

# *Nurture* NATIONAL WRITERS

*Barbara Nkala provides a Zimbabwean perspective on how publishers can encourage writers.*

**T**here are only a few Christian publishers in Zimbabwe. Most often, it is churches who publish materials of interest to their members, asking known authors to write on specific topics, or publishing translations. Such practices do not allow for developing national writers, but doing so is in a publisher's best interest in the long run. National writers benefit publishers and their target audiences.

How can publishers help prospective writers to develop their skills? Here are some ways to do this.

### ***Give writers opportunities and support***

Encourage good writers to devote themselves fully to writing, especially if there is potential for a book series. Publishers argue that it is burdensome and risky to have an author leave a secure job to write for a year or two. Money will always be a big constraint, but success demands risk-taking. The discipline of thinking and doing nothing else but writing should help authors to improve and excel. By the time a writer has worked at writing for two years, he or she becomes marketable.

Encourage authors to contribute to community publications. Some good authors have been recognised and commissioned to do greater things from small beginnings.

Send prospective writers to secluded resorts where they can be away from it all and get on with the task at hand, especially where deadlines are involved. A writer cannot do well with everyday disturbances and occupations.

Share good books, magazines, and pamphlets. When aspiring writers read the work of successful and professional writers, they improve their skill. Publishers and churches can put together

libraries of new and best-selling Christian and other motivational titles of interest to prospective writers. They should invite writers to borrow from their libraries. Writers can also be encouraged to listen to radio programs, audio cassettes, videotapes, and to attend lectures with an open mind. This will help them learn and develop critical prowess.

### ***Host writer's workshops***

Individual churches normally run annual workshops to improve the pool of contributors to church newsletters and magazines, Sunday school materials, evangelical tracts and church history texts. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches' department, Church in Society, has a section called "Mission and Evangelism" which in 1998 planned a successful five-day writers' workshop.

For over a decade, Zimbabwe has hosted the International Book Fair for one week each year in August. Usually, writers' workshops are planned to run concurrently. Many writers have benefited from mingling with the renowned African authors and others from all over the world. A specific programme to cater for Christian writers could be organized at the same time.

However, workshops are usually too brief. Because of this, publishers should encourage authors to join local writer's associations.

### ***Support writer's associations***

In Zimbabwe, there are six writers' associations catering to different needs and aspirations: established writers, new writers, authors working in indigenous languages, non-fiction writers and Christian communicators. These six associations hold frequent meetings to

develop self-confidence and writing skills. In them, writers also learn to critique their own work.

The Christian Communicators Association of Zimbabwe was formed in 1996. One of its objectives is to provide workshops to train writers on various writing skills. Since 1997, these workshops have successfully created an awareness among the churches that the media can be used as a tool for evangelism. Now, a number of churches invite members to come and run workshops for them and have since developed or strengthened their church newsletters and their youth magazines.

In planning for the new millennium, the Christian Communicators Association of Zimbabwe has partnered with the Theological College of Zimbabwe to train Christian writers. A joint committee has been working on a proposed curriculum to a three-month evening course. Many who have a heart for the development of national writers greatly look forward to this venture.

**P**ublishers have many avenues to bolster the morale of national writers and to open their eyes to opportunities available to them in the writing world. Any good writer, Christian or non Christian, needs to learn the skills and techniques of good writing. But Christian writers can be equipped to analyze current events and present a Christian point of view. Christian authors can write materials to evangelize people and bring them to Christ. ❖