

## Malawi Companionship

June 2020

Dear friends, I would like to share a few updates about our partners in Malawi.

### Covid-19

In March as we watched the number of infections and deaths from Covid-19 rise throughout the world, I was holding on with hope that Malawi would be spared from this disease. In April cases began to appear there, and testing became more available in the larger cities. In the last 3 weeks, cases have quadrupled, and there are now 455 confirmed cases, and 4 known deaths due to this disease. With the first recorded cases, the government ordered a shutdown, closing many small businesses, and limiting gatherings to small groups - this immediately put a strain on households who rely on those small businesses for survival, and community members who rely on those businesses for food and supplies. Bishop Joseph Bvumbwe also made the decision to pause in-person worship due to the large numbers of people who gather each week & knowing this would be one way the church could help ensure people's safety. With this decision, pastors and evangelists and many ELCM staff have been out of work with no pay. A court decision overturned the shutdown and decisions about community safety protocols are being negotiated. And, there is a strong urgency by the government to reopen schools in July, although this is very concerning for most families. Additionally, Bishop Joseph has asked all ELCM staff to work from home if they are able, due to the confirmed Covid-19 cases that are very close to the Lutheran compound in Lilongwe.

Aside from these concerns, there is growing anxiety about testing - currently, most testing access is in the large cities, and very little testing is available in the rural areas, in which the greatest percentage of the population lives in Malawi. And, there are only about 2 dozen ICU beds available within the country, so available health care and treatment also brings some worry for those who could need extensive care.

Feeding stations have remained open, with appropriate safety procedures in place, and it is our goal to help sustain this ministry in whatever way we are able.

### Companion Visits

In April of this year a small group of us were planning to travel to Malawi to teach at the Pastors' Academy and travel to Johannesburg for an ELCA/Southern Africa Consultation. The trip was postponed until 2021 (again, tentatively) due to the global public health concerns.

### Social Concerns

Large groups of supporters gather daily throughout the country at various presidential campaigns as the country looks forward to electing a president on June 23.

### Support

Many of you have inquired about how we can best walk with our brothers and sisters in Malawi during this time. One important way to offer support is through our prayers - please continue to pray for health, for effective leadership, and for peace for our companions in the church, but also throughout the country.

The next most effective way we can assist right now would be through financial gifts. These gifts will be used for the following: 1.) Food and supplies for feeding stations, and 2.) Assistance with ELCM staff stipends. Perhaps you feel called to contribute a financial gift to these ongoing needs. If so, please know that your gift will automatically be doubled (up to \$5,000) due to a generous gift from the Zomba-Immanuel Partnership group in Eau Claire, WI. Gifts can be mailed to the synod office, or made online. In an effort to send funds as quickly as possible, the deadline for donations will be June 26, 2020.

Thank you for your ongoing, strong support of our companions in Malawi - your generosity continues to warm my heart!

Please join me in praying for God's continued blessings on our partnership with the ELCM as we look forward to all the ways we will walk together in the light of Jesus Christ. **Zikomo Yesu!**

Together in Christ,

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