



Dear Friends

April 2010

Sometimes we have the joy of experiencing something so special we wish you all could have been there to see it. Palm Sunday was one such day. We arrived just as the large procession of Umvano (Women's Group), elders and ministers were making their way into the church. Waving their palm branches over their heads, they all sang 'Hosanna to the Son of David'. We'd brought the wrong sort of greenery from the garden, but the palm leaves were shared out and we joined in the procession. The church had over 1500 people crammed into it, most wearing white and all singing joyfully and waving their palm branches. It was a great sight – a privilege to be a part of, and a glimpse into heaven...Revelation 7:9,10

These have been a very busy few months, so apologies for not writing as often as we should. The rainy season brings a huge increase in patient numbers (more malaria and diarrhoeal illness) – often there were over 130 patients on my ward with 70 new admissions each day. In our paediatric emergency room we were seeing over 500 outpatients a day. The numbers of students has also gone up, so we have 35 third year or final years attached to paediatrics at any one time. At least there's lots for them to see! At times like these it's hard to keep your head above water – it can feel like you're drowning in the clinical and teaching load – so thank you for your prayers which have sustained us. I used to work with a medical orderly in Embangweni – Mr Tembo – a very wise chap. One night about 3 AM, very tired and feeling a bit sorry for myself, Mr Tembo leaned over the patient and reminded me 'Doctor... this is why you came!'

The last few months have reinforced my conviction for the need of Christian Medical Fellowship (www.cmf.org.uk) to support medics working in situations like this. I was speaking recently to Dominic one of our new interns (FI doctors for those in the UK or 'junior house officers' for those with longer memories!) during his 4 month obstetric rotation. As a newly qualified doctor he may

be doing 4 or 5 C-sections a day on his own, working very long hours with little support. He and his colleagues hadn't been paid for 3 months. When the interns met with a ministry official they were told 'you're only interns – you're expendable!' In situations like that there is a temptation to do the bare minimum or get angry with patients. But when we met on our konde (porch – see photo!) Dominic shared his frustrations, but also how the Lord had helped him to care with compassion even when really stressed.

We had a great visit from the Child Protection team from New York. We had a series of very successful series of inter-agency meetings in Blantyre, Lilongwe and Zomba (see <http://blantyreblarney.blogspot.com> for details). As a result we've had some real breakthroughs in the last few months:

- the establishment of child protection teams in Zomba and Lilongwe following the model established in Blantyre
- A commitment from the Department of Social Welfare to create the first ever full-time specialist social worker for child protection, to be based in Blantyre and working with our team
- Provision of a vehicle from the Dept of Juvenile Justice
- Funds from UNICEF to support phone-calls and fuel, enabling home-visits by victim support officers and child protection workers
- Counselling training for a group of women from a local church in Blantyre – they start work in our hospital providing victim support counselling for survivors of child abuse this month

It feels like many pieces of this complicated jig-saw are coming together. Please pray we'll see continued good progress.

Sara continues as the learning support teacher at Phoenix primary school. She enjoyed her 21st againth birthday on holiday at the lake on Easter Monday. We had a lovely break with our god-daughter Caitlin, her parents Heidi, Jonathan, brother Tom and sister Naimh. The photo is of us all at William's Falls in Zomba.

For those of you who pray for us regularly, the following are some requests for the next few weeks. Thank you so much for your continued support.

- Give thanks for the encouraging developments of the Blantyre Child Protection Team. Pray that the team will deliver real support for children who have been sexually or physically abused.
- Pray that Neil will use his time efficiently and cope with the many demands of teaching, clinical work and administration etc
- Pray for smooth preparation of finals and postgraduate exams over the next month.
- Pray for the ongoing work of CMF here – pray the Lord will use it to support Christian medics in their work and witness. Pray for a student outreach in some villages around Bangula on the 17th and 18th April.
- We are helping out a little at Bethel Church when a missionary friend is at home on furlough, leading a service a month. Pray for these Sundays that we'll connect with the congregation and the church would grow in grace.
- Remember Sara, Ben and Grace as they witness to those around them in school.

We hope you had a Happy Easter!

Neil, Sara, Ben and Grace

