

January 2009 update - Neil & Sara Kennedy in Malawi

Dear everyone

Happy New Year from Malawi! Thanks to everyone who sent cards / messages / presents. Due to the inefficiencies of the Malawi postal service, they are still arriving!

After Christmas in Blantyre, we went for a short break 'up north' to revisit old haunts, returning to Embangweni as a family for the first time since 2002. As we stepped out of the car at the guesthouse, we were met (and hugged) by friends. The next 3 days were a joy – visiting, seeing the 'sights' of Embangweni that our children have heard us talk about so much, bringing them on walks that they did as toddlers. We met some of Ben's nursery school chums, now 12 years old. Both Ben and Grace were struck by the differences in opportunities they have. Our kids go to a great school with internet access, have their own bedroom, toys and books. Their Embangweni friends go to a school with over 100 in each class, live in a small house with 1 bedroom for the whole family and not much in the way of toys and games.

It was good to see real progress at Robert Laws Secondary School. Neil had visited in June 08 with a team from Ireland. They found ROLASS very run-down. Teacher and pupil morale was low. Now, under the good leadership of Mr Chirambo the headmaster, and with the money raised from Belfast marathon sponsorship, the entire school has been repainted and there are plans to renovate the inadequate water supply. There was a 'buzz' about the place. There are still several staff from Sara's time teaching at ROLASS. The hospital is building lots of much needed staff housing. They have run into some financial problems completing these projects, as the original building costs were significantly underestimated. The container from Ireland containing 'new' hospital beds arrived earlier than expected, to much rejoicing. The HIV/AIDS work continues to grow with nearly a 1000 HIV+ve adults getting regular antiretroviral drugs. The ARV program is one of the biggest signs of progress that we have seen since returning here. Malawi is well on the way to reaching its target of 180,000 people on effective treatment.

Embangweni has a new head of station- Rev Gondwe. He's moved from a nearby parish. We heard him preach a stirring sermon highlighting the excellence of each institution (ROLASS, primary school, school for the deaf and hospital) and challenging them to build a reputation for godliness, compassion and witness to Christ. We attended a communion service. It was good to sing (many times!) one of our favourite Tumbuka hymns 'Mwana mberere, watiyeghera zakwananga zitu zose' – 'Holy Lamb of God, he carries away all our sin'.

After Embangweni we stayed at the Lake where the water was warm and clear, and enjoyed snorkelling / lazing about / eating fresh chambo (A fish, Ben's all-time favourite food).

All in all it was a good break, and we've attached several photos.

Returning to Blantyre, it was back to school for the kids and work for Sara and I. In the hospital, we are at the peak of the rainy season and had several very harrowing days when the numbers of sick and dying children threatened to overwhelm us. We've made some welcome progress on improving our services for children who are victims of sexual abuse, and really hope that over the next few months these plans will translate into concrete activities. The kids have slotted back into the school routine – Ben has joined a

mountaineering club (there's lots of very 'doable' hills near Blantyre) and started guitar lessons (he has sore fingers, we have sore ears...). Grace continues to swim like a fish. I have to really try to go any faster than her, but being sadly too competitive, I still manage to beat her in races! Sara is changing jobs at the school – finishing a maternity cover for literacy groups, and starting another maternity cover teaching P6 / Year 5. The weekly Bible class has about 20 kids turning up. Grace told me a few days ago that 'Bible class was really quite good' – high praise indeed.

Here's a few prayer requests for the next few weeks:

- Give thanks for a good break!
- Bible class at school. Pray for each child who attends and Sara as she prepares the activities.
- Work at the hospital / College of Medicine. Pray for stamina! Pray for Neil as he helps junior staff cope with the tragic things they see every day. Pray that he can point them to Jesus.
- Praise God for the developments in provision for children who have been sexually abused. We've identified several partners who could help us take things forward – UNICEF, some experts from the US, a Christian charity who are interested in this line of work. Pray that I will coordinate these opportunities and get maximal benefit from them.
- Embangweni: pray for Rev Gondwe, that his godly vision for the work there will be shared by all those in leadership.

Thank you very much for your ongoing support and interest. It means a lot to us.

Best wishes

Neil, Sara, Ben and Grace



Up Kalangulu



Sokos



'New' hospital beds from the recent container



New Bibles at ROLASS



Mrs Banda's Shop



B & G with Rose and Reggie