

Dear everyone

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2009

It's easy to get sympathy in Blantyre – just mention to someone that you have to get your car through the MOT (the annual safety check). This involves (multiple) trips to the dreaded 'Road Traffic Office' – the pinnacle of the Malawi queuing / bureaucracy / 'try not to explode with exasperation' experience. I had to go last Friday. My situation wasn't helped by a recent newspaper story highlighting corruption in the Road Traffic Department. It pictured a car with no wheels and no engine which had been given an MOT certificate, in return for a 'gift' given to the Road Traffic official. So they were being extra tough the day I turned up. My cunning plan to get in and out in less than 2 hours fell apart, and I spent 7 hours in multiple queues, chasing RTO mechanics in their day-glow vests trying to get an explanation of how *having* a fog light that worked somehow made my car *less* roadworthy than all the other cars *without* a fog light. I never did find out, and eventually we did get the certificate, but along the way I was taught a good lesson. I saw a fellow sufferer – a Baptist missionary – calmly engage in quiet conversations in excellent ChiChewa with the people alongside him in the queue. Naturally and sincerely, he shared his life and his faith. A real life example of 1 Peter 3:15 "Always (*even in Road Traffic*) be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. Do this with gentleness and respect" (*even if you want to scream because your car should have been passed hours ago*) (Extra material in brackets does not appear in most versions of the New Testament)

The last few weeks have flown by in a whirl of school terms, university exams and visiting experts.

We had a fantastic visit from 3 of the Birmingham Children's Hospital cardiology team. I run the only paediatric cardiac clinic in Malawi, and am responsible for selecting children for referral to South Africa for correction of their congenital heart disease. The team patiently taught me and 2 of my registrars – helping us with our heart scanning, screening almost our entire clinic list. We learnt a huge amount, and our visitors got to see things that don't often turn up in Birmingham.

The second ever 'Masters in Paediatrics' exit exams were held in late September. This is the end result of our program to train Malawian paediatric consultants. The exams went well (our external examiner who is President of the South African College of Paediatrics thought we'd prepared an 'international standard' of exam) and the candidate passed! It's a huge amount of work for a very small number of consultants, but it is an encouraging start to the process of training home-grown Malawian specialists.

The Christian Medical Fellowship final year 'do' was held at our place in early October. For details and photos see our new blog at <http://blantyreblarney.blogspot.com/>. The finals exams will be held over the next week. It is great to see students that you've got to know well on and off the wards come to the end of their course, and hopefully pass!

Our efforts to establish an effective multi-disciplinary child protection team in Blantyre was boosted by the arrival of Thandu Zimba last week. Thandu is a member of a local evangelical church who along with other volunteers, has been trained in child trauma and rape counselling. Her church was looking for opportunities to serve the local community, and heard about what was going on in Queens. So now, when a child presents to us who has been sexually abused (we see about 8-10 a month), we can engage social services, police and counselling services for them. There is a huge amount of work to do in this area – we covet your prayers for perseverance and wisdom.

All of us are well. The kid's social and school life continue at a pace. Sara is busy co-teaching kids who need extra learning support in Grace's school. She is thankful for the children who come every week to the school Bible club and humbled when they pray for her in their small prayer time. We are studying prayer with one of the SU books.

The attached photos show (1) Grace on her recent school trip to Majete game-park. She's sitting with some of her best friends – Ndume, Claire and Bethany. Seeing wild elephants on a school trip has to be good..!(2) Ben waiting to run his leg of a mini-triathlon, with his friend Joshua. 3) Some of the children who come to the Bible Club. They are wearing their sports kit as the club is held at lunchtime between school and afternoon sports.



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We are thankful to the many of you who regularly pray for us, and to the Lord for his faithfulness. Ideas to pray for this month include:

- Child protection. Give thanks for the involvement of Thandu and her team. Pray for the incoming director of the 'Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC)' desk in UNICEF Malawi. Pray he or she will be as engaged in this work as their predecessor who is moving on to Indonesia. Pray that the

plans for the One-Stop-Centre will be funded.

- The Bible Club Sara teaches each week. Pray for her as she gets to know and share with children from many different family backgrounds.
- The Christian Medical Fellowship / medical students: Pray for those sitting their exams next week. As newly qualified doctors they get thrown into the deep end of work in our busiest season in December / January. Some swim better than others! Pray that they will work out their faith in the incredibly stressful workplace that is a hospital in Malawi!
- ChiChewa lessons – twice a week for this term. Hard work, but worth it!
- We're on holiday for 2 weeks in early December – pray we'll get a good break together as a family.

With love, and thanks again for your interest.

Neil, Sara, Ben and Grace

