



November 2022 Beautiful Things

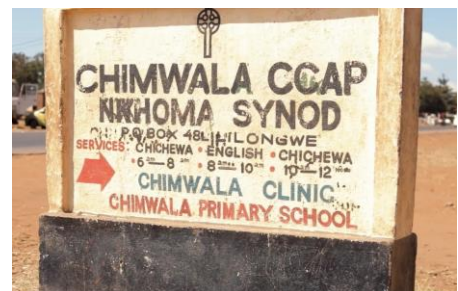
Dear friends,

My work in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe has allowed me to experience the mutuality of relationships that bring such joy and unanticipated fulfillment. This work has also revealed a bit of truth about me and has allowed me to get in touch with my “inner child.”

Those that know me best will attest to the fact that I am sensitive and sentimental. It takes very little to make me “tear up.” I will openly shed tears watching a sad movie or seeing someone in pain or need. I get watery-eyed when I watch a social media post of a beautiful marriage proposal that ends in a “yes,” and my heart breaks for the one who has risked public humiliation when the answer to a proposal is “no.” My tears often betray me in meetings or while preaching in the pulpit. Yet, on these occasions of vulnerability, I am consciously aware of how powerfully my tears ground me in the present moment and that is a beautiful thing. Let me preface the sharing of all of this personal information by saying that I do not suffer from depression or anxiety, and if anyone falls into this group, please make your mental health a priority. For me, I belong to a group of people called “empaths,” those who feel connected emotionally and cognitively with others.

This is just one of the attributes which define who I am, it is how I interact with the world; it is how I was designed by God, and I offer no apologies for this fact. It is also one of the reasons that I find my work as an Educational Facilitator so rewarding. This work uses all my gifts, it is a work that brings utter joy along with the discomfort of tears.

I recently visited the Chimwala Primary School in the Nkhoma Synod. I was greeted by the headmaster, Mr. Herbi Konyani, who escorted me around the school campus. Chimwala Primary School has a student enrollment of 6,000 students. The student-to-teacher ratio is 1 to 100. Chimwala Primary was one of the many schools that had the opportunity to benefit from a recent Early Childhood Education Training, held via Zoom, which focused on the classroom environment. Unfortunately, Chimwala Primary School does not have a classroom building for the youngest learners and, as a result, they could not fully benefit from the training. Mr. Konyani directed me towards two areas where the youngest students are taught, a small unwallled structure and an open outside area. Both spaces are devoid of chairs and grass. The reality that young children sit in such barren



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classrooms brought tears to my eyes. The physical space of any classroom should be a safe space, a place that should be practical, interactive, and interesting. In her book, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, the late author Bell Hooks writes, "The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility." Knowing that these young learners sit on the ground, under the sun, and in the rain, to receive instruction denies them the environment that promotes successful student development.



(left) Greeting young learners, (center) Close-up view of unwalled "classroom" structure for Early Childhood students, (right) Headmaster of Chimwala Primary School, Mr. Herbi Konyani and Rev. Cheryl Barnes.

There remains an inner child within me that would feel helpless when she watched TV commercials displaying the poverty in African countries with pleas requesting donations of what one would spend on a daily cup of coffee. As a little girl, I wanted to help the children in those TV commercials and now that I have this chance, I don't want to disappoint the eight-year-old me. I committed to Mr. Konyani to identify donors to support the building of a classroom structure for the youngest learners. Towards the end of my visit, Mr. Koyani urged me to stay a little longer to witness the ringing of the bell in the bell tower on the campus of Chimwala. At noon, the older students gathered at this massive brick tower, to ring a bell to signal their lunch break. Listening to the ringing of the bell combined with the laughter of the children was such a beautiful thing.



Outdoor "classroom" open area for Early Childhood students.

In my partnership with the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), I strive to shine a light on the challenging situations and unrealized goals of the Education Department. I believe that growth happens when the dry ground is watered, even if watered with tears. Water is life, and our tears are sacred because of their ability for inner renewal. Their presence ushers us into a soft place of recovery from a world that is often difficult to survive within. They are a humbling reminder that we are connected to something bigger than ourselves. Our tears validate every theory about the special relationship between the head and the heart... and that is a beautiful thing.



Unwalled "classroom" structure

You can give a gift today to help provide a proper classroom for these students and scholarships so they can attend school: www.rca.org/give/ccap-educate-our-girls-malawi/

As always, I am immensely grateful for your financial support and prayers. Zikomo (thank you)

Rev. Cheryl Barnes

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