible College became a reality. Students called it "a total game changer."

Of course, God's plan is usually bigger than ours. Shortly after launching Foundations Bible College, the Russells also started New Life Association of Bible Schools (NLABS). With NLABS, the goal was to train leaders, not just in Cape Cod, but all over the world.

The target audience was leaders with little education, who didn't speak English as their first language, and who were trying to lead churches without even a basic understanding of the Bible. If they could just teach the

fundamentals, they thought, it would be, as the Cape Cod students said, "a total game changer."

The Russells looked for a simple curriculum but couldn't find anything that compared to the quality of Thirdmill. That's when Dalene had an idea. "What if we took Thirdmill and reorganized it ... for rural pastors?" Rather than a three-year program, they'd make it only two—eight courses per year.

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*"[T]heir churches are growing, the believers are growing. There's a new enthusiasm in the church."*

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"Once we started with that ... we started getting all kinds of requests and inquiries."

Today, NLABS has schools in Kenya, Pakistan, and India, and applications keep coming in.

"For those that are doing the course ... each one of them has about between 20 and 30 people that they train. And ... a number of them have reported that their churches are growing, the believers are growing. There's a new enthusiasm in the church."

Dalene tells of one pastor they met inside his tiny church in the middle of the rice paddies. "You [could] see ... the effect of the hardship on his face. And we just started praying for him, and he burst into tears. He couldn't stop weeping. But he's one of our students. And for us to know that it's certainly all through this course we can make a difference to these people's lives, I cannot even begin to tell you what it means to us. You know, it's what it's all about."

# Our Team's Visit to Africa



**1, 2 & 5:** Celebrating Thirdmill Graduates at Kale Heywet Church **3.** A top graduate speaking **4.** Pastor Henok Tadesse Wotango **6.** Rev. Josiah Katumu presenting an Institute certificate **7.** *CW from L:* Cloud Roman: Area Dir. – East Africa, Elisha Nyambori: Kenya Country Dir., Rev. Katumu: Dir. of Partnerships, Steve Kammer: Dir. of Thirdmill Institute, Rev. Andrew S. Lamb: VP of Global Opportunities

In March, three members of our Thirdmill team traveled to Ethiopia and Kenya to attend the ACTEA (Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa) General Assembly in partnership with International Cooperating Ministries (ICM). The theme of this year's GA was "Future-Ready. Mission-Faithful." While there, they connected with partners, leaders, and educators who share our mission, joining them in worship and meaningful strategic dialogue. Our group also celebrated the graduation of students at the Kale Heywet Church in Soddo, Ethiopia, who had completed their first Thirdmill Insti-

tute certificate, Biblical Foundations. Steve Kammer, a member of the team and Director of Thirdmill Institute, said, "It was such a blessing to see the faces of 65 students as they received their first certificates. They had worked hard all year, and they were able to share with us their growth and excitement for the Word of God." The trip concluded in Nairobi, Kenya, where they met with trainers and partners to learn about their ministries and share Thirdmill's vision. Thirdmill is grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside these partners as we pursue our shared calling together.

## Generosity Corner

### Meet Soren Geiger



Soren Geiger first met Dr. Richard Pratt while attending a youth event as a teenager. After hearing Dr. Pratt speak, Soren approached him with a question about taking risks. Dr. Pratt's response left a lasting impression: "We are called to take risks in a biblical way."

For Soren, that risk was taking a gap year in Southwest Germany to play baseball and serve as an intern at a church plant. As part of the training, the young athletes studied Thirdmill's curriculum. Through Thirdmill, Soren discovered the richness of "Kingdom Theology," a concept that opened his eyes to a more expansive vision of God's work in the world.

Living in a place where Christianity had been declining for decades, Soren found himself spiritually challenged. Yet those six months became a defining season of growth. "This was a period of testing of my faith ... I was learning to defend the faith, learning why I believe what I believe, down to a granular level, under the mentoring hand of Christian leaders in Germany and from Thirdmill and Dr. Pratt."

After returning home, Soren graduated from Hillsdale College in Michigan in 2013 and received his J.D. from Thomas Goode Jones School of Law at Faulkner University in 2022. Today, Soren works in a private law firm and lives in Montgomery, Alabama, with his wife, Virginia, and their children. As he looks back on the spiritual formation and mentorship that shaped him, Soren considers himself blessed to be able to financially support Thirdmill.

## Staff Spotlight: Advancement & Generosity



CINDY LEBLANC is joining Thirdmill's Advancement and Generosity team as a Gift Officer. She will be helping us steward the generous donors who so graciously fund many of our programs and services. Thirdmill's mission is close to her heart, both personally and professionally.

Cindy has been in non-profit development for over two decades. Some of her previous roles include LeBlanc Consulting, where she crafted strategy and engagement plans, as well as coaching the boards of several non-profits. One of her many goals with Thirdmill is to engage our donor base to help strengthen and solidify our mission for years to come.

Cindy is a native Atlantan and received her Bachelor of Science degree from Georgia State University. She loves football (Go Dawgs) and enjoys volunteering locally. She has two grown daughters, Blair and Brooke. Please reach out and say hello at [CLeBlanc@thirdmill.org](mailto:CLeBlanc@thirdmill.org). She is eager to learn more about our supporters and how we can better serve you.

### THE THIRDMILL TEAM IS GROWING

In addition to Cindy LeBlanc, we're excited to also welcome these new staff members:



MARCELO SOUZA  
Dir. of Creative Delivery Systems



NIKKI PETERS  
Sr. Advancement & Generosity Assistant



KEANAN SEXTON  
AI Integration Specialist

## You Can Maximize Your Generosity!



DONOR-ADVISED FUND

A donor-advised fund (DAF) is a powerful tool to simplify your charitable giving and maximize your impact. By contributing to a DAF, you can enjoy immediate tax benefits while giving yourself the flexibility to support the causes you care about over time.

### Here's how it works:

1. Make a tax-deductible donation to your DAF.
2. Let the funds grow tax-free.
3. Recommend grants to your favorite charities whenever you're ready.

It's an easy, effective way to manage your giving, and it allows you to respond to needs as they arise.

Consider establishing a DAF today to make giving simpler, more strategic, and deeply rewarding. Your generosity can have an immediate impact!

To learn more, visit [thirdmill.org/give](https://thirdmill.org/give), or email us at [legacy@thirdmill.org](mailto:legacy@thirdmill.org).



To give to Thirdmill, scan the QR code or visit: [thirdmill.org/gift](https://thirdmill.org/gift)

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