

Dear everyone

8th July 2012

Usually when I sit down to write these, I need to begin with an apology- 'Sorry for not writing for a long time...' or similar. I get the last letter out of the file and find *again* that it's been too long since the last update. But today, I'm feeling a wee bit smug – I last wrote *less* than 3 months ago. Ok, only *just* less than 3 months, but an achievement none the less! However when I re-read our letter of the 11th March, it seemed like it was from a different era. So much has happened - so much has changed in Malawi in that time.

For the last 2 years President Mutharika's administration was increasingly characterised by corruption, control of the press, serious economic mismanagement and stifling of the opposition. People were pessimistic. What a surprise when on 5th April, the Thursday before Easter, Dr Queen Dube (one of my consultant colleagues) rushed into my office. "Have you heard the news? The president (Mutharika) has died!" The death was being covered up by Mutharika's followers who wanted to cling to power and prevent the Vice-President (Joyce Banda) taking over. She had publicly fallen out with Mutharika and been sidelined by his government, but constitutionally she was now meant to assume power. A cabal of former cabinet ministers tried to alter the constitution to allow their man to take over but a few brave individuals stood up to them, and after several days of real uncertainty, she became Malawi's first female head of state.

She faces a huge task, but seems to have started well. She has restored press and academic freedom, mended fences with the international donors and sacked some of the worst offenders from the last administration. She sincerely asked for prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in her first national address. In March I asked you to "Pray for the government of Malawi that it will make just decisions that will benefit the poor". The Lord answered these prayers in ways no-one could foresee.

We now have a few claims to fame within the current government. President Banda is a member of our congregation (St Columba's) – in fact we're in the same 'Malaga' – a bit like a fellowship group. However she's too busy to attend it very often! I also teach her daughter who is a final year medical student – thankfully she'd just passed her paediatric exams before mum took over the country! And the father of one of the registrars I asked you to pray for last month (Msandeni) has just become foreign secretary. Sadly none of this helps when you're in a queue at the bank, or immigration, or ...

The new president bowed to pressure from the IMF and allowed the Kwacha to float. There was an overnight devaluation of about 50%! However prices had been reflecting the 'real' black-market rate for some time so there wasn't a huge surge of inflation (only 21%!). Forex has become more available and the fuel crisis seems to be abating. More fuel meant we could finally get to Bangula with the Christian students for our annual outreach there. It was great to see young doctors and students 'doing their thing'. The weekend had a real impact on them too – they were challenged to pour out their lives in thankfulness to God just like the woman of Mark 14 who anointed Jesus with her perfume.

Last time I asked you to 'Pray for Emmie, Sandy and George as they take their exams'. The exams went well. Msandeni (or Sandy) and Emmie both passed their part 1s and progress now to Liverpool for a year doing a Masters in Tropical Paediatrics, before they complete their final 2 years of training in South Africa. George didn't pass, but will resit in September. He took the news with good grace and is working hard. Please pray for them all. I had a great conversation with Msandeni one night on call. She was full of praise for the Lord's hand on her life. Despite being the foreign secretary's daughter, her family life has been far from easy. It's a privilege to pray with and mentor these folk. Give thanks for Sandy's professional and spiritual growth.

In May, I was told by UNICEF that the UK Secretary of State for International Development (Andrew Mitchell) was going to visit the One-Stop-Centre. We had a week to prepare – and seeing as the electricity, water and

furniture still hadn't been sorted out it was going to be a busy week. There was still a wall where the access door from the main hospital should be! 2 days later, the office of the newly appointed Chief of Police phoned to say he was coming on the same day. Last time I asked you to 'Pray for the completion of the One-Stop Centre and the ongoing work of the child protection team. Pray they will persevere despite all the frustrations and obstacles to progress'. Yet again, the Lord has heard and answered and although it was touch and go and I wish God answered prayers in a more predictable fashion (we were painting things on the morning of the visit!) the centre is now finished and functioning well. The numbers of children coming are increasing as we offer a better service to families and individuals who have been abused. We have social services, police, counsellors and a full-time nurse all in the building. The cheesy grin on my face when I met Mr Mitchell was a mixture of relief and thankfulness!



The college continues to take more and more students. I've been busy over the last few months with trips backwards and forwards to Lilongwe where we plan to open a second teaching site in October. All of 3rd year will be taught there and we're making good progress. We've moved several members of staff, the buildings are constructed, and I've led some courses on clinical teaching for some of the new faculty. However this has meant more nights away from home. We've had a few attempted break-ins recently, so please pray for safety for us all - whether travelling or at home in Blantyre.



The highlight of the last few months for Sara and I was undoubtedly Ben's baptism. It was wonderful to hear him tell everyone there how he came to faith a few years ago. Thank you to family, god-parents and friends who have prayed and supported him in his walk with God.

Grace passed grade 4 piano and completed year 7 (first form in old money!) with aplomb. Sara has had the usual hectic end-of-term rush at Phoenix, including the play / reports / international day / weekend up Mulanje. Together with her other full-time job of keeping us all in order, it's been a really busy time for her. We're all about to return to the UK for a holiday.

Some ideas for prayer include:

- Give thanks for the many answers to prayer and encouragements over the last few months. My secretary reminded me a few weeks ago that 'we serve a living Lord'! She was right.
- Pray for the One-Stop-Centre staff. Pray we'll be able to integrate services for adult women who are victims of sexual violence.
- Pray for our holiday – that we'll have a good rest and come back refreshed.
- Pray for Emmie and Sandy as they head to Liverpool. Pray for George as he re-takes his exams in September and for Neil as he prepares them.
- Pray for the expansion to Lilongwe. There is still a lot of work to be done.

Thank you so much for your continued support.

Neil, Sara, Ben and Grace.