

It is nearly the end of hot season here. We await the start of the proper rainy season. **There is one overarching, heavy concern here that we would like to share with you for your prayers.** It both very simple, and very complex.

AM REAL STARVING HUNGER AT THE VILLAGE.

A few weeks ago, we received this urgent and distressing text from a friend called Francis, who lives in a nearby village. Nearly every year Malawi has a “hungry season”, as people’s food runs out before the next harvest arrives. This usually starts in January / February, a couple of months before the harvest in

April. This message, however, arrived in late September. We met Francis, and he was not exaggerating. He was thin and distressed and brought a saddening report from the village. To make matters worse, he is caring for 4 orphaned children whose house was destroyed by the cyclone earlier this year. Several things contributed to Francis’s situation:

- Lack of fertiliser last growing season, because of the war in Ukraine (this will also be an issue this year)
- Cyclone Freddy having damaged a proportion of last year’s crops (something that people fear will also be repeated this year)

Thankfully, we have been able to help Francis out with food and seed to plant. It was extremely humbling to hear his great gratitude. But it is very concerning because we know that Francis is not at all unusual – this is a typical message we are hearing from all over the region. And it is very worrying because there are still ~6 months until the next harvest might arrive.

Malawi also has pressing macroeconomic woes – the country has almost no foreign exchange reserves, meaning it is difficult to import resources. There have been repeated national fuel shortages with people queuing for days for petrol or diesel. This is usually the season when people build or repair their homes in advance of the rains, but the main cement manufacturer had to stop production because they could not import the raw materials from Zambia. The government cannot pay its internal or international bills. All this grinds the country to a halt.



So this week the government was obliged to take the drastic measure of again devaluing the local currency (the kwacha) by 44%, in an effort to encourage exports, improve foreign exchange reserves, and help the government to pay its internal and external bills. The hope is that as a result of this restructuring of the economy, the International Monetary Fund will soon grant Malawi an Extended Credit Facility which will help to access more foreign exchange loans.

But these measures are a brutal remedy. They hit the poorest people the hardest. Around 70% of Malawi’s population already live below the international poverty line of \$1.90/day, and Malawi has chronic food insecurity. Food, transport and commodity prices have already started to rapidly rise after the devaluation. **People like Francis will experience even worse suffering, shortage and hunger.** Many Malawians are apprehensive, fearful and bewildered. It is painful to witness.



How do we even begin to pray about this? We don’t have good answers to that question. But here are some ways we try to pray. Our prayers often feel inadequate, and we would so much appreciate you adding your prayers to ours

- We pray for justice and generosity in international and global economic structures
- We pray that the God of the feeding of the 5000 would provide abundantly and unexpectedly
- We pray for comfort, mercy and provision for so many families and communities who are suffering
- We pray for wisdom and good governance for the government of Malawi
- We pray for the rains to come joyfully, gently and consistently, and for good crops for next year
- We pray about global climate change and global conflict, and their impact on countries like Malawi

It is very easy to feel defeated by these issues but, as ever, wisdom and encouragement have also come from within Malawi. We were complaining to a Malawian friend, Feston, about how inadequate our assistance for Francis feels in the face of these complex problems. Feston summoned the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. We were grateful to be encouraged and assured by him that our small gift of grain for Francis would be used to achieve more than we could hope or expect, that it would keep lasting and not run out, that it would sustain Francis and his family and community in ways we cannot anticipate. **He challenged us not to think of our prayer and actions as a drop in the ocean, but as a seed being planted which will grow.**

As Melita was walking yesterday at sunset, she met large groups of people pouring off our local prayer-mountain and heading back to where they live in Mbayani, one of the poorest parts of Blantyre. Despite the terribly heavy recent news, they had a palpable lightness and joy as they walked, and **we are reminded that Malawians do not lose their faith or hope in these circumstances.** We learn so much from being here through these hard times.

A final point for prayer: Embarrassingly, unfairly, the devaluation now gives us even greater economic power relative to our Malawian friends and colleagues. Every pound sterling we now bring into the country is worth ~40% more. Unjust and inequitable as this feels, it does mean that we presently have an opportunity to use our own personal and research resources to make a bigger difference. So please pray that we will have wisdom and humility to use and share this economic advantage in ways that are right and just and effective.

Our recent personal news



In late September, having completed 2 years of Pioneer training with the Church Mission Society, Melita was licensed as a Lay Minister in the Diocese of Ely. We had a joyful weekend at Ely Cathedral, and were warmly hosted by the parish of St Mary's and St Andrew's in Whittlesford. We were especially grateful to be supported by friends from St Mary's and from Whittlesford. As well as being a link between Malawi and Whittlesford parish, Melita has now started helping with online theology training for lay ministers-in-training in the diocese.



In Vienna at the end of October, after 2 years of exploration and 1 year of formal preparation, Stephen and Melita together with our small preparation cohort took our vows to join the Order of the Mustard Seed (OMS). OMS is a recognised religious community within the Anglican church, which is dispersed, lay-led and ecumenical. We took vows to Be True, Be Kind, and Go to the Nations, and committed to a Rule of Life involving prayer and creativity; hospitality and justice; and learning and mission. We now wear silver OMS rings, engraved with the verse from Romans 14:7 "we do not live for ourselves alone", and will renew our vows each year.

This feels like a timely moment of renewed commitment, together and in community, as next week we hit 1/3 of a century of marriage (our kids helped us do the maths ... 33.3333 years!)



Every blessing to you all, as the seasons turn and we move towards Advent

Thank you as ever for your continued prayers

Melita & Stephen xo