



July 2022 God's Timing

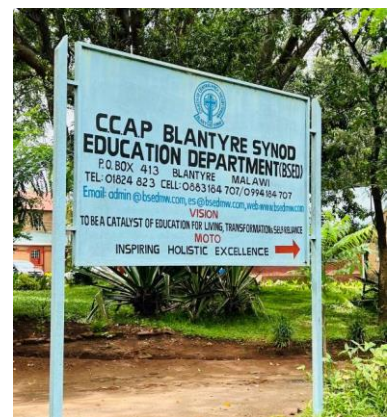
Dear friends,

Some would believe that my arrival in Malawi and beginning a new era in ministry happened at the worst possible time, and it is perfectly reasonable to believe such. After all, it was approximately 12 weeks after I arrived in Malawi, that the COVID pandemic surfaced, and mission co-workers from many organizations including Presbyterian World Mission were summoned back to their home countries. It was truly and time of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear. After prayer and discussions with my family, World Mission, and the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), I chose to shelter in place in Malawi while the world held its collective breath. It has been a liminal time, like the day of Holy Saturday that follows Good Friday. And just as Mary waited at the tomb of Jesus, we all figuratively waited for a new day to appear.

In the two years of liminality that followed, the world has changed. Every part of the globe endured untimely deaths, canceled plans, school and business closures, and overworked first responders. No one was left untouched in any way. Although we are not post-pandemic yet, the world has accepted a new way of living, working, socializing, and traveling. Most have come to accept that the norms and normalcy of life will always look different, even as the world is healing.

My work and assignment as an education facilitator have been my outlet. I have been able to remain productive by using my time working from home and developing relationships with the education directors of the five synods under the CCAP umbrella.

As restrictions are loosened, I am moving into a new era of work that allows me to personally engage with colleagues whom I have only met through Zoom meetings. During the first quarter of this year, I had the opportunity to meet in person with two of the education directors, Amos Kachilele from Livingstonia Synod, and Moses Kasitomu from the Blantyre Synod. Hearing the directors speak about the priorities of their respective synods allowed me to focus on the specific needs of their synods and discover ways that we can partner together to meet those needs. I also had the wonderful opportunity to do school visitations within both synods, which allowed me to engage with students and teachers. These visits provide valuable insight into the possibilities for upcoming training.



Blantyre Synod Signage

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The “Educate Our Girls” (EOG) project, which began in response to the desire to address the dropout rate of girls who became pregnant during school lockdowns, has begun distributing funds to the synods. These funds will help ensure that girls, who were in danger of permanently dropping out of school because they had an infant to care for, could resume their education. Following an application process, a review with CCAP leadership, and discussions with the education directors, 52 girls were selected to receive a scholarship to resume their education for one year. We will continue to prioritize this project and seek additional funding to assist as many girls as possible with the opportunity to further their education. The project will also be expanded to include educational funding for girls whose families are in severe financial hardship or who are orphaned.

The CCAP office space is undergoing some significant changes also. Because of the generous donations of congregations, we have begun a grounds project which will add to the security of the CCAP office where I now spend two days per week working alongside the Leadership of the General Assembly. The grounds project includes the building of a fence around the CCAP office building, and the clearing of the land to begin a pilot tree nursery project in partnership with the Alliance for International Reforestation, Inc. (AIR). We are also clearing space to support an outdoor pavilion for income-generating activities.

The New Year has also brought unfortunate changes including the departure of dear colleagues who are considering new ways God is calling them to service, and the loss of a long-time financial supporter. But even with these events, I recognize that it is God’s special timing. I am reminded that God’s time is always the best time; there is an appointed time for every vision to be realized. The prophet Habakkuk writes in chapter 2:2-3: *“Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.”*

Those who do God’s work will never be ashamed; those that trust in God shall not be disappointed. The prophets of old did not back down from their assignments; neither did Christ. Jesus went on with his work, setting his face like a flint; until his appointed time to die and then rise again. God requires that we also continue on our course regardless of the obstacles. Yet, we are reminded by the Holy Spirit to be gentle with ourselves, for disappointments will come as we await the completion of the vision.

This New Year brings new challenges as well as new opportunities to discover how to best utilize my time and talents to do the work that is before me. If you are not yet doing so, please consider making a financial gift of support as I continue my assignment in partnership with the CCAP to improve the quality of education for the children in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Zikomo (Thank you)

Rev. Cheryl Barnes



Students enjoying a break at the St. Colomba CCAP Private Primary School in Blantyre



Education Director for Blantyre Synod, Moses Kasitomu, and myself in front of the newly constructed secondary school on the Synod campus.