

Malawi Companionship Update - February 2022

Muli bwanji, friends.

Warm greetings on behalf of our friends and partners in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi. I have a few updates I would like to share from our companions.

Covid-19

Coming out of their third wave of the pandemic, the population in Malawi is starting to see somewhat of a decline in both Covid cases and deaths. Vaccine availability and distribution continue to be a challenge, and only around 5% of the country's population has been vaccinated.

After the December holiday, schools have resumed in full, easing some concerns about academic progress and access. Access to and distribution of goods and food, and the impacts the pandemic have had on the economy are still concerning for many, and the hope is that these difficulties will be resolved.

Ordination of the First Women Pastor



The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi ordained the first woman pastor, Rev. Bertha Monkhondya on September 26, 2021. Partners from around the world joined in this day of celebration – friends from Wisconsin, Lutheran World Federation (Geneva), Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Tanzania, Germany, and Malawi, among others were there in person or online to witness this milestone. The ELCM is proud of her hard work and hopeful that Abusa Monkhondya's leadership in the church will be seen by other girls and women and encourage them to consider their own call to ministry.

The Living Lutheran's article about her ordination can be found here:

<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2021/10/first-woman-ordained-in-the-evangelical-lutheran-church-in-malawi/>

Companionship Visit

Bishop Laurie Skow-Anderson and I had begun plans for travel to Malawi in May of this year. For a companion visit and to assist with teaching at the ELCM Pastors' Academy. Unfortunately, Covid uncertainties have prevented us from being able to secure flights to southern Africa at this time. We plan to keep a close eye on the ongoing travel restrictions and requirements and hope to visit our friends in person as soon as we are able.

Cyclone Ana

During the last week of January this year, Malawi, as well as surrounding countries, experienced a devastating cyclone which brought with it high winds and torrential rains. The excess rain caused wide-spread flooding, especially in the southern portion of the country. It has affected

tens of thousands of residents and displaced over 10,000 people who are currently living in one of 43 tent shelters as they wait for more permanent housing. Over a dozen deaths have been reported as a result of the storm.

Bridges and roads were destroyed. And, hydroelectric installations were washed out, creating a loss of power; even weeks later, electricity has not been restored in many areas. In addition to housing damage and loss, severe flooding can result in increased food insecurity, rises in water-borne illnesses and disease, loss of education/academic progress, etc.

Pastors' Academy

Due to travel uncertainties, we will be unable to be in Malawi for the academy this calendar year. However, to avoid a second cancellation of this ministry, we will be partners with the ELCM to support an online academy experience this year. The pastors in Malawi are still planning to gather at the Lutheran compound in Lilongwe as a group for a week in May, however instruction will (tentatively) be a combination of in-person instruction, pre-recorded videos, and live instruction via Zoom. Since the pastors will still be gathering in person, this ministry will require a budget to happen successfully. Historically, our synod has financially sponsored this week of continuing education, assisting with the cost of travel, housing, food and programming for the ELCM's 65+ pastors. The unique circumstances this year will also require the addition of technology to ensure connection and display of online instruction. It is our hope to continue this support for the 2022 academy.

Youth Companionships

In recent video conversation with Mphatso Thole (companion coordinator at the ELCM) and Eva Banda (Youth Coordinator at the ELCM), discussion have started about strengthening relationships between youth in Malawi and the NW Synod of Wisconsin. We are learning so much from one another, what our young people are passionate about and feel called to do, what the challenges are, and how the church can encourage and faithfully support these young leaders. Throughout this year we will focus attention on three areas of ministry: 1.) Training teachers, 2.) Climate Justice/Care and 3.) Hunger and Poverty.

Our hope is to collaborate, bring young people together from both the ELCM and the NWSWI to discuss programs and efforts that can address these challenges in ways that are faithful to the gospel, effective, and sustainable in both contexts.

Oelschlager Scholarship

On January 20, 2022, Kathryn (Kathy) Oelschlager passed away peacefully at 88 years old. She and her husband, Rev. Harold Oelschlager, were instrumental in establishing the companionship between the NWSWI and the ELCM. The Oelschlager's traveled to Malawi multiple times and quickly became like family to Joseph and Maria Bvumbwe. More than 20 years ago, in the early days of this partnership, Harold and Kathy also visited over 100 congregations here in NW WI to tell the story of this new companion ministry.

Bishop Joseph and Maria Bvumbwe were reunited with Kathy and Harold during a visit to Wisconsin in March of 2019. It was, indeed, a day filled with joy.

Kathy was passionate about education and invested much time with education programs in the ELCM. In honor of Kathy's life, and her dedication to education and companionship with Malawi, a scholarship fund has been created in the Oelschlager name. The Harold and Kathy Oelschlager Education Scholarship fund will assist students in Malawi with access to education and supplies needed for school.



Malawi Campaign 2022

As a synod, we remain committed to walking with our siblings in the ELCM. In conversation with Bishop Joseph Bvumbwe and the ELCM staff, we have learned a lot about the challenges and ongoing ministries that have been lifted up as priorities this year. So, during 2022 we are inviting individuals and congregations in the synod to consider sharing a financial gift with the ELCM, choosing one or more of the priorities from this list. Please be assured that contributions of any size will have a positive impact on our siblings in Malawi.

I am so thankful for your ongoing and faithful response to this partnership. Your continued generosity, prayers, support – ALL the ways you show up for our partners in Malawi – is greatly appreciated. Together we learn. Together we act. And, together we trust in the promises and love of God.

Let us join in prayer together:

Creator God, we thank you for teaching us how to accompany one another as we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ through our words and actions. Continue to bless our siblings in Malawi, comfort those who weep, bring assurance to those who are suffering, strengthen those who are weary, and shelter the vulnerable. Grant us abundant joy and fill us with the hope and peace that can only come through Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you have any questions about our companionship with Malawi, please don't hesitate to connect with me using one of the contacts below.

May God's peace be with each of you.

Deacon Laura Ramlow
Companion Coordinator, Malawi Africa
lramlow@nswi.org
715-559-3474