

HOLDING ON TO HOPE



INTERNATIONAL RURAL CHURCHES ASSOCIATION

LILONGWE, MALAWI

28 JULY TO 2 AUGUST 2014



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HOLDING ON TO HOPE: REPORT ON THE FIFTH CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL
RURAL CHURCHES ASSOCIATION 2014

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Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us a new birth and a hope that is alive.

1 Peter 1:3 (NIRV)

I don't really know why I care so much. I just have something inside me that tells me that there is a problem, and I have got to do something about it. I think that is what I would call the God in me.

Wangari Maathai



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is prepared with grateful acknowledgement to all participants in the conference, with a special mention to those who took up the invitation to supply material whether files of their presentations or reflections on the experience of being involved.

Huge thank yous:

To our hosts, in Lilongwe and in Mzuzu.

To the hard working local arrangements team of IRCA Malawi for taking on what they thought at the beginning was only a dream.

To the International Leadership group – for the determination of both to “hold on to hope” that the dream of this conference would be realised.

To you all we are very grateful.

And my personal thanks to the Kaeo-Kerikeri Union Parish and the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand who granted me study leave to produce this publication.

Robyn McPhail

October 2014

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FOREWORD

Yehovah landirani ulemu!

We owe God so much praise and honour for an eventful and fabulous week of the first IRCA Conference in Malawi, held at African Bible College, Lilongwe.

The Pre-Conference held in Mzuzu was one exciting and explosive experience of meeting new friends and building new relationships with various rural villages around Vwasa March, Chintheche Inn, Chitimba, Kabanda UMC, Bwengu, and Rumphi.

Then on 28 July 72 members (28 international participants and 44 Malawians) came together at ABC. It was a wonderful week of learning from one another and sharing many beautiful pieces of experience. A global variety of participation made this conference unique as we had people from Korea, India, Canada, Romania, England, USA, New Zealand, Australia, and Malawi.

And the Youth Forum was an outstanding component of the 5th IRCA Conference. Youth had been drawn in for the first time since the inception of IRCA.

Finally I wish to thank God for a good and diligent service provided by Catherine Christie and the Executive team over the entire quadrennium. I also recognise the good job accomplished by the local leadership whose names deserve elite attention, such as Rev John Mastern Dzonzi (Vice Chair), Jeff Maganga (Treasurer), Lumban Makwakwa (Secretary), and Copeland Nkhata (Chairman).

God revealed himself in a very special way by keeping the large audience active from the beginning of the conference to the end. From almost everyone enthusiasm exuded day after day. The bond of love waxed strong among us and joy was the crowning factor as we engaged in discussion and mingled over meals, or while sitting beside each other in the bus.

Copeland Nkhata



Present at the Conference Opening: John Mastern Dzonzi, Kalondola Nkhata, Radwel Mwase, Rhoda Jere, and Happy Jere, with Copeland Nkhata in the rear.



Present at the Conference Closing: Copeland Nkhata, Salome Jere, Kalondola Nkhata, Radwel Mwase, Lumban Makwakwa, Ken Manyozo, and Blair Nyondo.

PRE-CONFERENCE GATHERING IN MZUZU

Monile mose mu zina la Yesu Khristu Fumu yithu!
Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Pre-Conference gatherings began with IRCA2007. Catherine Christie, chairperson for IRCA2014 and chair of local arrangements for IRCA2007, reflects on the inspiration behind these gatherings:

2006 was an Olympic year. When the Canadians started thinking of hosting IRCA 07, Joyce Sasse reflected on the meaning of the progression of the Olympic torch through different communities, and wondered if somehow foreign guests to Canada could travel across Canada on their way to Brandon, experiencing the variety of Canadian rural communities.

I was able to set up host families from the West Coast to the East Coast, from a logging community in British Columbia to a small rural town in Nova Scotia, and even to fulfill a request for a host who could speak German. It was an excellent way for participants to recover from their overseas trips and find out some of the realities of Canadian rural life.

We called this experience 'Conference Scattered'. Since that year we have not been able to duplicate this experience, but there have been wonderful pre-conference events, in 2010 in Neckarelz, Mosbach, 255km south east of Altenkirchen, and this year in Mzuzu, North Malawi, 358 km north of Lilongwe. The strength of thus having one event for a group of participants to attend is that they get to know each other quite deeply while getting to know something about the country.

I commend Copeland for the wonderful event he planned, and the dear people of Luwinga Lodge for their warm welcome to the 14 of us.



THE PRE-CONFERENCE FAMILY ON THE LAST DAY IN MZUZU

Back row: Everett, Dave, Kevin, Landry, Chad, Christina (inset), Prasad, Eric. Middle row: Annette, Robert, Harriet Banda, Nyuma Shaba, Memory Ngulube, Monica Ng'ambi, Lloyd, Robyn, Sandra. Front row: Janice, Gloria Msowoya, Everis Chipere, Kelvin Chipere, Catherine, Rochelle.

EN ROUTE TO MZUZU – THE ADVENTURE OF 21 JULY

The trip from Longonot Lodge in Lilongwe started off quite a bit later than planned. When the bus came, we somehow managed to squeeze everybody onto it. Then there was a bit of shopping to do at the City Mall nearby by. Finally we got going around 11.30am.

When we were a little over half way to Mzuzu from Lilongwe, the van's clutch started to malfunction so we pulled over to the side of the road pretty close to a small village. Once we got out, little African kids swarmed us and we walked with them to the village. Our driver then "fixed" the clutch enough to get back to the town, got some work done to it there, and we were on our way again.

After about 30 more minutes of driving, the clutch failed again. This time we stopped in a village that was a little bigger. While there we got to enjoy a visit that couldn't have been planned better. We bought roasted maize, hard-boiled egg, and cooked sweet potato while waiting for a real mechanic to fix the clutch; we watched a welder working Malawi style and took in all the sights of a village in the late afternoon early evening.

After that repair job the clutch held for the rest of the journey. But just as we were getting close enough to Mzuzu to see it, we started smelling something burning. It was the radiator!

The radiator had overheated. After about 20 minutes of waiting to cool down, a large number of bottles of water were poured into it, and we were on the road again finally making it to Mzuzu in the dark. Robert had phoned ahead to the Lodge and dinner was waiting for us.

Thank you Copeland, Lloyd, and Robert, for your care and concern, and for the adventure.



Driver Lloyd at work on the clutch, with farmer Kevin offering encouragement and understanding.

HOPE SCHOLARSHIP CENTRE



United Methodist Church Mzuzu

The Oasis of Hope at the United Methodist Church of Malawi, in Mzuzu, operates a Business Management School that prepares suited Youth for a career in business – teaching Accounting, Business Management and Marketing. For two years, five days a week – six hours per day, five to seven students are personally taught valuable Business Skills, preparing them for their final examinations.

The Students take exams with several examination boards in United Kingdom such as Association of Business Executives (ABE), Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), Institute of Commercial Management (ICM), and Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (ACCA). The list also includes Public Accountants Examination Council of Malawi (PAEC).

The Hope Scholarship Centre started in 2004, in the midst of new and unique challenges. These included an avalanche of school dropouts because of various crises, untimely departure of many

parents through HIV/AIDS and other causes leaving many young people to fend on their own. Adding the challenges of shelter, food, books, clothing, and school fees put the future of many youth in jeopardy.

The Hope Scholarship Centre was created to help these very capable youth to have a brighter and more prosperous future, as accounting and business jobs are usually the higher paying careers. Since the first graduating class in 2006, the Hope Scholarship has provided school fees, books and sundry needs to over 40 boys and girls.

Reverend Copeland and his wife Jane, with their family, offer their home to many of these students, while they are in class. While at the Main Branch of the National Bank of Malawi, Copeland introduced me to many of the graduates from the Hope Scholarship School, who now have good jobs and are able to support their extended family. Thanks be to God.

HOPE TAILORING SCHOOL

The Hope Tailoring School is purpose-built in the grounds of the Mzuzu United Methodist Church. There are 14 sewing machines. Six, imported from Brazil, are able to be used as electric or treadle.

The very competent teacher has ten students in the morning and a smaller class in the afternoon. The school year has only just begun and at our visit aprons were being constructed, in an attractive material of blue and brown.



The students were singing as we arrived for the visit.

The vision for the school is to educate women for independence of income as well as to produce clothing for their own families. Education covers design, pattern making, preparation, and sewing, as well as machine maintenance.

The women are selected from churches throughout Mzuzu so this is a real ecumenical project. They are usually women with children, but this year there is one student in her late teens chosen because of her goal of becoming a designer. An assistant pastor's wife is also in the class, with a view to setting up a school when she and her husband are placed in a church in another community.



Flora, Menacy, and Veronica, the top three students in 2013

The graduation for the previous class was held in June and we were honoured by the presence of the three top graduates, who wore their "graduation gowns". These are clothes that were their final assignment in the course, namely, to design and make an outfit to wear at graduation.

Top graduates are presented with sewing machines. Six were presented this year: initially it was only the top student who received a machine, but an increase in donations has enabled more students to receive this valuable capital injection for their home-based enterprise.

A point of interest that Sandra noted was the very good security doors outside the wooden doors. She also noted the louvre windows and suggests we ask Copeland about the two that got broken. Any improvement to his football skills?



SUNDA WELL

Our first day in Mzuzu featured a tour of the many missions Pastor Copeland Nkhata and the Mzuzu United Methodist Church have initiated over the past few years. One such mission was a well the church helped drill in June of this year in the Sunda Community, just outside of the main town of Mzuzu, but still within the city boundaries.

The well provides clean water to over 1,000 people who live in homes which don't have piped water. Many women carry heavy buckets of water on top of their heads from the well to their homes, some over a kilometre away. Before the well, people were drinking from contaminated water sources, which brought diseases. This well also included a washing station for families to clean their clothes. Although wells like the one we visited in the Sunda Community are quite expensive – about USD8,000 – they are good for over thirty years and help to save lives across the rural areas of Africa.

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR WATER AND SANITATION

[Rochelle Holm](#) is serving in Mzuzu, Malawi, at the invitation of the Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP), Synod of Livingstonia. Rochelle is the manager of the Centre of Excellence in Water and Sanitation and [Smart Centre](#) at Mzuzu University. The Centre, which partners with the Synod of Livingstonia's Development Department, opened in 2009 and participates in applied



Landry demonstrates an innovative and affordable pump

research, water quality analysis, training, consultancies, outreach programs, and the practical application of research findings. Through the Department of Water Resources Management the Centre is offering a degree program in Water and Sanitation, which is an important link to the dissemination and documentation of research findings. The Smart Centre, opened in 2012, has an exciting and innovative focus on low-cost water and sanitation solutions appropriate for

households to purchase, the so-called self-supply, through the buildup of local water and sanitation entrepreneurs.

Chrissy Zamba, monitoring and evaluation officer, told us about low cost sanitation toilets using one handful of ash with three handfuls of soil to keep odours at a minimum. When possible, bore holes are encouraged for community use. When larger bore holes are not possible, we saw demonstrations of water wells using low cost plungers to draw water for places where a community water bore hole is too far away to be practical. We also saw a demonstration of collection of rainwater coming from the roof into a storage tank to use for watering plants during the dry season.



Chrissy demonstrates a cost-effective hand washing system

MINISTRY AT MPAMBA

Rochelle's husband Tyler is also working on behalf of the Presbyterian Church USA at the invitation of the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia, and Papa Dave asked if he could connect us to a rural church. Tyler teaches theology at the University of Livingstonia and knew one of his students, David Mbale, was doing a field placement nearby.

Taken into the hills to the rural community of Mpamba we were met by David and by vice clerk Christen. The congregation is made of up 10 vestries (other countries might call them “preaching points”) for which one pastor is responsible. David is assisting over the university break.



Student minister David with Vice Session Clerk Christen

Some of these vestries are only accessible by walking over the hills. As the senior pastor was away at a Presbytery function that day, David had been responsible earlier that morning for the funeral of a young child who had died suddenly. All of us who had been student ministers could strongly feel the significance of this event. We talked a little about the fragility of life in this area.

As a former Presbytery official looking for education sites, Catherine expressed appreciation to this congregation who sees itself as a place for education through preparation of student ministers. Christen replied, sharing his appreciation to the college and the Presbytery, for providing wonderful student ministers for them. David shared his delight in his favourite professor's taking the time to come see him at this time, and bringing foreign guests.

We closed our visit with prayer for David and all student ministers and for the congregation, then with the singing of “This Little Light of Mine”.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT BIBLE STUDY

Before leaving to pick up the second batch of Pre-Conference participants, Copeland invited suggestions for Bible Study. All were taken with Robyn's suggestion of the earth creature (Genesis 2) being formed by God from the vital topsoil, and she was thus assigned. Before dinner we set out for Elder Peter Botha's home with our dear Justin, assistant pastor to Copeland. Along the streets, round several corners, past the church, through some side streets, and there we were.

Before the start, Justin suggested we exchange seats to mix up with local participants, which we gladly did, 20-25 people in two rows of chairs around the room. Peter Botha welcomed us and offered prayer for the evening and Justin led in singing “How Wonderful is your name, O Lord”. After listening to various language versions of the Genesis account we reflected on two key words – *'adam* “human being” and *'adamah* “top-soil”, the living nest of fertile earth. In each of our languages Tumbuka, Chichewa, and English, this connection is lost. The church's reading of this text has also lost the connection and we, as rural Christians, need to reclaim it.

Stories were shared of our own lives with the soil as a way to reclaim this God-given connection. Peter Botha noted how crucial the matter of relationship is and there was a good discussion from participants talking about working with the soil and the threats from globalising pressures.

A wonderful light supper of buns and coffee was set out in the kitchen, and we partook of delicious and warm hospitality. Copeland's wife, Jane, had arrived to help with the supper, and was one of the ones to escort us home by torchlight over the rough roads. Thank you, Jane.

Copeland's daughter again led the singing, the call and response of “How Wonderful is your name, O Lord.” Walking home, stirred by the sight of the multitude of stars over Mzuzu, we gave thanks.

PRE-SCHOOL VISITS: KABANDA AND BWENGU

All over the world Pre-schools are a needed phenomenon in the context of children needing to cope with the speed of the knowledge explosion.

Rev Copeland had selected an appropriate village to start this preschool in Kabanda about 80ms from Mzuzu town in Malawi. This is surrounded by tiny village communities of agricultural families. The evangelist Mrs Cecilia is indeed a powerful organizer who could mobilize children from all families of these hamlets. She is really a good evangelist who engages children in Christian choruses along with alphabets and colours and so on.

The multipurpose community hall meant for this preschool is also a place for worship for these communities which is a real boon. Added to this, a bore well in front of the building attracts the mothers to be around, fetching drinking water and washing their family clothes making children feel not very far from the mothers.



"I love you Jesus deep down in my heart". Teacher Cecilia leading the little ones in one of their many learning songs

Following are some impressions:

- Rev Copland is really a dynamic pastor initiating these community development programs.
- Mothers are freed from the burden of keeping the children during their daily routine.
- Parents are really motivated to send their children to primary school which is nearby.
- Visuals on the walls are beautiful and very appropriate.
- Surroundings are kept clean and tidy.
- Life revolves around the church with children, mothers, fathers and so on all part of it.

On the whole the program is impressive and meaningful which should be emulated in all rural places. We wish Rev Copeland all the best.

TESTIMONIES SHARED

We were blessed to have Pastor Justin and Gloria share their testimonies with us. Both experienced severe rejection as children, both have a strong faith in God, and their lives show it in the joy they express in smiles, energy, song, and dance.

Justin was brought up to be very involved in the worship at the Muslim Mosque. As a school boy he got sick on his way from school one day, leaving him unable to walk. A Pastor came and Justin was reluctant for him to pray, but he was healed and God's hand was firmly on his life.

The change in his life was dramatic, but caused him to be sent from his family. He walked miles to get away from where he was known and found some work and shelter to survive. In time he got an education and has a vibrant pastoral and healing ministry in Mzuzu.

Gloria was rejected by her father and had to fend for herself pretty much. She came to faith and was able to gain sufficient education to be able to enrol in a Hospitality Diploma Course, which has given her the opportunity of a job at the Luwanga Lodge. Her father has left her mother and siblings so she now is their main breadwinner.

She calls herself "Blessed Grace" as her faith is strong and God has led her and protected her.

OUR DRIVER LLOYD

Lloyd Chipere was our driver from Lilongwe to Mzuzu and for the duration of our time in Mzuzu, six days. Half way to Mzuzu our vehicle had a break down and needed a couple of hours to repair. This time gave us a wonderful chance to experience “local culture” as it was a street full of every market stall you can imagine including welding and manufacturing. We enjoyed street cooked corn cobs, sweet potato and hard boiled eggs.

Lloyd drove us to National Parks and short trips around Mzuzu and we were impressed with his driving skills. Some of the roads took a bit of “navigating” and he managed to miss the pot holes. We were always comfortable with Lloyd's driving and his cheerful, helpful personality. Lloyd is a widowed father of a young son and daughter. Thanks Lloyd. It has been good to know you.

REFLECTIONS FROM LUWINGA

Hi my name is Annette Skillings and I want to say a special thanks. We stayed at The Luwinga Lodge for a total of 3 weeks. I enjoyed the employees there and Robert, the owner, was so accommodating. Everyone had such great personalities. Robert, Lloyd and Copeland toured us all around Northern Malawi. Thanks to Robert, we saw things we never would have seen by ourselves. The kitchen staff worked really hard at making meals that Canadians would like – and yes, we did try some African meals. The cleaning ladies were great and cleaned around our schedule. We could not have asked for better service and accommodations.

SUNDAY WORSHIP UMC MZUZU

On Sunday we joined with the members of Copeland Nkhata's congregation at the United Methodist Church Mzuzu for morning worship. It was a happy time of praise and togetherness. Translators were used so all were included.



The youth group under Assistant Pastor Justin Boxe led the congregation in some vigorous singing in the Tumbuka language. People danced, sang, and clapped.

Following the welcome to us, Prasad, Robyn, and Chad gave thanks for the hospitality and experiences we had enjoyed while in Mzuzu, spoke of our relationship to God, our land, and other people, and the IRCA network of friendship. Catherine presented some small gifts to the congregation.

In her sermon Catherine Christie read from Exodus 2:23-24 and reflected on the words “Voice for the Voiceless”, the IRCA theme song, using the illustration of Jesus becoming the voice for Zacchaeus and challenging us to be voices for those weaker than us in our communities. Following prayer we led the congregation in a hearty singing of “This little light of mine”. The people came forward with their offerings which Robyn blessed. Catherine pronounced the benediction which was followed by more local singing.

The congregation was multi-aged from babes in arms and up. Bishop Prasad shared some special time with a young lady of two and a half.

We are all one in the bonds of Christian love.



Fumu yimutumbikani na kumusungani nyengo zose.

May God bless you and keep you always.

CONFERENCE OPENING

“Welcome to the Warm Heart of Africa”



The conference began on Monday evening, 28 July. After dinner in our under-cover outdoor dining space the Conference Opening got under way. Music from the young people of Kaning'a CCAP (Church of Central Africa Presbyterian) Praise and Worship team tuned us in to the context.



Local committee vice-chairperson John Mastern Dzonzi began with welcoming words. “When Copeland shared the idea for a conference in Malawi,” he said, “it was a dream.” The dream was that IRCA would hold its first conference in Africa in Malawi.

And indeed that is what happened:

As we gather tonight in this room we represent globalisation... “I saw men and woman from all the lands, from all the tribes and languages.” So tonight you will agree with me that indeed this is what it is going to look like in heaven.

After inviting people from each of the countries present to stand in turn, with finally the delegates from each of the three regions of Malawi, John told us we were there to encourage one another, and to share how to hold on to hope.

A PROPHETIC MESSAGE OF THE HOUR

Preacher Molly Kalenga provided a powerful proclamation to inspire us for our time together. She saw in the Conference theme “Holding on to Hope” a prophetic message for the darkness of our time.

We need determination, she said. In particular, drawing from the text of Mark 6:45-52, we need to focus on Jesus and expand our spiritual territory. If we do that, we can get out of our comfort zone. Like Peter, we can jump out of the boat not fearing an answer, not fearing life. We can challenge the challenges that come at us. For that, we need to know who we are.



God knows you so come, she invited us, enter into the heart of God.

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE RURAL AREAS



The presentation that followed, from Dr Mrs Maggie Madimbo, Vice-Chancellor of African Bible College, gave the perfect introduction to the context of rural church in Malawi. For her “rural” is defined by what she sees in Malawi and her view is from the leadership perspective working to provide transformational leaders who can serve in the rural areas.

She told of her brother-in-law's ministry with a Presbyterian congregation in a remote area which has 49 prayer houses. That means travelling almost the whole year to visit them all for holy communion and to provide teaching for Christian life. His mode of transport as a student was a bike with 50km to one of the prayer houses meaning he and his wife had to leave the day before. And in between there are other needs to attend to, cheering the sick, burying people, marrying people, and many meetings. Maggie and her husband visited them one Christmas and the house was full the whole time with Christians, and Elders bringing church business. “You would think Christmas is a holiday. Not for pastors in the rural area of Malawi.” Their house was the office, and not just the house but the pastor himself wherever he went with people stopping him to talk to him. It is not possible for a rural pastor to say, “come and see me tomorrow in my office.”

The sad truth for rural pastors is that much is expected from them. It is not just the congregation but the community that looks up to him. The call is, as in 1 Peter 5:2-3, to do this service willingly, and not lording it over others, or for gain.

Dr Maggie asked the question: “How does such a pastor hold on to hope as he or she tries to service the hopeless?” It is very difficult, and she saw the value of the conference in relation to this question. She said in closing:

When I heard of this conference, I thought, wow, this really does consider those who work in the rural areas. For them to be meeting together and encouraging each other, this would be a tremendous help for pastors in the rural setting, for their challenges include loneliness.

Praise God, these men and women are out there to share the gospel of hope, the gospel that transforms.

To those serving in such settings, I want to encourage you. That each person you interact with looks up to you and, as such, that's your privilege. That's your opportunity for ministry. Do it in such a way that you provide transformational leadership.



THE JOURNEY OF IRCA

The baton was then handed to Chairperson Catherine Christie to lead the gathering through the Journey of IRCA with banners and input from people representing the different stages.

Through video Lloyd Vidler spoke of the beginnings at Durham, England in 1998, with the inaugural IRCA conference on the theme Rural Culture and Spirituality. The Arthur Rank Centre were the hosts.

Prasad Rao spoke in person on the Chennai experience of 2002 where the Church of South India were hosts and the theme was Voice of the Voiceless. This theme has been retained as the stream that flows through all our shared mission as rural churches. Joyce Sasse, by video, spoke on the ecumenical experience of bringing together the conference in Brandon Canada in 2007 on the theme Cry from the Heart. Dietrich Galter read a text on the background the 2010 conference in Altenkirchen Germany and the significance of its theme of Hunger – the Global Challenge.¹



WORDS OF THANKS

Thanks from local chair Copeland Nkhata brought the formalities to their conclusion with acknowledgements to the International Leadership Group (below) and to the IRCA Malawi organising team (see page 6). The evening ended with light refreshments and much chat.



International Leadership Group: Laszlo Mark, Kevin Harper, Roger Greene, Robyn McPhail, Copeland Nkhata, Catherine Christie, Eric Skillings, Prasad Rao, Dave Ruesink

¹ see Videos album on <https://www.facebook.com/IRCA.News> and jpg of text on Altenkirchen Timeline Photos album.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS 1: FULATA L. MBANO-MOYO

Fulata L. Mban-Moyo is a systematic theologian; Church Historian; and gender and HIV and AIDS activist-academic. Her interests lie in the area of women's sexuality as embodied and interconnected spirituality: how this understanding of our interconnectedness impacts our life as a community of women, men (and ecology) who are committed to justice in gender, economy and ecology.

As WCC's Programme Executive for Women in Church and Society, with the mandate to coordinate women's global work in all WCC's member churches in all the 8 regions (North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia, the Pacific, Middle East, Africa), she has focussed on building a movement of just peace that directly addressed violence against women and children.



WHAT SHAPE DOES HOPE TAKE WHEN INJUSTICE VIOLATES PEOPLE'S DIGNITY?

Holding on the Hope – As the Church journeys together towards Justice and Peace

WHEN INJUSTICE VIOLATES PEOPLE'S DIGNITY?

Two days ago someone sent me an image that was showing how much the cabinet ministers in the current Malawian government get per month. It indicated the following:

- Salary: MK2 million
- 2 Cars
- Fuel, 1000 litres
- Free Accommodation
- Free Water, Electricity and Telephone communication
- Children sent to top expensive schools paid by the government
- Etc etc

Same benefits are true for the advisors to the president. There are 20 ministers and 18 advisors. 38 people cost the government and people of Malawi: MK160 million (\$405,503) each month (\$4,866,036 a year). Each minister/Advisor costs: \$10,671 a month, and \$128,053.58 a year.

On the global financial scale, Malawi is:

- One of the 10 poorest countries
 - An average Malawian gets an income of \$160 a year
 - The minister's/advisor's yearly income above could pay 800 Malawians
- What is it that cabinet ministers do that benefit the average Malawian to deserve 800 times more than the people who they serve?
- What is the justification for such a disparity?

The minister's monthly income could help bring medication in the hospitals, could help enhance people's dignity

- if there was good health care services available for all and medical personnel were paid enough and on time;
- if schools had good facilities, teachers were paid enough and on time, girls and boys would receive the necessary education that would keep the girls away from the risk and pressure of marrying early, or being trafficked and sexually violated by those who have resources;
- ETC ETC ETC.

If the above figures are really what ministers get then as a Malawian Christian, I am justified to be outraged!!! *How can we even preach hope in such an atmosphere where people's God-given dignity is violated every day of their life? What shape does the hope we preach take within such realities?*

The above scenario is just an example of existing injustices that take different contextual shapes and expressions that are a global reality (endemic). These are injustices that dehumanise women and men, girls and boys, yet poverty seems to be one of the worst dehumanisation and in most cases, it mainly bears the face of women and children (feminisation of poverty).

In Matthew 21:12-13, we are told about Jesus being outraged by complacency of the co-opted religious people:

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer"; but you are making it a den of robbers.'

Malawi has been made into a den of robbers! If the church does not turn the tables, this broad daylight robbery of Malawian people's dignity will continue and be recycled whoever comes to political power. For it seems as if most of the Malawian politicians come and go not because they want to make things better for the electorate but rather as opportunists whose turn it is to make their own millions at the expense of the Malawian masses. It almost seems as if the saying is: "It's my turn to also enjoy the privileges!" Rather than, "I think I have something to offer/contribute to make Malawi better as I enhance people's dignity!" What role can the church play to make sure that alleviation of poverty of Malawian masses is an important agenda of the politicians and that government structures reflect that as well with checks and balances that protect the masses against the corrupt and abusive few?

Today, I would like to focus my reflections on the theme of the 5th International Rural Churches Association's Conference, "Holding on to Hope" by framing my reflections as journeying together towards justice and peace in a globalised inter-religious world. I will do this with an acknowledgement of the ongoing World Council of Churches' Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace which was decided upon at its 10th Assembly in Busan, 2013. Using an ecofeminist theoretical framework so as to bring out the gender perspective, I will weave through three sub-themes as my focal points. These are:

1. Ending poverty through an economy of life
2. Climate justice
3. Gender justice and peace with no sexual and gender based violence

Acknowledging the intersectionality of justice, I will try to share as much of the implication of such intersection in these three elements of justice and peace that I think the church as an institution, as well as a fellowship of believers, is called to stand in the gap for (or advocate for). As a theological ethicist in the area of gender and sexual ethics, I will end by focusing mainly on the last sub-theme on gender justice and peace with no sexual and gender based violence: how does the church live the reality of being a just community of women and men in its theology, participation and relationship?

Firstly, let us look at what an ecofeminist approach would entail.

Ecofeminism is developed from a linkage results from the striking parallels that exist between the how the earth and women are treated in systems of patriarchal domination. According to Elenora Rae, for example:

the traditional role of both is seen as an instrumental one—women and the Earth are

viewed in terms of having usefulness rather than as having intrinsic worth in their own right. Also, each occupies a sharply differentiated place in the hierarchical system. But in addition to grasping an understanding of the parallel ...ecofeminism also perceives these parallels on the conceptual level—the level of worldviews, myth, symbol, idea, and image. (Rae, 1994:23)

If feminism is the radical notion that wo/men are people (Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza: 2013:7), ecofeminist analysis therefore helps us to address issues of power in its negative form as domination. This entails more than its ability to question the status quo and to develop a coalition around issues. As a way of thinking, ecofeminism offers an alternative vision of transformed power based on creation's intra-interconnectedness and its interconnectedness with the Creator.

According to Ivone Gebara, ecofeminist theory is based on a “unified understanding of life whereas each being and each vital process is absolutely interdependent” (Gebara, 1996: 76). Yet since within the reality of the often existing gender injustice in church and society, the feminine is still the oppressed reality of every human life and all biological systems, ecofeminist analysis therefore becomes necessary lenses through which we have to plan, implement, monitor and assess our pilgrimage of justice and peace. Such an analysis will help us to make sure that we are taking this journey together as a community of women and men, prayerfully reflecting together on issues that concern all of us and using our creative and diverse perspectives without favouring one particular gender over another.

Eleanor Rae argues that ecofeminism transcends the acknowledgement of the close identification between subjugation of women and of nature. It also seeks to transform society according to these ecological and feminist principles (Rae, 1994: 24).

Ecofeminist theory culminates from at least three diverse feminist paths:

- a study of political theory and cultural history;
- exposure to indigenous knowledge systems that acknowledge and respect our interconnectedness and interdependence as created beings;
- and involvement by feminists on environmental issues.

Within the Christian context, ecofeminist theory would particularly add the interconnectedness of creation and Creator, and that of the Triune life, as the fourth path.

JOURNEYING TO JUSTICE AND PEACE IN A GLOBALISED AND INTER-RELIGIOUS WORLD

The World Council of Churches' 10th Assembly brought voices from different parts of the world and different ecclesial traditions offering a common space for discernment and commitment for justice and peace. Delegates, representatives, participants and visitors prayerfully journeyed together to understand the signs of the times against the background of the diverse contextual and global realities. The assembly theme ‘God of Life, lead us to Justice and Peace’ formed a uniting prayer that led to a commitment to move forward together in a pilgrimage of justice and peace.

GLOBALIZATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

According to the WCC strategic plans 2015-2017, there is an acknowledgement that the process of globalization has and is still increasing the gap between the few rich and the poor masses. This rising inequality is increasingly being recognized as a major social, political, economic and an ethical challenge. Needless to say that the economic elites and transnational companies define the rules of the global economy, while nation states are losing their function as democratically accountable actors in securing social welfare, human rights and sustainable development especially the countries in the global south which often times depend on the rich global north countries for

grants and loans, the latter which drains the former in an endless spiral of servicing these endless loans.

Poverty, including extreme poverty, continues to be a major problem and an injustice in many regions of the world. General improvements in particular countries have in some cases masked persistent or growing poverty among members of marginalized and vulnerable communities. An example would be the case of Indigenous Peoples and particularly women and young people that are often the most excluded from development, even within developed countries. Furthermore, internal and external structural factors deprive women, men and children of their dignity, rights and entitlements in countries most severely affected by the global economic crisis, as well as in many countries in the global south.

Young people have been especially affected by unemployment and lack of future prospects. As a result many poor people, especially youth, are leaving their countries in large numbers using risky transportation to seek for a better world. Some become victims of human trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation. 80% of the trafficked are women and girls, 79% of the trafficked are for sexual exploitation especially women and girls. Some of the migrated and trafficked lose their lives on the way. Many of those who manage to reach their destination work under inhuman conditions due to exploitation of their labour. At the same time, the host countries experience the migrants as exerting pressure on the social and economic institutions leading to local resentment of foreigners and xenophobia. Migration, human trafficking and displacement of people undermine the social structure of family and community life, with major ethical and spiritual consequences for society as a whole.



For the trafficked and sexually violated women and girls, there is often no meaningful care given to them for the healing of their memories and the possibility of embracing themselves as sexual beings once again. Most of them live with the unhealed trauma of their experience amidst the stigmatisation from their communities that often conspire to silence around sexual and gender based violence.

CHURCHES' SELF-UNDERSTANDING AND ROLE IN THE CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS PLURALITY

Malawi is one of the few countries that has lived peacefully as a religious plural country for many years. The Centre for the Study of Global Christianity² shows that the fastest growing religions in the period between 2010 and 2020 are likely to be the Baha'i faith (1.7% per annum), Islam (1.6%), Sikhism (1.4%), Jainism (1.3%), Christianity (1.2%), and Hinduism (1.2%). Each of them will grow faster than the world's population (1.1%). This growth will express itself differently in the various regions of the world. In the global north, the religious diversity will increase further as secularisation and migration continue to transform the religious landscape. In other regions, such as Africa, the growth will be seen within mainly one or two religions, primarily Christianity and Islam, while in Asia also the growth of Eastern religions will also dominate.

The resurgence of religion in general is of great importance for the understanding of the changes in the ecclesial landscapes. The growth of Christianity³ has taken place primarily in Africa and Asia,

² Christianity in its Global context, p.13

³ The share of Christians is projected to be around 21.8% in Africa and 16.6% in Asia by 2020. Christianity in its Global context, p.14

while in North America and Europe numbers have decreased. In Asia and Africa the share of Christians has doubled in the last 50 years thanks to missionary activities, but also due to fast growing populations.

However, growth is not taking place equally in all Christian traditions. It is well known that growth takes place primarily in Pentecostal and charismatic churches. It is expected that Pentecostal churches will have 115.2 million members in 2020 compared to 14.5 million in 1970. The Charismatic churches will in 2020 boast 281.9 million members, compared to 4.3 million in 1970. Finally, the Independent Charismatic churches are projected to grow to even 312.7 million members, compared to 43.9 million in 1970. These churches have grown fastest in Asia and Latin America and are expected to grow further in Asia and Africa in the coming years. In other regions, for instance North America and Europe, Pentecostal and charismatic churches are also growing as members of other churches search for a new spiritual home⁴.

The changing ecclesial landscapes also challenge the understanding of the place of churches in the public domain. In countries where churches have strong ties with political regimes, changes in these regimes require fresh theological and ecclesiological reflections on the place of the church in society.

In situations of extreme church growth, as seen in some Asian and African countries, churches face challenges with regard to formation of new members and especially of leadership. As church growth more than often results in the formation of new churches, leadership formation is strongly connected to the need for theological and ecclesiological reflections.

Another significant phenomenon in the changing ecclesial landscapes is the emergence and growth of migrant churches in different parts of the world. These churches frequently do not relate to the existing churches in the countries to which migrants have moved to, but remain related to the churches in countries from which the migrants originate. The churches in the countries from which migrants come, consider themselves then as international churches.

In spite of these globalisation processes, the mainline protestant churches as well as the newly formed Independent Charismatic churches increasingly have, each in their own ways, a strong focus on the local faith community life. Acknowledging the value of local church life, the question of national, denominational structures is often challenged in new ways. How can churches be encouraged to see themselves as part of the larger Church of all times and of all places?

Religious diversity is a reality in many countries. While in many parts of the world like here in Malawi, people of different religions have lived together peacefully for centuries, political leaders sometimes use religion as they also use regions and ethnic diversity for their own purposes and in their own interests, often leading to discrimination and oppression of the “other” according to their preferences. The human rights and fundamental freedoms of religious belief and expression of some citizens are denied especially those of women.

At the same time, the debate within the academic and government development aid agencies and the UN agencies on religion and development has continued. This debate has attracted critical positions vis-à-vis the role of religion to the extent that some actors have wished to totally dismiss the place of religion, while others have appreciated the value base and human capital and infrastructure that religious communities have, and which, if well harnessed, provide potential for social transformation.

In fact, churches nationally, regionally and globally have always been at the centre of

⁴ WCC Strategic Plan 2014-2017, 5

implementation, articulation of new ideas and development of new tools for development practitioners. To-date it is the church that provides many of the services to the marginalized, poor and vulnerable communities in the global south including the most trusted health services. For example, 40% of health services globally are provided by faith based institutions. In Malawi the health services provided by the Presbyterian, Catholic, Anglican and Seventh Day Adventist churches in all the regions of Malawi can be cited as good examples.

Other faith communities have also become very active and there are interfaith platforms emerging for service delivery, especially to provide humanitarian assistance in times of human-made or natural calamities.

The United Nations Development Decades declared from the 1960s up to 1980 were largely focused on infrastructure and the state in terms of institution building. However, the church always offered a counter approach, namely, a people-centred approach to development and not simply the Gross National Product (GDP). Socio-economic development models have constantly been questioned by churches in the global south as they have increased the gap between poor and rich, and have excluded people's participation while being insensitive to the care of creation for future generations. In some instances, these development models have resulted in inter and intra state conflicts making it necessary for the church time and again to engage actively in peace building, conflict transformation and reconciliation.

UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH AND THE ECONOMY OF LIFE

According to Pope Francis, we cannot understand the Good News of Jesus Christ, the gospel of dignity and fraternity, of justice and peace without being aware of real poverty, that is, by turning our backs on the scandal of exclusion or blindly hoping that it will take care of itself (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, § 54). Quite on the contrary, it will be by putting the human being back into the heart of economics and politics, by welcoming the participation of the poor, that poverty can be overcome and the planet safeguarded.

The process of globalisation has also influenced changing global and geopolitical trends. The rise of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), and other 'emerging economies' on the global scene, pose a challenge to the few most developed countries that have dominated the international community. The emerging economies have strengthened south-to-south political and economic cooperation. However the rise of the emerging economies has not solved the problem of poverty in their countries, with national elites capturing a disproportionate share of the wealth. The discovery of natural resources in some countries has led to new social, political and environmental pressures, as well as to greater wealth for some few individuals often politicians.

At the same time, economic development and the impacts of climate change have increased competition and tensions over natural resources – including water and arable land – raising the spectre of new conflicts over such resources. It is also important to recognize that the economic and consequent political rise of the BRICS is now faltering or stalled – even in China – due to different economic, political and social factors, including not least a rapidly aging population in China. But at the same time, many African economies are experiencing high levels of growth – at least relative to most other economies, and generally on the back of extractive industries. Unfortunately even in the African countries where they have been experiencing high levels of growth, this has not been translated into improved social and economic benefits for the majority of the people.

Needless to say that poverty still bears the face of a woman. While women carry out the majority of work in farms, households and other unpaid labour, they only own 1% of the world's property. Most of them are so deprived that the only commodity they can sell to have their daily livelihood and that

of those who depend on them is their body. A majority of women and girls that end up in prostitution do so out of desperation to live. This often leads them to the risk of HIV and AIDS together with the stigmatisation that comes with their kind of job.

Globally 60% of those who are HIV+ are women. A majority of them cannot even afford decent medical care. What roles can the church carry out to make sure that the dignity of such women is restored? An ecofeminist perspective would further raise the following questions:

- What are the principles that characterise a life-affirming economy?
- Whose principles are they?
- Who developed them, whose experience do they enhance and for whose benefit?

CLIMATE CHANGE

The process of globalisation has also been marked by high and increasing levels of consumption, unsustainable methods of farming and extraction of natural resources, increasing urbanization, migration and demographic change having a seriously negative impact on the global ecosystem. The effects of climate change are increasingly being felt today, primarily by the poorest and most vulnerable communities.

There has been an increase in unpredictable and extreme weather phenomena. Floods and droughts are affecting food security and human security. Lack of access to clean water and sanitation is an on-going and worsening crisis in many parts of the world. People's health is also negatively affected. Governments are not acting responsibly to address the issue of climate change. Many international resolutions and commitments on climate change are not being implemented or monitored. Yet it is the poor and vulnerable who are suffering the effects of climate change the most. In contexts where gender roles mean that women and girls have to take care of household duties, this means that they have to walk long distances to fetch water and find fuel for their families.

These long walks also have implication on their safety. Often such women and girls risk being victims of sexual and gender based violence. Both violations often go unaddressed because both victims and communities they come from find it taboo to talk about such dehumanisation. In few cases where such silence is broken, the victims end up being the accused often being judged according to what they were wearing or how they responded.

An ecofeminist perspective would further raise the following questions:

- Whose agenda is this climate change agenda?
- Does it include perspectives from both men and women?
- Do the issues raised include gender concerns of both women and men?

GENDER JUSTICE AND PEACE WITH NO SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

In this decade, although international conflicts have declined, there has been a dramatic increase in numbers of internal conflicts and wars, which often flow over into neighbouring countries. Food insecurity, high levels of youth unemployment, oppressive regimes, financial and economic corruption, political mismanagement of human and natural resources, competition over natural resources, religious intolerance of diversity and religious fundamentalism are some of the causes of such conflicts. This leads in turn to high levels of population displacement, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, statelessness, trafficking of women and children, and ecological disaster.

UN reports have indicated that rape of women and children is constantly being used as a weapon of

war. There has also been an increase in the availability and dissemination of small arms, and renewed threats of the use of nuclear weapons. Without more effective mechanisms for disarmament, peace building efforts remain fragile. Furthermore, while a few countries can be clearly identified as trouble spots, they are all too often the venues for ‘proxy wars’ by other powers and interests, and such powers and interests must themselves be addressed in order for peace building efforts to have any prospects of success. Even in places and countries where there is no armed conflict, women’s bodies remain battle fields in the form of domestic or sexual and gender based violence.

World Council of Churches carried out a study called Community of Women and Men in the Church in 1979-1981. This study which started as a proposal at the WCC Fifth Assembly (Nairobi, 1975) and was authorised study by the Central Committee (CC) of 1976 became an interactive theological study with reflections at different levels of church life. In 1983 after the Sheffield Consultation where the report was shared, *The Community of Women and Men* was published. This study which was jointly carried out by Faith and Order and Women in church and Society, led to the call for change in three distinct areas of church life: Firstly, in theology, where a thorough examination of biblical and theological assumptions concerning the community of women and men in church and society were made and certain anthropological theological affirmations were observed including the declaration that:

A true community of women and men is God’s gift and a promise for humanity, which is created “in God’s image”- male and female (Gen. 1:27); and the church, as prophetic sign of that which God desires for women and men, is called to embody that community in its own life⁵ (emphasis-FLM)

Secondly, in participation, where true freedom was equated to the ability for every person to determine their own liberation by participating in processes of decision-making that determine one’s liberation against oppression so as to be able to embrace one’s human dignity and rights. Thirdly, relationship, the concern for mutual identity of women and men was upheld against existing practices of exploitation by misuse of power over each other. It was affirmed that

“the domination of women by men does not belong to human community as intended in God’s creation (Gen. 2:23) but to the consequences of sin which distorts the community of women and men as well as the relationship between human beings and nature (Gen. 3:16-19b)”⁶.

Popularly known as the Sheffield Report, it has become a spring board to many initiatives in the ecumenical movement beyond the WCC, including in the WCC, the Decade of Churches in solidarity with Women (1988-1998), Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010), the popularisation of Pauline concept of “Living Letters” as an ecumenical witness of accompanying through prayers and visits to those in crisis situations.

The life and questions that it has created keep on challenging churches to keep on asking ourselves as to how far we are indeed a community of women and men

- In our theological reflection and praxis?
- In participation in different levels of church life?
- And in our daily relationship as women and men?

⁵ A Faith and Order Study Document. 1990. *Church and World: The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community*- Faith and Order Paper No. 151, Geneva: WCC Publications, 51.

⁶ Ibid.

Though almost three decades have passed, the questions Sheffield report asks still remain unanswered especially as there is still no equal representation in theological perspectives that undergird our search for visible unity; not yet 50% participation of women and men in the ecumenical and church life, and our daily relationships as women and men are often an expression of domination by men over women. Such relationships still end up in expression of sexual and gender based violence even within the church.

An ecofeminist perspective would also raise the following questions:

- Does the just peace agenda include addressing threats like sexual and gender based violence?
- Is gender justice core to the just peace agenda?
- Are women's rights parts of the human rights agenda?

With all these unanswered and also often unasked questions, I wonder how we can talk of holding on to hope if the church is not the presence and visible expression of justice and peace?

- When the church as spaces of community is part of the den of robbers that grab every opportunity to exploit the vulnerable?
- When the only poverty that we work towards eradication is only our own individual one, which we selfishly eradicate often at the cost of everyone else?
- When churches are at the center of those who exploit Mother Earth without thinking of nourishing and replenishing her so that there can be sustained climate justice?
- When sexual and gender based violence is part of the normality of Christian life and families?

Unless we become part of those committed to work for justice on this journey of justice and peace, there will be no hope to hold on to not for the faithful masses that count on us as the church! Let me invite the IRCA and this conference to join this pilgrimage of justice and peace and help to hold member churches accountable to working for justice and peace in economy, climate, gender and other concerns of justice.



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KEYNOTE ADDRESS 2 – JERRY MARSHALL



Jerry Marshall is CEO of the Arthur Rank Centre in England. He is a 'Kingdom Entrepreneur' and international speaker, passionate about applying entrepreneurial leadership to mission, especially in the challenging rural context.

The Arthur Rank Centre in 2012, an independent charity, is recognised as an ecumenical resource for rural communities and churches, facilitating the Church's engagement with Britain's wider rural agenda.

This address was given without detailed notes and the following is a summary of the main points and slides rather than a direct transcript.

INTRODUCTION

1. Personal

Let me start by introducing myself as I have a rather strange background. I was brought up in Kuwait and rural England, becoming a Christian at 22. I worked for engineering companies and a firm of agricultural merchants before setting up a series of businesses and social enterprises. I co-founded a congregation in my village in Warwickshire in 1992 and remain on the leadership group. I ran the Transformational Business Network, which uses business to alleviate poverty, helping develop businesses in Africa and Asia and delivering entrepreneurial training. In November 2012, after setting up a call centre in Bethlehem (to create jobs, skills and exports unaffected by the 'Wall'), leading a political campaign and writing a book (*Travels with an Inflatable Elephant*⁷), I joined the Arthur Rank Centre as CEO.

2. Arthur Rank Centre

The Arthur Rank Centre, which had a hand in founding IRCA, is a UK charity that supports rural churches and communities. There is an amazing range of resources available online at www.germinate.net: on evangelism, mission, worship, discipleship, lay training, buildings, and many case studies. To navigate through the key resources, click the link 'Are you involved in a rural church'. A free monthly e-news is available, click the link top right. Our colour magazine with examples and stories is available on-line for a small subscription. We are developing several new resources, including Germinate Enterprise, a rural business start-up workbook and six session course that churches can deliver; and Germinate Communities, which will help local churches leaders consider and develop their missional strategy.

SIGNS OF HOPE?

The theme, "Holding on to Hope", can be taken quite negatively, in the sense of, "just holding on". Yet there are signs of hope in rural areas. Here are three examples.

1. Iris Ministries, Mozambique

I have stayed at the centre established by Heidi and Rolland Baker and read their inspiring book, *There is Always Enough*. Rolland Baker wrote:

Kakala is grinning broadly, so excited. Heidi is prompting her syllable by syllable, and she is answering perfectly into the microphone. This stirs the whole watching village, which knows that Kakala has been a deaf mute all her life. They run to get Kakala's mother, and soon the two of them are beaming as they stand together on our revival

⁷ <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Travels-Inflatable-Elephant-Attempts-Things/dp/1909728047>

platform — the flat bed of our 3-ton truck. The mother confirms to the whole crowd that she has never heard Kakala speak before.

This is such great news that someone runs off to bring another deaf mute to the meeting, a little girl named Magdalena, much younger than Kakala. Heidi and our ministry team lay hands on her, and instantly she can hear and speak too.

Just minutes ago an older lady got her sight back. Many have been crowding forward urgently for prayer, and Jesus is gracious. The entire village turned out tonight, and many walked for miles from the countryside when they heard we were coming. They watched the Jesus Film intently, listened to Heidi preach and testify to the power of God in previous meetings, and responded to the Gospel all together with one voice and heart.

This is Heidi's and my third village outreach in ten days. Each time an entire village, without previous exposure to the Gospel, has come to Jesus openly, willingly and eagerly.

The Moslem province of Cabo Delgado in the far north of Mozambique is receiving the King. In just two years we have seen over 190 churches birthed in villages like this, and every week more are added. The harvest is ripe. This is the time for Mozambique, for all of Africa.

2. Simon Guillebaud, Burundi Annual Mission

Simon is a friend in Burundi. Between 3 and 17 August 2013, he was part of an annual mission, with 42 local teams and 761 evangelists.

- 18,218 gave their lives to Christ
- 171 people healed
- 15 paralytics walked
- 15 blind people recovered their sight
- 8 deaf/mute people heard/spoke again
- 20 demon-possessed people delivered
- 8 divided families reunited
- 55 separated couples reconciled.

3. Hebridean Revival 1949-52.

It's a long time ago but I thought I'd include a Western example.

Peggy and Christine Smith (disabled ladies aged 84 and 82) prayed constantly for revival in their cottage near Barvas village on the Isle of Lewis, the largest of the Hebrides Islands in the bleak northwest of Scotland. God showed Peggy in a dream that revival was coming. Months later, early one winter's morning as the sisters were praying, God gave them an unshakable conviction that revival was near.

Peggy asked her minister James Murray Mackay to call the church leaders to prayer. Three nights a week the leaders prayed together for months. One night, having begun to pray at 10 pm, a young deacon from the Free Church read Psalm 24 and challenged everyone to be clean before God. As they waited on God his awesome presence swept over them in the barn at 4 am.

Mackay invited Duncan Campbell to come and lead meetings. He replied that he could not come until the following year.

God intervened and changed Duncan's plans and commitments. Within 10 days he was on the island of Lewis. At the close of his first meeting in the Presbyterian church in Barvas the travel weary preacher was invited to join an all night prayer meeting! Thirty people gathered for prayer in a nearby cottage.

Duncan Campbell described it:

God was beginning to move, the heavens were opening, we were there on our faces before God.

Three o'clock in the morning came, and GOD SWEPT IN. About a dozen men and women lay prostrate on the floor, speechless. Something had happened; we knew that the forces of darkness were going to be driven back, and men were going to be delivered.

We left the cottage at 3 am to discover men and women seeking God. I walked along a country road, and found three men on their faces, crying to God for mercy. There was a light in every home, no one seemed to think of sleep.

When Duncan and his friends arrived at the church that morning it was already crowded. People had gathered from all over the island, some coming in buses and vans. No one discovered who told them to come. God led them. Large numbers were converted as God's Spirit convicted multitudes of sin, many lying prostrate, many weeping.

* * *

How do these stories leave you feeling? Encouraged because God is at work? Or discouraged because we haven't seen this in our patch?!

Perhaps we have mixed feelings, but there are some common strands that may be relevant to our situation. I have drawn out five.

FIVE HANDLES ON HOPE

1. Double Listening

We need to pray, to listen to God for his guidance. And we need to understand our community situation and needs, to listen to our community, not our perception of our community. Heidi and Rolland Baker had a specific call to Mozambique. And once there, they took responsibility for an orphanage that was 'horribly neglected and dilapidated, with eighty miserable orphans in rags'.

The Arthur Rank Centre resource, *Equipping for Mission* is one approach: four sessions to work through with a congregation, containing creative ways to understand community needs, as well as the resources and call of the church, and an approach to mission planning appropriate to a small (and probably hard pressed) church. See www.germinate.net/go/profiling.

2. Be Holistic

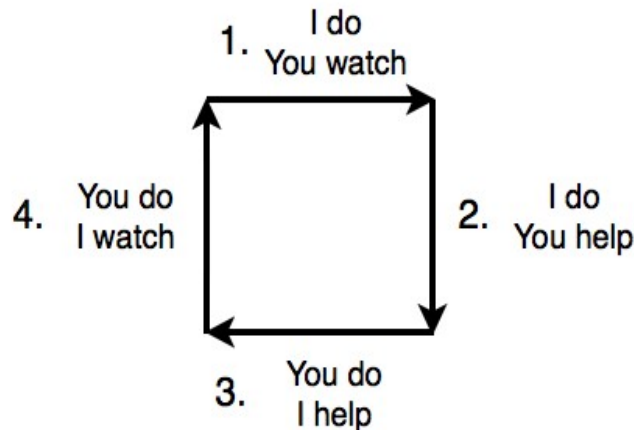
We need to get a balance between three dimensions: Up (relationship with God); In (relationship with our community) and Out (reaching out).

Iris Ministries combine worship, building up local church leaders, and mission. Jesus spent time alone with his father, setting off at before sunrise or spending whole nights in prayer on the mountainside. He also spent much of his time with the disciples, not just teaching them but sharing his life and ministry with them. And he spent time with the crowd, speaking and healing (see for example Luke 6:12-19).

Do we as church leaders spend as much time as Jesus developing and discipling leaders?

3. Share Leadership

What is your ‘default’ leadership style? Jesus was the master of several styles, that he used as different stages to develop the disciples. He varied his style according the stage his disciples were at.



- Initially, he was Directive, saying ‘come and follow me’ to the disciples and performing miracles (I do, you watch).
- Then, Coaching – involving them, for example in feeding the 5,000; and Mark 9:28-9 shows they were doing miracles (and sometimes failing) (I do, you help).
- Then, Consensus – he calls the disciples ‘friends’ (John 15:12-17) – and sends out 72 (Luke 10) (You do, I help).
- Then Delegation: the Great Commission (Mat 28:18-20) (You do, I watch).

Note that training up others to lead requires humility. Our personal desire for glory must be tamed to encourage others. Leadership is multiple (Ephesians 4:11-12) and the primary calling of church leaders is to impact the church, in order that the church impacts the world. Alone we are incomplete:

It’s time to end the myth of the complete leader; the flawless person at the top who’s got it all figured out. In fact the sooner leaders stop trying to be all things to all people, the better off their organizations will be.

Only when leaders come to see themselves as incomplete- as having both strengths and weaknesses- will they be able to make up for their missing skills by relating to others.⁸

Leaders need security in God, trust in His people and a willingness to take risks and accept consequences; in particular:

- Comfortable level of self-awareness; character/integrity before skills and knowledge.
- Engaging with, and helping others engage with, reality—beware unrealistic expectations!!!
- Understand “What I have inherited” – the back story – not to collude with it but realise you never start with a blank sheet.
- Clarifying and articulating a God given, shared vision.
- Developing a realistic and owned strategy.

⁸ *In Praise of the Incomplete Leader*, Ancona et al

- A developing level of emotional intelligence and people skills.
- Being proactive not just reactionary – effecting change not just responding to it.
- Empowering others through release of gifts and potential assuming a “non anxious” presence which instils confidence; Aim to coach disciples.
- Enabling, modelling and resourcing rather than doing.
- Nurturing a culture of innovation, creativity and flair.
- Gently challenging rather than colluding – discern the pace of the church.

4. Take a Risk

All the people behind the examples quoted were taking a massive risk. The early church was a risk-taking church, for example:

- Stephen preaching the Gospel at the Sanhedrin.
- The disciples defying the demand not to speak in name of Jesus.
- Peter, defying convention by going into Cornelius house (Acts 10).
- Paul’s crazy missionary journeys.

BUT church leaders typically have a pastoral heart: they don’t want to upset people. Does this stop us following God’s call to us? Jesus upset the religious people of his day! The best advice I ever received was to try one audacious new thing every year. My recent goals included setting up a call centre in Palestine; and trying to save the British Government £50bn on a high speed rail system that makes no sense and is especially poor stewardship of our limited resources.

It’s easy to pay lip service to taking a risk. But if we are really taking a risk, occasionally we will lose face or lose money. If we are not, we are not taking a risk.

Incidentally, don’t underestimate the impact of passion, especially when undertaking a risky project. Some will catch your passion. But expect opposition. Think of the people who really made a difference to the world – Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mandela – they had very little other than their passion about injustices of their day.

5. Make It Happen

It’s God’s work, but making a difference also involves planning and hard work. When I stayed at the Iris Ministries Maputo base, I was struck by the sheer hard work of sending teams out on a daily basis on bush missions and to prisons, hospitals, the dump, the homeless, etc. Similarly the Burundi effort must require a great deal of effort and co-ordination.

I own a share in a sailboat, which I sail across the Channel to France and the Channel Islands. These trips require passage planning, because it’s essential to leave at the right time to have the tide with us (or at least not against us) at certain ‘tidal gateways’ where the tidal current can reach nearly 10 knots (11 mph). However, it is also necessary to adjust the plan during the journey: the wind and weather may be different from the forecast. Sometimes I change the destination and adjust the course, to avoid strong headwinds and go for a different but equally desirable island or port a few miles from the original destination. As rural church leaders, we also need this combination of a clear plan but a willingness to change course somewhat as circumstances change.

This is the approach Jesus took. At first sight, Jesus appears to be wandering rather aimlessly around Galilee for most of his ministry. But dig deeper, and there’s a lot more to it. He had a clear purpose, which he frequently defined (the “I have come to...” sayings). He had a clear timetable,

well aware of his appointed “time” or “hour”, and towards the end of his ministry he was heading resolutely to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51) to keep this deadline. Yet within this, he built in flexibility; he frequently allowed his plans to be put out in order to respond to opportunities (e.g. Mark 6:30-34).

I have a number of recommendations on “making it happen” based on hard won experience.

- Set goals – but work out the cost: this will need to be ‘paid’ in advance of achieving the goal. For example, if the goal is to learn a language, the cost will be many hours of study before any benefit is felt.
- Spot the opportunity – we need to keep our eyes and ears open to needs and opportunities aligned with our goal(s).
- Who else is catching the vision?
- Work in partnership – consider who else might be trying to achieve something similar and work with them. This might be a different organisation from yours, but this doesn’t matter if you agree on the particular thing you want to achieve.
- Be a catalyst – bring people and organisations together to make things happen. I love being a catalyst: you can get much of the credit without so much hard work and responsibility!
- Where are the income streams? Maybe there are several.
- Is it sustainable – will it keep going after you have moved on to other projects?
- Is there a clear accountability for those involved in the work?
- What are your aims and targets?
- Involve key influences and spend time getting them ‘on side’.
- Consider writing a one page summary of the project, with your aims, reasons, programme, cost, etc., to help other people understand what you are trying to do.
- Bring people on board on a basis of character first, then ‘chemistry’, then competence. The temptation is to focus on skills and experience, but these can be developed; good character and an ability to get on with the existing team is much more difficult to improve.
- Prepare and agree a plan showing who needs to do what and when, and including a ‘cash flow’ so you know how much money you will need.
- Remember, it will always take longer and cost more than you think!

In the process of “making things happen”, we are normally leading volunteers, not paid employees, possibly from several churches or other organisations. Leading when you have no formal authority is different from when you are “the boss”. Julia Middleton summarised her book *Beyond Authority* by saying we should lead with “humility and self-belief”. As a Christian I would say humility and belief in what you and God can do together! Here are her main points:

- Jettison – giving instructions, intellectual rigour, strict hierarchies, and the instinct to tidy.
- Expect the vitriol – there will be strong voices against you.
- From what position will you lead – front, back, middle or side?
- Don’t be in it for yourself – enjoy the achievements of others.
- Be “multilingual” – to communicate your passion to different groups
- Involve outsiders – e.g., on your steering group

- Build coalitions – this does not require consensus.
- Avoid distractions and diversions – delegate someone to sort emotive but less important issues.
- Be patient – and ready for the right time.
- Get the pace right – slow down to keep people with you without losing momentum.
- Creativity and fun – people keep with leaders who are brave, and fun; count the laughs at meetings.



In the course of the presentation, delegates were asked to join others from their country to reflect on the following

What IS? What is God doing in your community and country?

What COULD BE? What's your dream for your community and country?

What WILL BE? What will you do in the next six months to move towards your vision?

FINALLY:

- Get underway: a boat's rudder only works when the boat is moving forward; likewise, make a start and feel God's "steer".
- Step out in faith and enjoy the ride!
- You can do it!



BIBLE STUDY 1: CHRISTINA MORUNGA

Tuesday Bible Study on Luke 8:40-56

MY STORY

The story of the woman with the haemorrhage has a deep personal significance for me, but it also has a wider application to world events, in both instances it brings hope out of despair.

For me at age 12 menses started with heavy bleeding and severe pain every month with increasing length of abdominal pain and migraines to go with it to the point where I would have one day a month feeling well, if I was lucky.

I went to many doctors and gynaecologists, who tried various medications, most of which had side-effects. I had a variety of surgical procedures which caused me a lot of distress and pain, which the doctors told me, was psychological. Every month I felt I wanted to die rather than to continue with the pain.

I had various Christians come and pray for me, expecting me to throw away my medication and be healed. When that didn't happen I was told it was my lack of faith.

I had many very embarrassing experiences with the sudden onset of the debilitating pain as I travelled, like being shunted from a Railway Station as the guard thought I was drunk or stoned.

Relief came when the gynaecologists offered me a hysterectomy. It was hope, but also despair as I had wanted children and had not been able to have any. I spent a night of anguished prayer and tears to come to terms with my loss.



Ben Morunga and some of the young ones

I had the surgery and my healing was a real joy and a new lease on life, the pathology confirmed the problem was my uterus not my mind; I could live and be part of social functions I'd had no energy for previously.

As a nurse and midwife it made me very compassionate to women with menorrhagia, endometriosis, and labour. It taught me to question diagnosis and offer support to my family and clients going for examinations and treatments. If I as a nurse with a reasonable knowledge of how the body functions could be so put down, made to feel neurotic, I want to support the trend to patient advocacy and I work to reduce disempowerment.

Through my late husband, I am blessed in having four married step children, 14 grand-children, 25 great grand-children and even a great-great grandson. The verse in Psalm 113 "He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the Lord." Is so true, my family is a joy to me, and I was able to visit with one branch of them in Perth on the way here, meeting some of the young ones I'd only seen in photos.

THE WOMAN'S STORY

The woman with the bleeding had her hopes raised and dashed by the many doctors she had visited; her last hope was in Jesus. It would have taken so much courage to go out amongst the crowd which was pressing in around Jesus, knowing that all whom she touched would become ritually unclean, knowing that as a woman she would have difficulty getting near Jesus, and also aware of the consequences and the fear of being exposed. Did she know that she was interrupting Jesus on his way to visit the official of the synagogue, Jairus, to bring healing to his only daughter who was sick and dying? Jairus had humbled himself by falling at Jesus' feet and pleading for his daughter, (as a girl child, she also was a person of no standing in their culture).

The woman had had to dignify herself to achieve her goal of touching Jesus' cloak. Her bleeding stopped, but Jesus wants her identified. She comes forward and tells of her condition and the healing, and Jesus gives her much more than she ever hoped for. He addresses her as Daughter, assuring her of her place in the family of God and in society, she is released from the law of ritual impurity found in Leviticus 15.

It is as the woman receives life in all its fullness, word comes of the death of Jairus' daughter. Jesus said "Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved". Did Jairus' receive hope in the moment of despair at the news of his daughter's death?

Some of us have to humble ourselves to find faith in Christ, like Jairus, educated and powerful and perhaps proud; others of us have to dignify ourselves to find faith in Christ, like the Woman. Either way it takes faith and hope, but all of us share in the common and wonderful experience of healing in Christ.



BE AS THE GARMENT

In discussing this with my 91 year old friend, Sister Louise, she suggested that we can be as the garment that others reach out to touch for healing. She referred to young people who have got involved in trouble or neglect of their Christian commitment being restored by being in contact with caring families. We need to be available to be touched for healing to flow through us.

At IRCA Brandon, I had the opportunity to visit a First Nations People's Reservation with Bernice Salteaux. Prior to that we were taken to the property near Brandon, a Church Boarding School, which had taken First Nations children in, often by force, given them a basic European education, but separated them from their own culture and had them work the surrounding farm and doing the house chores. Some of the children died, others seldom saw their families, some were able to become pupil teachers and become teachers. As I prepare this, news has come to light of a similar situation in Ireland with the children of unmarried mothers kept in the care of a religious order, lost to their families. Many were found in a mass grave. These and other instances of the world of western values being placed on indigenous peoples correlates with the story of the woman who was haemorrhaging in that the families were bereft of their children, their future, and their culture suffered a great decline. As an act of restitution the Brandon property has been gifted to the people and cleansing rituals were held when children were heard crying, even though there were no children present. It was the cry of the children who lost their lives. Those lives have been acknowledged and they have been given culturally appropriate burial rites so they can be at peace. The Canadian First Nations People are rediscovering their culture from the elders who went west away from European settlement and maintained their traditions.

When I thought of migration before IRCA 2010 in Altenkirchen, in Germany, I thought of planned migration for improved lifestyle. New Zealand has known migration: the Maori came in canoes and settled. Europeans came, first for the timber and the whales, then as Missionaries and settlers of the land; conflict occurred. As in many countries there has been urban migration in New Zealand, where people have hoped to gain employment and improve their lives by moving into the towns and cities. For many this is a myth as their lifestyle and living conditions become much worse. We have migration of many Pacific peoples: many living in our cities, many working in poorly paid jobs and living in overcrowded conditions, with the expectation of financially supporting their families back in the Islands.

At Altenkirchen I realised that migration also included those who have been forcefully taken from their homes and in some cases their homelands and sold into slavery or prostitution. Recently we heard of Nigerian girls taken from their Boarding School, and are aware of many others from many countries who have been kidnapped. The girls frightened and abused their families bereft, bleeding and barren with their losses. But there is hope, I read from PIPES: Partners in Prayer & Evangelism where “Last year they partnered with local churches and police to save 5,000 girls who were being transported by sex slave traders across the border of Nepal and India. These girls were rescued before they entered prostitution and most were able to be returned safely to their families and villages!”

I think of the mining work migration, which separates families and causes much grief, although in some instances financial benefit. Copeland told me of the huge issue of HIV AIDS which has been a part of the migrations, breaking families and impacting on succession rights for the children.

SOME TRIBUTES

My parish chairperson shared with me a DVD about his very humble relation: titled “A Helping Hand: the Story of Bishop John Osmers. A tribute to Bishop John Osmers for his contribution to the liberation of South Africa.” Some of you may know of him: a New Zealander who went to South Africa as a young man and was shocked at the oppression of Black Africans. That began for him a lifetime of working in Southern Africa with the oppressed and the refugees.

It is not every person who reflects on a near martyrdom experience and remarks that he felt privileged to be witnessing to Christ enough to warrant such an attack. Such was the reaction of John Osmers after surviving a near-death experience at the hands of an apartheid security force’s bomb in 1979.⁹

He lost his right hand and nearly his life.

Now, although officially retired, he continues his ministry of hospitality, hope for the poor and ostracised, and a voice for the voiceless. Many of the African National Congress leaders, and the many ANC workers, consider Bishop John as their “father” for his hospitality, his total support, and his wise spiritual and practical guidance.

I also want to pay tribute to Nelson Mandela for his total commitment to freedom from apartheid in South Africa at huge personal cost. His biography is an inspiration: his sustained hope and belief in a united South Africa through primarily peaceful acts of civil disobedience rather than engaging in actions that would take lives put his life in grave danger. He was well educated, being prepared to be councillor to his tribal chief. He became a lawyer, using his talents to support those unjustly condemned by the apartheid regime, and then in negotiations to bring about change. His ability to forgive the injustice done to him, his family, his co-workers in the ANC, and the people of South

⁹*The Common Good*, No 31, Advent 2004 www.catholicworker.org.nz

Africa is a challenge to us all. Three decades in prison would cause most to despair, but Nelson Mandela held onto hope, worked hard behind the scenes of politics, and he saw the change that he lived for begin.

Bishop Desmond Tutu once said

I don't like to talk about my own personal experience of forgiveness, although some of the things people have tried to do to my family are close to what I'd consider unforgivable. I don't talk about these things because I have witnessed so many incredible people who, despite experiencing atrocity and tragedy, have come to a point in their lives where they are able to forgive.

Take the Craddock Four, for example. The police ambushed their car, killed them in the most gruesome manner; then set their car alight. When, at a Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing, the teenage daughter of one of the victims was asked: would you be able to forgive the people who did this to you and your family? She answered, "We would like to forgive, but we would just like to know who to forgive."

How fantastic to see this young girl, still human, despite all efforts to dehumanise her. These kind of things Bishop Tutu speaks in relation to his work as chairman of the South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.¹⁰

HOLDING ON TO HOPE

With people like her holding on to hope, we can be inspired to hold on to hope too. Her story can help us to get our minor grievances into perspective.

Migration also includes those who have fled their homelands because of civil war or terrorist action and become displaced people. I give the example of Syria where people are wondering if they are ever going to be able to return, or at what cost. People are being crucified. Many atrocities are being inflicted on the people. Refugee status is not easily attained and even if they achieve it and are settled in another country, their personal wounds to soul are great with their lost contact with family, friends and their familiar life.

Natural disasters, drought, earthquake, fire, tsunami, volcanic eruptions, floods and cyclones can all cause despair, but they can also provide for regeneration. Man-made disasters of water shortage, global warming and contamination of land and water, from multinational greed or neglect, can affect us all.

Think of the issues affecting your part of the world or issues somewhere else that are of concern to you, and keep them in our prayers.

In God's timing I received healing, I have also developed a deep compassion for people who are suffering pain and rejection. Those times when I felt I wanted to curl up and die, I cried out to God, I held firm to hope for healing. I held firm to the promises of God's redemption, and his welcome as a daughter.

Peter wrote the words of Jesus to struggling Christians in his time, "He has given us new life and a hope" (1 Peter 1:3). His words must have resounded with the members of the ANC when the official end of apartheid came, and it will continue to bring hope to all people who struggle for justice and equality in the countries torn by civil war. It's a letter to people who are experiencing tough times and his message to us is that we have hope.

With the new life we are given through Christ comes hope. We misunderstand Christian hope if we

¹⁰ See [The Forgiveness Project website](#).

view it as some sort of wishful thinking. For us hope is a belief in the presence of God that is with us now, and a certainty about a promised future when there will be a greater revelation of his presence. The Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. God is bringing all creation to its ultimate fulfilment. The hope that this will culminate in Christ's reign of justice and peace enlivens us and gives us motivation to live for him here and now. By his presence with us we can face whatever may come.

There is no promise that we will be free from troubles. The Christian faith is not a route to escape suffering. Instead we learn from the scriptures that with our Lord we can encounter our troubles and trials and walk boldly, even through the valley of the shadow of death.

At those times and places in the church's story when Christians have been misunderstood, abused, mistreated and persecuted there has been an up-welling of desire and longing for the Last Day when Christ will appear. Our future in the presence of God is described by Peter as an inheritance that will never decay, be ruined or disappear. Through the centuries this has been called the "blessed hope" of believers.

THE GLORIOUS HOPE

The woman Jesus healed, Jairus' daughter raised to life, my healing and gift of family, the rescue of some of the girls being sold into prostitution, and many other stories of healing and miraculous redemption gives us hope to go on and to strive to bring justice and healing to troubled, often bleeding and barren situations in our world.

In Revelation 21.4 we read, "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." And in Matthew 28:20b Jesus' promise "...I am with you always, to the end of the age."

This is the glorious hope we are to hold onto!

What is causing concern in your community, or in your country?

What signs of hope do you see?

What possible solutions can you work out together?

Rev Christina Morunga, Kohukohu, New Zealand



Christina befriends a family: Lloyd, Everis, and Kelvin, our Pre-Conference driver and his children



Laszlo receiving gifts with our thanks

BIBLE STUDY 2: LASZLO MARK

Wednesday Bible Study on 1 Peter 1:13-16

Dear brothers and sisters, in the first letter of Peter, we can find five times the word hope, but also five times we can read about the coming back of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that we cannot live without hope.

In my country, I often see people on the road are bitter, wondering what could be the reason? Hopelessness.

Also, if we are going to visit somebody in the hospital, we can observe how recovery comes much more quickly for those who have hope, against of those who are without hope regarding their health. Even for doctors it is much harder to help those for whom it is hopeless. If there is no hope, there is no reason to live. And there are many forms to the way a person can express this.

That's why we need to see what is the teaching of the Bible about hope.

Why, how, and whom to put your hopes up if you do not know? What is hope? What is the basis for a robust, reliable basis according to the Bible? And what follows from the fact that if someone has hope?

In my Bible Study I would like to mention three types of hope, or of so-called hope. About the third type of hope I would like to speak much more detail.

I would like to illustrate each type of hope with a literary work.

A. THE FIRST TYPE OF HOPE

The first type of hope – **a false, vain hope** – is expressed in a poem by Hungarian poet, Csokonai Vitéz Mihály. The name of the poem is “In the hope”. I quote him:

To mortal eyes, you, Hope, do seem a form divinely sweet; but eyes of gods can pierce the dream and see your blind deceit. Unhappy men in times of ill create you for their easing; and as their Guardian Angel still they worship without ceasing.

This kind of hope, as we can see, is vain type. We cannot trust in it. It deceives the man. It is blind, it cannot see anything. It is unbelievable, that we can call something hope, which we cannot see how it will be in the future?! It has no perspective. It doesn't know what is coming. It is truly vain, blind hope because it was created by the unhappy man for himself. It has no basis, wants to reach something, but is living in an illusion that it might happen. In false, blind hope, we should not believe.

B. THE SECOND TYPE OF HOPE

Another form of hope – and there is such a definition of hope – is that **something good waiting for people that might occur in the future.**

I do not know whether anybody realises that this kind of hope is so uncertain. Something good might happen... We'll see how the Biblical hope is different. Because there is no “something good” to wait for, that might happen. There we know what we expect to be occurring. Because God is truthful.

In best case they could be called optimists. However, this person is still there, trying to be

optimistic. These are called optimists. Something good always waiting for what might happen. They depend on people, actually trust people, waiting on them, on others so that the hopes will become a reality. Waiting on the interplay of favorable circumstances, much of it luck.

The literary work that has brilliantly shown this kind of hope is the drama by Irish avant garde novelist Samuel Beckett called *Waiting for Godot*. Actually, nothing happens in this drama, but in the end, the last scene is a small plot. Two people talking to each other who are waiting for Godot. When will it come out? Maybe today. Or tomorrow. Or the day after tomorrow. What day is it today? Thursday. But it may be Saturday or Monday.

What day is he promised to come? Where is Godot? We do not know. But who is Godot? We do not know. Are we sure that he would come? Could be.

This is the spirit of the drama. Spending their lives waiting for Godot, but in overall uncertainty. Typical for the drama is the message of the last few sentences, and just the last words that these two people talking to each other. One asks the other: Should we go? Let's go. And there are brackets in the director's instructions: do not move, and they are not moving, because they are waiting still for Godot. This is the vision of the future, so uncertain, and for those who think that this is the hope that looks forward to the future, that something good might happen.

C. THE THIRD TYPE OF HOPE

The third piece of literary work it is the Bible. The Bible says that **hope means to know God and the believer in it is waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises**. And there are very specific and precise promises of God here, described in the Bible. And, there are more than three hundred and sixty five promises. In C. H. Spurgeon's book on God's promises¹¹ one promise is chosen for every day of the year and a brief explanation. In addition to the Bible that I read this year, this book is a spiritual medicine every day. "Vitamin injection for man's soul": a divine promise clearly, concisely expressed and applied in person. But there is more in the Bible! Many of God's promises.

It is very amazing when Apostle Paul in his letters puts in front of the name God: "God is truthful." He is truthful: God does not lie. That is exactly why every promise fulfilled or will be fulfilled. Our hope is based on these divine promises. Of course, hope arises from reading and thinking about the Bible, through which one knows someone who make promises. Who is confident, who knows that God is truthful, faithful, merciful love? One who does not ever let anyone down, never says untruths, does not forget what you promised, because he is not a human, but is God. That is why it is so important, through our everyday misery, to know better and better our God.

I was reminded of the example of Abraham, and the way the Apostle Paul has described this in Romans Part 4 why Abraham could have hoped for quite hopeless situations?

Against hope Abraham believed in hope with the result that he became the father of many nations according to the pronouncement, "so will your descendants be." Without being weak in faith, he considered his own body as dead (because he was about one hundred years old) and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver in unbelief about the promise of God, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God. He was fully convinced that what God promised he was also able to do.

Romans 4:18-21 (<http://biblehub.com/net/romans/4.htm>)

From this kind of faith we can have hope, which stays with us in spite of hopelessness. But for this

¹¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *Faith's Checkbook Daily Devotional*, <http://www.spurgeon.org/daily.htm>. See also *God Promises You*, Whitaker House, New Kensington 1995

there was divine revelation, and the certainty that God actually promised him that. So he will be sure it will come to pass. Oh, but when? Ninety-year-old Sarah, and he's more than a century old. When will a child be born? We do not know when. And how? We do not know how. There are many things we do not know, but I know what God has promised. And I know that what He has promised will come true. The details I will leave to Him. And when it comes to doubting and attacks from left and right, then climb again and again into the divine promise to repentance, and be quite certain that it will become a reality.

Moreover, the Bible is full of these kinds of statements. A number of people of God tell you that they trust in God, or in God's grace, or that they have hope in God's word. These three expressions are the most common.



The 118th Psalm says: “It is better to take shelter in the LORD than to trust in princes” because trusting in people, hope may be blind, but those who hope in the Lord, they are sure they will not be disappointed.

Also in the 119th Psalm, it is repeated six or eight times: “My hope it is in your Word”. So this is the basis of hope. There is no basis for hope in waiting that “something good” happen in the future. The promises of God give us solid fundamentals and, if you persist, you will not be disappointed.

To mention another good example where the natural history of hope can be detected: when the apostle Paul brought as a prisoner by boat to Rome. There is a storm, they suffer shipwreck, and after bitter experiences they arrive in Rome. And what did Paul say in the boat when, because the storm, they had to throw everything out? All hope is taken away from our survival chance.¹² That is why, since everyone has accepted the fact that they would not remain alive, they had not eaten for many days. Then Paul makes a statement. God says: No one is lost, only the ship. For you all the two hundred and seventy six people will survive; therefore eat. You will be thrown out on an island and then went on from there.

Paul immediately passes this message to the people (because the word should not be kept secret, the word of God should be preached), saying to them: people, if there are more snacks that you haven't broken into, or dried bread, then eat, because soon all of us will have to swim, because the Lord told me. It is showing them the foundation: God's promise was spoken. Be therefore in good hope, because there will be hope, as the LORD had said to me.¹³

Here we see hope in a hopeless state. Then we read that Paul was giving a good example in front of them to eat, to pray, and even before that as well, some to say a prayer for the table. Then the rest can eat, and it turns out that they really need to get some strength because they have to swim. Those who could not swim will hang on to boards to get to safety on the island of Malta.

So finally this therefore the basis of hope, and the foundation of the word of God, God's Word, God's promises. It is safe to trust on that even if some of the promises the fulfillment will be delayed. Therefore, we have to take these promises seriously.

So what follows from the fact that if someone has this solid hope?

We can read about it also five times in the first letter of Peter. Such as:

The first task: “just as holy is the one who called you, you also be holy in your full life.”

The second task: “Proclaim the mighty things, who had called you from the darkness into His

¹² Acts 27:20

¹³ Acts 27:21-38

marvelous light”.

The third task: “Deny yourselves of bodily lusts, which has war against the soul”.

The fourth task: “For what credit is it if you sin and are mistreated and endure it? But if you do good and suffer and so endure, this finds favor with God” (2:20).

And finally the fifth task: “Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God” (4:10).

So I would like to finish my bible study with the sentence, that it is difficult to live without hope, or sometimes even impossible. But hope is not true hope, when people deceive themselves for a certain illusions.

It is not even a real hope when there is a sense of optimism in it, either because they are such a person, or they like to be suggestive with themselves. God wants to give us a life with real hope. To do so, however, we need to know Him, and His promises, because the real hope is in expecting the fulfillment of God's promises. So do not be ashamed. This applies to the hope of that kind which does not disappoint us. I wish for everyone here to be blessed with this kind of hope.

PRAYER

In Hungarian and English...

Imádkozzunk! Dicsőséges Urunk, Jézus Krisztus, áldunk és magasztalunk téged azért, mert a Paradicsom kapuját ellőttünk is kinyitottad. Tudjuk, hogy ez a te bűn nélküli, tiszta életedbe került. Köszönjük, hogy semmi nem volt drága azért, hogy minket kiemelj a reménytelenségből, és újra megajándékozz az elvehetetlen örök élettel. Dicsérjük és magasztaljuk ezért nevedet. Köszönjük, hogy utat és kaput nyitottál számunkra a mennyei Atyához, vissza a mennybe. Köszönjük, hogy a benned hívők itt egészen bizonyosak lehetnek abban, hogy a mienk ez az elvehetetlen örök élet.

Kérünk, hogy ennek az örömhírét hirdeted most nekünk újra. Hadd tudjunk sokféle nyomorúságunk között is dicsőült örömmel örvendezni ennek, egy csüggedésekkel teli, reménytelen világban reménységgel élni, és másokba is reményt önteni. Kérünk, hogy erre taníts és tégy képesekké most a te igéd és Szentlelked által.

Ámen

Our glorious Lord Jesus Christ we are blessing you and praising your name because You have opened gates of Paradise for us. We know, that the cost was your sinless, pure life. Thank you for that nothing was so expensive to you to lift us from hopelessness, and again you to give us the eternal life. We praise and glorify your name so. Thank you that you have opened the door for us to the heavenly Father, to heaven. Thank you for that we can be faithful and absolutely certain that it is ours the eternal life.

We request that this good news publish to us again. We ask you to teach and do this now capable of operating by your word and the Holy Spirit.

Amen

László Gyula Márk, Reformed Congregation Sacele-Négyfalu, Romania

BIBLE STUDY 3: JEFFREY MAGANGA

THURSDAY BIBLE STUDY ON PSALM 119:49-56

A story is told of a prisoner who was preached by a fellow convict and got converted.

I have been in prison for 23 years. The first ten were full of despair and hopelessness. I saw no sense in living and thought only of suicide in my utter misery.

When the police arrested me in 1977, I was 24 years old. I was sentenced to life imprisonment. In the New York jail an attempt was made to cut my throat with a razor-blade. I escaped death by a hair's breadth. And I was a candidate for hell, but God had other plans for me. Jesus Christ wanted to reach me by means of his kindness, love, and affection. That was something I had never known until then. On a winter evening, as we walked around the prison yard, another prisoner came up to me and told me that Jesus loved me..." (*The Good Seed*, 2014).

The story might be applicable to each one of us in different ways depending on the different situations each one of us has passed through (is passing through), but here is the good news: Jesus loves us.

Let us hold on to the hope we have in him.

When you read Jeremiah 19, you discover that Jeremiah is prophesying. Then in chapter 20 somebody heard that and put Jeremiah in the stocks, but Jeremiah did not lose the hope. There he was, the situation was tough, not imagining, but he prayed to hold on to the hope.

There are lots of characters in the New Testament. You can talk of Paul, going through lots of things, but he clings on to hope. And this is what can encourage one another in this conference as we go and continue ministry in different fields that the Lord has called us to help him.

Read through the text of Psalm 119:49-56, maybe using two or three versions. Then guided by the nine questions that are here let's discuss the text and discover what we can learn from there.

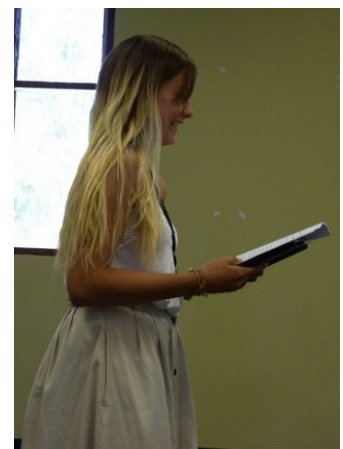
Groups were formed with each one looking at a particular question.

1. What are some of the promises found in God's Word that give you hope, bring you comfort in difficult times and/or get you excited about living?

God's Word has said God will always be with us: he's our God and we are his people. We talked about different things we find in different scriptures. Most of all it was: "Do not fear. God will always be with us."

2. What does this passage teach us (me) about God?

To be strong regardless of the problems. God speaks through a cluster of experiences and songs and dreams. We are learning that we need to depend on the will of God as the Psalmist did. Also we should remind God of his promises.



Rochelle presenting for group 1

3. What is the Psalmist asking the Lord to remember and why do you think he is asking him to remember it? (verse 49)

In times of brokenness we ask God: remember your word to your servant in which you have given us hope. As in the story at the start, it is in the brokenness of situations that this happens. This group heard some of their own stories of those kinds of times, praying “Lord, remember what you've promised me.” Here I am now, I'm studying, I've got fees due and no-one is answering my emails asking for money to pay them. Or I'm in this new place, totally out of my comfort zone and here I am in the middle of the night with my young family. “Remember Lord, you put me here!” And there was that wonderful robust relationship where it's like, God if I don't remind you, you might forget.

4. How does the Word revive us (people)? (verse 50)

We looked at the challenges we face in our families, our country, our churches. First, the word of God does encourage us to press on towards serving the Lord. We can't go back, we don't stop serving him, but the word of God gives us courage to press on because we know the hope we have in him is greater than whatever challenges we are facing in the world. Secondly, the word of God heals broken souls: we are healed by the word. And thirdly the word of God restores us back to God. We are restored and able to move forward.

5. From verse 53: why is this kind of anger proper and right, when some other types of anger are not? Do we have examples of Jesus feeling this kind of anger and responding to it?

David was not just angry, but angry against the wicked ones, the people were not abiding by the will of God. This kind of anger is very important, it is good anger. This kind of anger draws people from darkness to light. It is love. It is passionate. e.g. Romans 8:5; John 8:1-11 when the woman was caught in adultery, the people were angry but Jesus showed compassion; Matthew 21:12-17 when people were doing business in church and Jesus chased them out; Matthew 23:13-16 Jesus used strong anger against the Pharisees.

6. What does it mean that his “statutes are my song”? (verse 54)

David is on a journey: a pilgrim, but meeting afflictions on the way. He had the word of God as his weapon to console him in times of distress. So when we look at the word of God we can take the example of David who night and day would make a song, because in the song is power. It carries power that can activate people's lives so let's take the word of God as our song, our weapon, our consolation in afflictions as we move from Egypt to Canaan. We should also emulate the spirit of David meditating alone on the word, did so by singing. There is power in singing. The song of one who is sad, and the song of one who is happy. Both songs mean something in a particular situation.

7. Why is night mentioned specifically here? (verse 55)

We kept coming back to the same thing: night is a time of reflection on our day, it is a time when our doubts hit us, a time of self-assessment. We just think things through, we sometimes feel shaky, we feel alone. There's no-one talking around us, so even when we are sharing a room with somebody else there's quietness there. Sometimes darkness in the spiritual sense. You are away from the support of the group around you, you're on your own resources. “Through the valley of the shadow of death” we hold on to what we have got, we hold on to the hope when we're going through the tricky bits.

8. Of what importance is the personalization of God's Word? What action follows the personalizing of God's Word? (verse 56)

In the experience of the Psalmist, which was maybe David, he had the word of God which he held on to and it gave him courage, hope, and comfort in times of trouble and afflictions. So the word of God when he is personalising it, making it more personal, gave him hope, strength, courage. The actions that follow are what we heard from previous speakers: at night time he found a song, because of the word of God, so he was able to sing, to pray, to praise God, to worship because the word of God was in him. And that word of God gave him lots of aspirations.

9. List at least any six things that you think the passage is saying about God.

God gives us hope.
God preserves life.
God gives us comfort.
God gives us the law to live in an orderly way.
God gives his way.
God gives us promises which encourage us.



Jeffrey invited us to come back to these questions, remembering what has been shared and learning more, as we continue serving the Lord.

As we serve the Lord there are indeed times of brokenness, but there are three things we need to remember:

1. We need to know our Lord, to understand who our God is. Who is this God we are serving? What is it that God is able to do? What assurance do we have in serving God?
2. We need to remember God's promises in times of brokenness, remembering in general the promises that are there in the Bible. When we remember some of these things, no matter what situation we might come into when we serve the Lord, they are going to help us to hold on to hope.
3. Personalisation of God's word can also help us in our brokenness.

In relation to anger we need to encourage one another. Sometimes it is easy to cope with situations, but sometimes it is touch and go. And then you sit down and look at it, and anger comes in. It develops in that negative form that leads one to hatred. It brings a lack of interest to continue

serving, to remain in ministry, such that the zeal to serve the Lord is removed. All that love for the road somehow comes to earth hard and I think, I need a sabbatical leave. Situations affecting you financially, family, comments from the people you are serving, the pressure from the government, some of us are serving the Lord while we are working, some of us serving the Lord full-time. You know these different things and somewhere somehow anger comes in and the negative battle becomes disastrous. But when you focus on the positive part of it, you hold on to the serving. And in the end I'll say as Paul did, "I am fighting the good fight and I am waiting to receive the cup." We have got a task that we really need to do that encompasses a lot of things that we need the most to keep in our sight.

A word of encouragement to conclude:

REFLECTION

People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centred. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you. Be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight. Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, others may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough. Give the world the best you've got anyway.

You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God. It never was between you and them anyway.

Jeffery Maganga, Emmanuel Teacher Training College, Lilongwe, Malawi



A song to support the gifts and the words of thanks from Prasad to Jeffery

PRAYER AND WORSHIP



Prayer and worship, and lots of music, were woven through the days of the conference, with different IRCA regions responsible for worship to begin and end each day. The Malawi beat inspired us all from the first night, with many learning the moves that go with the meaning of the words. We know for sure that there is no-one like Jesus.

Korean dance, contemporary songs, and old Sunday School favourites also joined body and spirit in song.



IRCA Europe team after leading morning worship



Report of the Fifth Conference of the International Rural Churches Association 2014

Our closing worship brought this all together and set us up for the journey each back to their own rural places.



HEARING ONE ANOTHER'S STORIES



Central to any IRCA conference is the opportunity to hear the stories of rural churches and communities around the world. This took place constantly as people spent time together, over meals and during breaks. There were also scheduled times during the conference when presentations were made from each of the regions: Europe, Asia, America, Oceania, and Africa.

These were powerful times of relationship building with everyone sharing things that moved those listening to compassion. No-one is in a totally easy place and each could hear common themes, even if their own context was different in terms of material goods or receptivity to Christian faith.

WHO COMES TO CHURCH?

One particular topic – people coming or not coming to church – captured our shared attention and keynote speaker Jerry offered to help us explore the issues involved. These are the fruits.

First a brainstorm:

PEOPLE COME TO CHURCH BECAUSE...

To meet people
Befriended by church member
Invited
People your age
Role to play
To give thanks to God
Wedding/Baptism/Funeral
Good church reputation
Crisis
Shopping for a church
Come to a programme
Benefit from charity

PEOPLE RETURN BECAUSE...

The welcome
Spirit touches
Great sermon

Music
Follow up visit
Freedom of choice
Non-judgmental
Being loved
Answer to prayer

IMPLICATIONS

Every member ministry
Warm welcome: greeting, explanation, temperature, etc
Opportunity for prayer
Lifelong Learning skills
Group Opportunities
Interruptible
Hospitality
Worship opportunities
Movement of the Spirit
Healing/Prophecy

BARRIERS TO ATTENDING CHURCH

Then we asked ourselves the question: what gets in the way?

A list was made and the top issues of concern were worked on together in small groups. Here are the issues and the ideas suggested for some of them:

- **Church is a clique – inward looking**

Open your groups, for example. single mothers; for the Poor – home meetings – go to their place; food – ask people to bring something they have; get them involved in the work of the Church; people need to feel they are loved!

- **Poor church leaders**

Focus on the positive – serve the Lord; deal with it sooner than later; leadership must be visionary; leadership must be transparent.

- **Not seen as relevant**

Focus on examples of our Master Jesus Christ in choosing people and meeting them where they are; do not judge – share love.

- **Lack of resources – financial/transport/toilets/equipment**

Be involved in fund-raising activities; giving of offering and tithes .

- **Leisure**

Sports on television at church – pray and celebrate; markets on Sunday – go to the market; change time of service,

- **Affluence: people depend on money not God**

Invite them to contribute,

- **Cultural disconnect**

Seen as old fashioned; disconnect with sub cultures – youth, men, etc,

- **Buildings**

Change services to reflect youth and men; cell groups and house churches; ask people what they want,

Other issues in many ways related to those discussed included:

- Not feeling loved, being judged – again and again our response to issues was: love, don't judge,
- Other activity on Sunday, having to work, and poverty – responses under other headings that relate to being flexible and willing to include people in different ways apply also to these issues.
- People going through marriage difficulties call for sensitivity in our preaching in relation to a number of biblical text.
- The issue of the world's dominant consumer culture, with the frequent claim made by people in our different parts of the world that there's 'nothing in it for me' to go to church: this relates to the issue of affluence. It is perhaps also much bigger than that as the core point of contention between the kingdom ways and world ways.

BURNING: AN ISSUE RAISED ON THE CONFERENCE FLOOR

One participant, Chung Ho Jin from Korea, raised a concern with the conference which was heard with interest and passion. Chung has been involved in mission with the land for many years in a number of countries. In fact, IRCA first met him at the 2002 Conference in South India in particular with the field trip to Kasam Farm Institute.

Naming this issue triggered a lively discussion. For farmers in some places, it was important to put the case for the need to burn for crop and pasture development. For Malawi the matter goes right to the heart of the changing environment and current problems.

Harrison Kamanga introduces the situation and the challenges. See Appendix 2 for a more detailed presentation from Radwel Mwase.

LOOKING BACK TO UNDERSTAND OUR ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

Growing up and living in several rural communities in the north, central and southern Malawi, it was unthinkable then that natural indigenous trees and shrubs that formed thick tropical forest would eventually disappear leaving mountains, hills and plains naked and almost bare. The results of poor resource management have been terrible. People have suffered erratic rains that have caused erosions, dry spells, triggered poor soils, and siltation, floods and drying of rivers. One of my fond hobbies then was hunting birds that lived in indigenous trees that formed tropical and rain forests. Those bird species have either immigrated or died because the whole ecosystem has been disturbed.

What generated the problems?

It should be said that the problem is more complex than what it appears to be. However, humans are the main perpetrator and principal culprit in destroying our own environment, the forest and whole ecosystem and as a result causing our own and the misery of many others, even gloom for generations to come.

Part of the causes is poverty which has justified many to engage and encouraged unaccountable cutting down trees for firewood and charcoal burning. Infrastructure and modern housing and urbanization has really had a great impact on the forest.

Brick making for construction continues to encourage cutting down of trees. The majority of the population cannot access the electric power even in urban areas therefore firewood and charcoal is used as an alternative.

To change a wrong world view, it should be said will take really long time. It will also require financial resources. And a multi-sector approach engaging and involving many stake holders to change our world-view regarding the care of natural resources and the modern challenges. This will include formal and informal education. In the process there is need to explore alternative sources of income and power that can be sustainable. This will demand political will that can live the talk.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that tree planting is disadvantaged because of wild fires, or bush fires started for various reasons including hunting mice, or allowing new cultivations of gardens as goats also eat young planted trees.



Harrison Kamanga

REFLECTION ON THE CONFERENCE

Presented to the conference by keynote speaker Jerry Marshall

We have covered many subject areas but I'd like to draw out four themes that have emerged. Of course, this is through the filter of my understanding; other issues may have spoken to you.

1. DARKNESS

Rural Challenges: the voiceless need a voice

Many challenges have been mentioned.

- World issues such as the violence to women, environmental issues and inequality, raised by Fulata.
- Regional issues such as the caste system, dalits, land, seed marketing in India, and floods in many places.
- Personal challenges such as described by Christina.
- Challenges of church leadership, for example the pastor overseeing 49 'prayer houses'.

Molly said 'The world is getting darker.'



2. HOPE

The world hopes for the best; hope in God is solid.

There is darkness, yet there is hope, as Lazslo and many others reminded us. Our hope is solid: "God has a track record", as Roger put it.

3. RISK

Step out of the boat! Try one audacious new thing each year.

If we have a solid hope we can afford to take risks. "Get out of your comfort zone", said Molly. And I talked about the early church being a risk taking church. What audacious new thing will you do this year? Remember: truly taking risk means being ready to lose face and/or lose money.

4. LEADERSHIP

Taking a risk requires good leadership.

In rural areas we need to share leadership because distances are too great for one person, and because this was the Jesus model.

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Jesus varied his style according to the stage his disciples were at.

- Initially, his leadership style was Directive: he said ‘come and follow me’ to the disciples and performed miracles – I do, you watch.
- Then, Coaching: involving the disciples e.g. feeding the 5,000; Mark 9:28-9 shows they were doing miracles (and sometimes failing) – I do, you help.
- Then, Consensus: Jesus called the disciples ‘friends’ and sent out the 72; Luke 10 – You do, I help.
- Then, Delegation: the Great Commission – You do, I watch.

These are important points for those involved in rural church leadership. Nevertheless, God may well have spoken to you through other points and presentations.



YOUTH FORUM



Back row: Mabuchi Mwafulirwa, Prince Inglis, Chad Ruesink, Vitumbiko Lungu, Joshua Walinase (obscured), Kennedy Mkandawire
Front row: Noel Kumwenda, Landry Ruesink, Rochelle Craig, Asante Nkhata, Jeremiah Nkhata, Happy Mzoni, Everett Bennetto

For the first time in the history of IRCA, the youth have participated and the Holy Spirit has moved in a special way.

We learned what we did not know about the youth in different countries.

We discussed topics like HIV/AIDS, drug and substance abuse, leadership, financial independence and finding a good life companion.

We played games and had a lot of fun for all the days we had.

HIV AIDS

Leader: Happy Mazoni

The youth shared a lot on the HIV/AIDS, a condition which up to now has no cure. We tried to assess how youth from across the world are holding on to hope amidst such a scourge. We discovered that HIV/AIDS has impacted the youth in the following ways:

- **Education** Just as Vitumbiko, a participant, said he had to abandon his studies at high school to take care of his uncle who was suffering from AIDS. This affected him in his academic pursuit.
- **Financially** If the family loses a breadwinner, then the financial source of the family is blocked.
- **Psychologically** Many youth who have been diagnosed with HIV feel stressed and are very anxious that AIDS will kill them. They look at the condition as the death sentence.
- **Discrimination** Youth who have been found with HIV are not accepted by their buddies. Their friends look at them as sinful and they are isolated.
- **Orphans** According to 2011 statistics which were shared during the discussion, Malawi had 610,000 orphans who lost their parents to HIV/AIDS. These fellow youth become crippled economically and lack parental care and guidance.

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

Leader: Noel Kumwenda

Participants also met in the evening to discuss how they as youth can stand on their own feet financially. We discussed ways of achieving financial independence:

Getting a job; being creative on good ways of finding money; realizing one's talents and opportunities; being confident and hardworking; good debt management and good spending habits.

What a rural youth group can do to achieve financial independence. We got the following views from participants:

Fund-raising (youth dinner, car washing, monthly contribution, shoe polishing, running church projects); saving and proper group spending; cooperation; proper planning and budgeting.

LEADERSHIP

Leader: Vitumbiko

We looked at qualities of a good leader and the following points were raised;

Confidence	Living by example	Be knowledgeable and wise
Friendly and committed	Creative and visionary	

The youth discovered that they could learn the following from the servant leadership of Jesus:

Humble (Jesus washed the feet of His disciples)	Prayerful
Understood and lived out his mission	Delegated tasks
Set standards for his followers and respected them	Was aware of his gifts

DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Leader: Sibongile

REASONS: Stress; frustration; curiosity; peer pressure; lifestyle/culture.

EFFECTS: Madness; disease e.g. cancer; financial loss; community crimes.

HOW TO ERADICATE: Avoiding bad peer pressure; keep youth busy; awareness on the dangers of drug and substance abuse

QUALITIES OF A GOOD LIFE COMPANION

Leader: Noel

A good Christian; trusted; fills the hollow of one's heart; caring and loving; who can make you happy; who can persevere; listening and cooperating; prayerful

REFLECTION

Members reflected on how best they can help a friend who is facing hardships and the following solutions were raised according to the Bible.

- Take heart (John 16:33, Hebrews 13:4)
- You need to act to help because faith without action is dead (James 2:14)
- Show him/her love (Job 2:1)
- God is present in our troubles
- God is merciful, he will not leave us alone (Psalm 139:1)
- God has good plans for all of us. We need to continue to hold on to hope (Jeremiah 29:11)
- As empty and void the situation is, the spirit of God is with us (Genesis 1:2)
- God will strengthen us and uphold us (Isaiah 41:10)

SPORTS AND INTERACTION

We enjoyed sports on Tuesday and Thursday and we had soccer and others went for swimming. We praise God that no one was injured in the course of our play. The youth have interacted very well and up to now we are able to know each other by name.

REQUESTS

- We request you as our parents that as you plan to go to the next conference, support us so that we can also share our opportunities and challenges.
- We request that you help us also to plan visits with one another as youth. For example youth from Canada should visit youth in Malawi and Malawian youth should also visit Canada.

Compiled by Noel Daire Kumwenda, IRCA Conference Youth Leader

I have enjoyed this trip and I have liked the people and the meeting together was just awesome. Our meetings, our playing and the chatting, all of that was great. I like every part that I participated. It was a wonderful time together.

Chad Ruesink

Meeting people from many countries was awesome and I was happy to participate. We have learnt a lot from this conference in our youth studies and I hope we will make a difference in our respective rural areas. The networking was very helpful as many of us will join together to continue fighting the challenges we are facing.

Joshua Nkhata

My favourite part when I was in Africa was playing soccer with Gift (the bartender at Luwanga Lodge) and some of the neighbourhood kids. Gift also taught me how to cook nsima, and I have already made a batch for my family. But my all-time-favourite part was meeting Vitombiko. He is such a good person and he wants to be an actor. He already made a video about when the Mzuzu market burnt down. Everyone thought it was the end of the world. Vitombiko reflects that worst things could happen. I'm the Canadian to have his movie. Thanks.



Everett presents gifts of footballs to rural pastors

Everett Bennetto

INAUGURAL RURAL YOUTH AWARD

This Conference presented the first Harold McSwain Rural Youth Award to Mabuchi Mwafulirwa.

Rev Dr Harold McSwain was a professor at two United Methodist Seminaries in Ohio where he nurtured several hundred young men and women who became interested in rural ministry. He was a visionary who saw how to make these pastors feel like they were making a contribution to rural ministries. One of the ways that he did this was by encouraging rural ministry leaders from around the world to become part of a worldwide organization which began 20 years ago and became known as the International Rural Churches Association.

The organizers of the 2014 IRCA Conference wanted to do something in memory of Harold McSwain's work. They therefore asked the local committee to select a young minister from Malawi, who was doing outstanding rural ministry, to be recognized at the conference.

Mabuchi Mwafulirwa comes from Karonga in the Northern Province of Malawi, on the western shore of the lake. He works for the Students Christian Organization of Malawi (SCOM), evangelising in Primary Schools, High Schools, and Universities.

Mabuchi was chosen as the award's first recipient because he is an outstanding youth minister in his region. He covers more than 100 schools and impacts many youth.

Congratulations, Mabuchi, and may God bless you abundantly.



THE FUTURE OF IRCA

A small group met to take a fresh look at the priorities for IRCA. I have grouped the points discussed under three headings.



1. SOLIDARITY

- Meeting up, offering personal support to each other, sharing issues.
- Raising the profile of rural issues, challenges and injustices.
- Providing a rural voice in the Christian world.

2. RESOURCES

- Sharing ideas for rural churches and communities, e.g. using our network to collect and disseminate materials and resources (such as those available on the Arthur Rank Website) to a wider network.

3. STRUCTURE

- We need an effective mechanism for the dissemination of resources and ideas.
- This is likely to include country co-ordinators and working groups.
- These groups and individuals need to identify the most appropriate means of communication for the country/region (email, text messages, etc.).

These and other points (such as finance) will be further discussed by the leadership group.

As incoming Chair, I am daunted by the challenge but grateful for your prayers and will serve to the best of my ability.

A Blessing

May God who provides the seed for the sowing,
the rain for the growing,
the hand for the doing,
the mind for the thinking,
and the heart for the loving,
bless us and preserve us
all the days of our lives. AMEN

Jerry Marshall

REFLECTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

FROM NORTH MALAWI

The fifth International Rural Church Association meeting in Lilongwe Malawi was the first conference of the association that I had attended, indeed I had only learned of this group six months or so earlier. My initial attraction was more focused on their identity as an international, ecumenical church gathering rather than the rural aspect.

All my hopes for a diverse loving Christian community were met. The identity of rural life is integral to the understanding of serving Christ in a way that provides a voice for the voiceless, holistic care of creation, and seeing our common identity beyond denominational or national labels. Challenges that face different ministries may cause those involved to focus on the very short term, or see the larger task.

Integrating rural ministry to the World Council of Churches and sharing with other clergy and laity from around the world demonstrates that, rather than be overwhelmed with the present, careful and long-term answers are being sought. For many short-time visitors that come to Malawi from the west, the typical mindset is that these visitors bring the answers with them. This attitude is evident both in westerners who sometimes might be described as haughty, and in our Malawian brothers and sisters who often appear disempowered. In contrast, the loving posture of fellow learners was clearly modeled by our IRCA western visitors, but personally the most important takeaway has been the connections and the excitement of fellow brothers and sisters here in Malawi.

On the local front, these connections have crossed denominational boundaries that may have kept us from working together in the past. That the rural church sees the need for this cooperation may be a witness to the larger church and an important result of this week.

Tyler A Holm, University of Livingstonia Faculty of Theology

FROM NORTH MALAWI

Overall the Conference was very exciting. It was first time for me to hear about this organization and better still to attend the conference.

There are a couple of items that I learned from the conference, including:

- That somewhere there can be people who can be so concerned about the delivery of God's Word in the rural mass.
- That there can such dedicated people very willing to sacrifice and help others for the sake of Christ.
- Patronage in the rural areas meets similar challenges regardless the denomination.
- That most of all poverty is the root cause of the suffering of clergy in the rural areas.

I was very much surprised with:

- The way the leadership cooperated. It looked as if you came from one town. This was amazing.
- How people personally sacrificed time, resources, etc to organise such a conference and previous ones for the sake of Christ. God should bless each one of you.
- The reception that Malawians produced. The turn up was amazing, though it could have been better.
- The level of Christianity in South Korea was beyond my imagination. I thought there are no

Christians in that part of the world.

- The situation of persecution in India is shocking, as recited by Prasad. I had the belief that 99% of the Indian population were Muslims, where in fact most are Hindu and more than 2% are Christian.

Concerns included the funding of the organization. That the organization is running on donations from dedicated Christians is amazing. I do not know how we do it, but perhaps we need to fund raise for 6th IRCA Conference.

With me is this challenge: what can I do for the Lord as an appreciation for what he does for me? How can I help those that are in need of help?!

In a nutshell, IRCA is a wonderful organization that everyone needs to support.

Last but not least I am very pleased to be part of this team and through you people and this association I hope to serve the Lord better.

God bless all you people.

Robert Mkandawire, Viyele Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Mzuzu

FROM CENTRAL MALAWI

What I have learned

That all people in the world are created in the image of God, no matter the race, colour, or creed.

All races realise that there a Mighty God above, who created all nature.

That churches in the rural areas in the whole world face almost similar challenges and that to cope with such situations we need to:

Form fraternal groups where we can be interacting with others in sharing testimonies and other experiences and get encouraged in the process, to avoid losing focus of the calling.

Pastors should be networking with others to improve communication to ensure they are kept abreast with information.

Pastors should be conducting joint programmes with colleagues to avoid working in isolation which may lead to boredom.

That all who have participated in IRCA programmes are members of IRCA and are concerned with problems experienced in the rural churches; therefore we must arise and strategise how to support them to avoid the related poverty, which leads to heathens ridiculing servants of God, as it shows that our love is not practical.

I have also learned that rural churches elsewhere, e.g. Korea, are very busy with agriculture activities which earn them money for enrichment of pastors' support.

That members in the IRCA executive committee travel to the whole world, spending from personal resources. Christians must be ready to sacrifice.

The questions that I have

Where can I get finances so that I can join the next conference? What is expected of me as an IRCA member? How much can I subscribe to IRCA? What is the minimum subscription?

When I felt enthused

Listening and learning from reports presented from various continents and countries. They have been thrilling, moving and educative.

When I learned about leadership, I felt humbled.

The mere presence of a diversity of races of people, all in the name Jesus, young and old, as old as 72 years old women, still serving the Lord committedly. This is an awesome experience.

When I felt disturbed

Upon hearing reports about riots in Lilongwe town after the Market got burnt down. This resulted in cancellation of our field site-seeing trips, This brought my spirit low.

The second disturbance to me was the report from India about the tough times Christians are experiencing. All the situations narrated are bitter pills our friends are swallowing. This let me down and has left me interceding for that beloved rich country. That the Holy Spirit must come down, in order for India to be saved.

What I will take home to my people

I am revitalised from here and will go home to do the following:

- Form up forums with fellow rural leaders where will share the word of “hope” to encourage each other.
- Encourage pastors fraternal where we can share experiences, testimonies and also strategise how to improve on networking.
- Highlight that David's experience of killing the beast in the bush, which attacked his sheep, enabled him to kill Goliath. God keeps us in the rural area for a purpose. This is a blessing in disguise. Some day, the experiences from there will solve and remove a huge mountain which Saul will have failed to do.
- We are in God's hands because the whole world is in the hands of God.

Juliet Jere, UMC Church, Bethel Circuit. Lilongwe, Malawi

FROM CENTRAL MALAWI

I have learned a lot of things from the Conference at Africa Bible College. I cite the example of commitment from those involved in IRCA who live very far apart, yet the love and passion you have for the lost souls, your willingness to use your resources for the advancement of the gospel: by lifting even us from this region which is characterized by a lot of challenges too numerous to mention and the spirit of unity because of Christ despite differences in professionalism.

The question raised from me is how this wonderful gathering could happen. Though partly answered through conversations with those involved I still feel it is important to know more in order to sustain what the organisers did to make it vibrant and acceptable in all the regions.

There are questions too about the churches of the leadership and participants in IRCA accepting their full participation and how individuals manage and balance the three, namely IRCA, church and family.

Soon after the conference I felt this enthusiasm that I need to press on towards the right goal. I am working with the rural community starting with the youth. I had 540 youths at one conference from 21-24 August 2014 and it was wonderful since three quarters of their questions were answered.

I hope to host one for the women within the next three months. I did work with some six pastors who were very supportive of my team and the youths in terms of transport, food and accommodation.

Sajeni Kamanga, National Co-ordinator of New Life for All, Lilongwe, Malawi

FROM ROMANIA

From this experience I find I love my home country much more than before.

What can we do to meet each other respectfully? Is our task to go down to lower levels or to help people to rise?

I was deeply impressed by the friendship of different people and the worship of the Malawians with dance and songs.



The flag of Mircea's town

There were some difficulties and disappointments: that nobody was on the airport to pick us up; and insufficient meals. I also missed a well-organised field trip during the conference with possibilities to contact regular local people. We had a trip on the end of the conference but that was not the best idea.

Since I have returned I have shared my experience with more than 700 colleagues and have given the final document to our church press.

Mircea Dejeu, Orthodox Parish Bucea/Cluj, Romania

Mircea attended a meeting of the whole region when he returned, thus being able to share face to face with this many people. His Metropolitan is very proud regarding him and it is hoped that the Metropolitan can be present at the next IRCA Europe conference in 2016 with the plan of holding it in Cluj.

A HUNGARIAN PARTICIPANT FROM ROMANIA

For me, in the first case, I praise the Lord, for leading me, to attend to this conference, and a big thank you for Rev Garry Hardingham, for helping me to see Africa, Malawi. It was a great opportunity, to see another part of the world, to see other Christians in other areas, to experience another style of living.

I have learned from this conference that whatever part of the world we are living, whatever languages we are speaking, we belong to each other, we serve together our Lord, in many ways possible. It is great to go more than 10,000 km, but to sing the same songs, pray, and worship the same Lord.

I felt enthused from the beginning, travelling so far away. At the conference, I felt enthused for any situations when we served during the time, for the European Report, especially for the Bible Study, and also for the European prayer morning. I do not feel disturbed at all.

Returning home, I bring the message of the IRCA (the conference statement) for the Christians from all around the world, as a message also for my area. I also bring the experiences related to travelling to Africa. We have a common passion for rural communities, because we have a passion to be real Christians, based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Continually thankful to God for this wonderful opportunity, I hope I will have the chance to attend another IRCA conference in the future.

László Gyula Márk, Reformed Church Sacele, Romania

FROM INDIA

Rev Catherine Christie the Chairperson, the secretary Rev Garry, and the leadership team coordinator Rev Eric have established a wonderful means through skype for the leaders to make decisions on the Malawi conference well in advance. The priorities set for choosing the venue are really apt. The conference began with the pre-conference visits. 16 international participants, who arrived into the city called Mzuzu in the Northern region of Malawi, took their accommodation in Luwinda Lodge. Mr Robert, the proprietor of the lodge was indeed a mature guide to keep us fit with comfortable accommodation and delicious food.

The church of Rev Copeland was indeed a multi-faceted ministry model: a school of management, tailoring centre, outreach programmes of preschool and rural ministry. It was exciting to see how the people and children enjoyed the visit. Rev Eric helping the tailoring centre was so meaningful. His grandson Everett's idea to distribute footballs was a very good one. Kabanda village pre-school was so impressive that the village community is simply blessed. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Kevin and Sandra are the supporters of this school. However, the sound of the song "I love you Jesus deep down in my heart" has really gone deep in our spirits.

Lake Malawi is a magnificent blessing to the country with water and in such quantity, clean and good. It is the real life for all. Malawi Museum of course was interesting with a character. For me an enchanting feature of Malawi is the bicycle rides on hire. Markets were just lively with casual shops all along the footpath.

For the Conference itself we were well accommodated. In the inaugural session the keynote speaker Molly gave a vibrant and moving religious exhortation. I really appreciated her emotional commitment to the people of Malawi and their passion for Christ.

Bible studies were very informative and innovative and the morning and evening prayers were indeed spiritual and enriching. Songs with Malawian dances were always refreshing. I am glad I could dance too.

Jerry's address was a well prepared presentation for a training programme of rural leaders. I appreciate Jerry for the work that had gone in its preparation.

Catherine's leadership as Chairperson was marvelous – simple to look at, but strong the control. Eric's messages on the screen was really a blessing. Robyn from behind had an eye on the proceedings, and Eric was very good in managing the laptops and screen displays. The youth part of the conference was complementary and very supportive .

Throughout this time, I had the opportunity to experience the Malawian spirituality in their worships, singing, fellowships, and courtesies.

In the end, despite the struggles of so many demands between national and international in the conference, Copeland did the local arrangements task really well. Finances seemed to be a constraint into which I really could not help much. The new team of officers are elected in real good spirit and are indeed promising. I am sure the Association is progressing and stepping into new phase of fellowship.

B.D. Prasada Rao, Bishop, Church of South India, Rayalaseema Diocese

FROM NEW ZEALAND

I arrived in Malawi a couple of days before the IRCA conference and stayed in a hostel where I watched, along with four Kenyans, the New Zealand rugby sevens play South Africa at the Commonwealth Games. That was an experience as they were all rooting for South Africa, but were

kind to me when New Zealand lost.

My first impressions were of dust, dirt, and bikes. I couldn't believe how much can be carried on a bike (with no gears!). I was well looked after by friendly locals and felt safe.

The conference was amazing. Listening to local stories and stories from several continents was very humbling. I live in New Zealand and decided I had nothing to moan about in comparison. I was aware that the more we have, the less we seem to rely on God's grace.

I was confronted with a Christianity that was bold, lively, and shared. I noticed several signs at markets claiming the Jesus way as the life to follow, I saw prayer shared in the open and many pastors giving freely of their time and gifts. The vibrant worship with dance and singing is something that enriched and touched my soul at depth. I encountered real poverty on the road trip to Lake Malawi. Great creative initiatives to make enough money to feed their families by wood carving, basket weaving, market gardening. Then, I arrived at the luxurious Lake Malawi resort. I felt quite uncomfortable after seeing the poor walking the roads taking their goods to market. It seemed the lifestyle between rich and poor was unjust. Tales of corruption at government level were rife in local papers.

The idea of the IRCA network was well received and I made several contacts that I will follow up with resources and friendship. In spite of many administrative difficulties the conference at the Bible College was well run. We were well housed and fed. I didn't get sick. We got used to the phrase "this is Africa" when things didn't quite go as planned. One highlight for me was the youth programme that was run alongside the conference. I hope we can do this again as their report of learnings and sharing of stories was amazing.

It was reinforced for me that story telling is a powerful tool to effect change. I spoke to many women who were living lives that meant change was happening, albeit slowly, in health, nutrition, and education. On my plane to Lilongwe were about two hundred people coming with church or aid to spend time in Malawi. I also caught up with the Young family, missionaries who are supported by southern New Zealand Presbyterians.

I have come home with plans to support and resource a couple of pastors and will be talking with the local youth group about a partnership.

A truly humbling experience and a chance to meet Christianity in action at grass roots, thank you Malawi.

Gillian-Swift, Anglican priest in Lumsden, Southland

FROM THE PAST CHAIRPERSON

Having returned from Malawi, and now having a vacation with my daughter in London (and kind of wishing I had prolonged the Malawi time with a safari), I have time to consider the weeks spent in preparation, in pre-conference in Mzuzu, and in the conference in Lilongwe. I sit down to write with a grateful heart.

It is so valuable to take IRCA to a country like Malawi. In "developed" countries like Canada and Germany (site of the 2007 and 2010 conferences) there is the awareness and despair of depopulation and withdrawal of services from the rural area. For so many countries where the rural community is in the majority and the norm, still however they are experiencing their own despairs that come from a state of voicelessness. We saw it strongly in India when meeting in Chennai 12 years ago and again this year in Malawi. There is also a major challenge in planning such a conference, both for the international leadership team, and for the local arrangers. For us from outside, we want to "nail down" details and have assurances we can count on (but rarely get) and

for the local folk, there are definite challenges of transportation, communication, as well as lots of anxiety about what the foreigners will think and experience, and other challenges I do not even perceive. I want to most deeply express appreciation to the local arrangers who carried out so many unseen tasks in the preparation and then the time of the conference itself. Thank you for taking this project on, and carrying it out with Christian love and patience. It was so wonderful to have 44 Malawians at the conference, from all parts of the country, who are now part of the IRCA network, carrying renewed hope home with them to their churches and communities.

At the same time, profound thanks to all members of the Leadership Team. Those of you who were not able to come to Malawi but shared the responsibilities and frustrations – Lothar and Garry – we missed you so much, but know that the part you played was so necessary to the rich and rewarding outcome. For the others with whom I have worked so closely for these past four years (Dave, Kevin, Eric, Roger, Robyn) deep gratitude and love for these days when God brought us together to embrace rural hope, for your wisdom, consideration of issues and needs, willingness to stretch the boundaries, and passion for God’s work in rural areas.

I welcome the IRCA Chair, Jerry Marshall, knowing that he is God’s gift for this time of IRCA, and rejoicing in his willingness to say yes to the challenge put to him. We profited from his words and presentation in Lilongwe, as we did from the amazing presentation from Fulata Mbanu-Moyo and the fantastic Bible studies.

I don’t normally think of myself as an auditory sensing person generally, but the main impressions I have of both Altenkirchen and Lilongwe are auditory ones. Altenkirchen was the first conference to use a second language (German, also Romanian) and I remember with deep joy the murmur of translation that accompanied the presentations and discussions. In Malawi it was the strong structure of sung harmonies. Where I stood at the front of the hall, I would enjoy the first line of a Malawian song sung by Symon, Christopher, Steven, Salome, Juliet or others (thank you so much), and then experience the wave of sound that would come from behind from the responding voices. These two memories will never leave me, and I give thanks to God for the opportunity to have been part of this body of IRCA.

God be with all the IRCA family as we continue to raise the voice of the voiceless throughout the world.

Catherine Christie, United Church of Canada overseas personnel with Presbyterian Church Republic of Korea and Korea National Council of Churches



Appendix 1



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International Rural Churches Association Voice to the Voiceless

STATEMENT OF 2014 IRCA
5TH QUADRENNIAL CONFERENCE
HELD IN LILONGWE, MALAWI
July 28 – August 1, 2014

THEME: HOLDING ON TO HOPE

*Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope.
My comfort in my suffering is this: your promise preserves my life. (Psalm 119:49-50)*

We, the seventy-two members of the International Rural Churches Association who have been meeting in the African Bible College Lilongwe, Malawi, for the 5th International Rural Churches Association conference from July 28 to August 1, have this message to share with our Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world, our rural colleagues and with the leaders of national and international church organizations. We have been 44 from Malawi, mostly from rural congregations, and 28 international participants from eight countries around the world (India, Romania, Korea, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, UK, US), gathered to explore the theme, Holding on to Hope. For us all, whether local or visitors, it has proven to be an unforgettable experience. For us Malawians to meet and talk with rural Christians from other parts of the world, and likewise for us internationals to learn from such a significant number of Malawians, from all regions of this country, is an amazing opportunity for practical and spiritual enrichment. In worship, in music, in Bible studies, discussions and times of fellowship, we have shared deeply, in a great variety of accents, perspectives and experiences, everyone contributing something different, and yet we have been very aware of our commonality as rural people.

This was the first conference of IRCA held in an African context. In meeting here, rural church people from Malawi were able to share with brothers and sisters the difficult situations under which they minister, the deep poverty of this mainly rural country, the difficulty of communication and travel, the high rates of illiteracy, and sicknesses caused by lack of potable water and sanitation facilities. At the same time we shared similar concerns of rural communities around the world caused by the uncertainties for farmers caused by weather, low commodity prices and high production costs, by governments' lack of concern and poor services.

The hope, which came from the love and support experienced through this community, strengthened IRCA's belief in networking. It encourages us to continue our journey as the people of God, though we know the road will be dusty and full of potholes.

This was also the first conference with a youth caucus. Four international youth and seven youth

from Malawi shared activities and fellowship parallel to the conference time, while exploring issues that face the youth of the world (like HIV/AIDS, leadership, drug and alcohol abuse, financial independence) and ways of approaching them from a faith perspective.

From the conference we bring back to our churches, communities, countries some learnings:

- Commonality of Rural People around the world and our problems.
- Decisions that affect our lives (e.g. by governments) are made far away from the rural context. Unfortunately, decisions that affect our churches face the same problem (church national offices); ultimately we as rural people have to depend on ourselves and on God.
- Therefore, we realize the importance of ecumenical connectedness.
- We will continue to explore fresh ways churches can stimulate community development when resources are slim.
- We recognize the need to develop leaders, both lay and ordained, to increase the effectiveness of the Christian presence in rural areas.
- We commit ourselves to sharing resources with each other, as we develop and maintain a worldwide rural network for a holistic ministry, in order to embrace rural hope.
- We challenge ourselves to take risks to further God's Kingdom.

The Association reaffirms its solidarity with rural communities which are vulnerable due to both man-made and natural disasters. The rural areas need a voice. We in IRCA realize strongly the role, given by God, to be a voice for and to the voiceless, and to actively raise the profile of the challenges of rural ministry.

IRCA LEADERSHIP TEAM

August 1, 2014

Jerry Marshall – Chairperson (Director, Arthur Rank Centre, UK)

Catherine Christie – Past Chairperson (United Church of Canada Overseas Personnel Korea, clergy)

Eric Skillings – Secretary (United Church of Canada, clergy)

Garry Hardingham – Treasurer and Past Secretary (Uniting Church in Australia North Queensland Presbytery Minister and Chairperson, clergy)

Kevin Harper – Past Treasurer (Uniting Church in Australia, farmer)

Lothar Schullerus – Representative for IRCA Europe (Protestant Church Switzerland, clergy)

Robyn McPhail – Representative for IRCA Oceania (Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, clergy)

Prasad Rao – Representative for IRCA Asia (Church of South India, bishop Rayalaseema Diocese)

Copeland Nkhata – Representative for IRCA Malawi (Malawi United Methodist Church, clergy)

Dave Ruesink – Representative for IRCA America (Presbyterian Church USA, emeritus professor)

Appendix 2:

BURNING: THE CHALLENGES OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMAN NEEDS

ENVIRONMENTAL OVERVIEW

Malawi is a landlocked country in south-eastern Africa, bordered by Tanzania, Zambia, and Mozambique. Malawi is 118,000km², but one fifth of the country is made up of Lake Malawi, so actual land area is 94,080km², roughly the size of Scotland and Wales combined. The Great Rift Valley runs through the country from north to south, and Lake Malawi lies to the east. Land is made up of mountains, plateaus, hills, valleys, flatlands, and lakeshore. Malawi has a sub-tropical climate, and experiences a rainy season from December to March, a cold dry season from April to August, and a hot dry season from September to November.



Primary forest at Kalwe: much of Malawi had large trees like this



Deforestation of lower slopes by subsistence farmers

Malawi was previously heavily forested. However, forest cover is now just 27.2% of the total land area of Malawi. The Northern Region has more forested areas than the heavily populated Southern and Central Regions combined.

The challenge for Malawi for the future, with its rapidly growing population, is to help communities to develop a more sustainable approach to the environment.

DEFORESTATION FOR FARMING



Nearly all of these large hardwood trees have been cut down for timber



One farmer illegally cut down all of these trees and was going to open a new farm



Once the trees have been cut down and burnt, the soil is exposed to erosion from the rain

Most of Malawi was originally covered by forest but, over the years, people have been cutting down the trees and burning them where they fall to open up areas for farming — this is commonly known as “slash and burn” agriculture. In the past, these areas were farmed for one to three years, and then the farmer would move on, cut down some more forest, and start all over again. Whilst the

population of Malawi was small, the environment was able to recover as the trees would regenerate but now, with the population doubling every 25 years (in July 2011, the population of Malawi is estimated to be 15 million, there is increased pressure on available land. Today, more than 80% of Malawians live in the rural areas and are subsistence farmers.



Fires burn out of control and regularly burn people's houses



Often the land on the steep slopes is very marginal and produces poor crops



This is central Malawi where the forests have all been cut down and only a few small trees now grow

During President Hastings (Kamuzu) Banda's time in office following Malawi's independence from Britain in 1964 until 1994, the forests in Malawi were protected. However, with the arrival of multi-party politics and democracy in 1994, the people believed that they had the freedom to do what they liked, and huge areas of forest have been cut down in the past 20 years to provide more farmland to produce food.

The result is that much of the country has very few forests left and, in fact, it is not possible to see a large tree in many places in south and central Malawi.

In Nkhata Bay District, there are still large areas of forested hills, but these are disappearing very quickly because people from other areas of Malawi are now moving into the District and cutting down the trees illegally.

The deforestation in the hills is causing a major change to the landscape and to the climate. As soon as the trees are cut down, the soil is exposed to the rain and, in many places, most of the top soil is washed away into the rivers and eventually into Lake Malawi.

This is leaving the hills infertile so that trees and crops do not grow well, and the soil that is being deposited in the lake is affecting fish stocks which, together with over-fishing, is causing a dramatic reduction in the number of fish that are being caught in the lake.



Nkhata Bay District, close to the lake, with yearly rainfall of 1.2m



The eroded soil washes down the rivers and eventually into the lake



This is an example of gully erosion due to deforestation

OTHER REASONS WHY TREES ARE CUT DOWN

The main reasons why the trees in Malawi are cut down are as follows.

Wood is the main fuel in Malawi, and 95% of homes still use wood or charcoal for cooking. Nearly everybody uses three-stone fires for cooking, and each fire consumes about three large bundles (weighing about 30kg each) of wood per week. In many areas, wood is now becoming very scarce. Although the government has a number of laws to restrict the sale of wood and charcoal without a licence, the practice is very common throughout the country. The use of charcoal for cooking is more common in the major towns, but charcoal production and the sale of charcoal is illegal. However, despite this, the people in rural areas produce many bags of charcoal which are transported to the towns. This fuel is incredibly wasteful as it uses a considerable number of trees to produce one bag of charcoal.



Three-stone fires consume huge quantities of wood



Typically, each family consumes over 150 bundles of wood per year for their cooking fire



Bags of illegal charcoal for sale by the side of the road

Most houses in Malawi are made from bricks, and these are commonly made by putting clay soil into molds and then drying them in the sun. These sun-dried bricks are then built into a large kiln and vast amounts of wood are used to fire them. Between August and November, it is normal to see people burning their bricks all over the country, but there is no restriction on this activity at the moment. To make enough bricks for a small family house would require three large mango trees or the equivalent.



Charcoal being produced illegally



A brick kiln, which is burnt for 24 hours, uses three large trees to fire enough bricks for one small house



Sawyers cut down hardwood trees in the forest, usually without permission

There is now very little hardwood available in Malawi for timber production. Sawyers walk up into the hills and cut down the best hardwood trees to make planks for building and for furniture.

Although wood is such an important resource in Malawi, the Malawians have been very poor at managing their woodland and replanting their trees.

AGRICULTURE



A healthy crop of improved maize grown in a low-lying fertile area



Local maize and poor nutrients produce disappointing crops



Young cassava shoots: Cassava provides the staple food for many people in Nkhata Bay District

Malawians used to farm the old traditional crops of millet and sorghum which are disease and drought resistant but, as with most of the other countries in Africa, maize was introduced by the World Bank in the 1950s and is now the most popular crop as the staple food in Malawi. Ideally, maize needs good soil and nutrients, and sufficient water, but it is susceptible to disease and drought. Maize is commonly grown in the rainy season from seed which farmers have to buy, and it is planted in December. Unfortunately, Malawians rarely rotate their crops and often, at the end of the season, the fields are burnt to clear them so that the nutrients are destroyed and there is very little organic matter in the soil. Hence, increasingly, farmers rely on expensive, chemical fertilisers to increase their crop yields.



Young children regularly start bush fires in the dry season for fun



In the dry season, people prefer to burn their fields to prepare them for planting crops in December, leaving the soil without organic materials



Bush fires burn out of control and often destroy mango trees, thatching grass, and other valuable resources

In the dry season, August-November, many farmers burn the bush as a quick way to clear their land, and children set fire to the dry vegetation for fun, and also to search for mice, with devastating results. All of the organic matter is destroyed, and homes, trees, and seeds are also burnt, often leaving the soil sterile.

Radwel Mwase, Central Malawi