

Dear everyone

6th November 2011

“Everyone in Malawi loves peace, there’s no-one who doesn’t want peace. But Jesus didn’t say ‘Blessed are the peace lovers’; he said ‘Blessed are the peace makers’. What Malawi needs are peace makers!” These words were preached a few weeks ago by our pastor Rev Felix Chingota. It was a great sermon – a call for those in the church to pray and act in the midst of a very turbulent time in Malawi. The government has fallen foul of the international donors because of concerns over human rights, so aid budgets have been cut. As 40% of the budget is from overseas donors this is a significant blow. Foreign exchange is in short supply, so there is no money for pharmaceutical firms to import medication and the hospital and health centres have run low. There is no end to the fuel crisis – it’s always a sense of achievement to find some! Planned protests have been banned and a student leader has been killed in very mysterious circumstances. Initially the police said it was suicide, but the post-mortem concluded he had been murdered.

In just the last month the President (Bingu wa Mutharika) has shown some signs that he listening. He appeared on a World Service interview (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15201248>) and has recently reinstated some university lecturers who were sacked after striking for academic freedom. The enemy of progress and justice is apathy and acceptance of the status quo, so please pray for our Malawian brothers and sisters who are heeding Christ’s call to make peace, often at great personal risk.

I have settled into my new role and though I don’t enjoy being the head of department, I am content it is what I’m meant to be doing for now. I’d prefer to be doing clinical work, but inevitably I’ve had to cut down my practise to meet the other demands. I have to make all sorts of decisions about issues I have little experience of. Our department attracts lots of overseas researchers and grant holders who want to work with us – part of my role is working out who we should say ‘yes’ to! Pray I’ll get it right and not be overawed speaking to some of my research heroes on the phone!

Last month we had the encouragement of 3 newly qualified Malawian consultants joining us. When I arrived in 2008 the department had 1 Malawian paediatric consultant - it now has 7. This is tremendous progress and gives me hope for the future of the specialty. Obviously it isn’t right for us to keep hold of all of these folk, so they are filling posts in other central hospitals and we are trying to grow our district outreach by putting in for a grant with THET to fund regular visits to hospitals over the southern region.

The One-Stop centre is built (see photo) and we are waiting for the furniture. The contractors are on the finishing touches of the walkway and garden. We had a visit from the new country director for UK aid – DFID. DFID supplied a lot of the money that UNICEF provided for it. She was thrilled with it – and I thanked her for choosing to spend UK taxpayer money on such a good



project! We have heard that the Blantyre police have chosen someone (Constable Emmanuel Kalungu) to come and work there at least on a part-time basis. This is excellent news as we have struggled at times to make good links with the police in Blantyre. Emmanuel has a real heart for the work – he put us in touch with the Fountains of Life volunteer counsellors who are now a crucial

part of what we do.

As a family we are well. Grace has taken to high-school like a duck to water. She seems very happy at St Andrews. She's just started grad 4 piano, and has discovered 'Abba' sheet music. I'm typing this to her rendition of 'Lay all your love on me'! Ben is into his GCSE classes. He's happy to have stopped French and much prefers Spanish. He's just started helping out at church with their work with street children – something we were delighted to see him do. Sara has a new class and a new headmaster. So far, so good! I hiked across Mulanje last weekend with the Mountain Club. Great trip with lots of chances to jump in the freezing / refreshing mountain pools! (see picture)



We started a new term on the 14th November and we'll be back into the routine of teaching, mentoring and exams. Year on year the student numbers grow – this year we'll have over 130 through our department between 3rd and final year. It's great to see, but hard work and we are planning to expand to second teaching site in Lilongwe. This needs careful planning and money and staff. The planning bit is easy! The Christian Medical Fellowship will also be starting their new term. Please pray for them as they elect a new committee and chair. There are a few newly qualified doctors and some senior students who are very keen on planning a medical trip with me up to Embangweni where we used to work – about 8 hours drive away. I'd hoped to do this a few weeks ago but the lack of fuel put paid to our plans. Please pray we'd get the fuel we need to make this happen. I think it would be a real encouragement for Embangweni.

So lots of things to pray for...

- Pray for peace-makers in the church, and for the President and leaders

of Malawi.

- Pray for our new consultants as they take on their new responsibilities - that they'd cope with all the hard work!
- Pray that all the finishing touches on the One-Stop centre will be completed and for the plans for an opening ceremony. Given the political turmoil we have to be careful which government minister we invite to open it.
- Pray for Constable Emmanuel Kalungu from the police. Pray we'll build a strong working relationship that results in more children being protected from abuse.
- Pray for the new term, the new CMDF leaders and for enough fuel to make a trip up to Embangweni possible.

Thanks as ever for your support.

Neil, Sara, Ben and Grace.