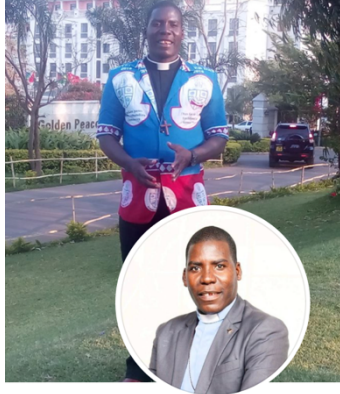


A LETTER FROM MALAWI

The Rev'd Fr. Daniel Chunga, Kasangadzi Anglican Parish, Diocese of Lake Malawi, Province of Central Africa



Beloved in the Lord

In this letter I describe how a typical Anglican Parish priest ministers in Malawi and to share some of the joys, problems and challenges that clergy face in their day to day ministry.

BACKGROUND

Malawi is a landlocked country in Central Africa bordered by Zambia to the West, Tanzania to the north and Mozambique to the East, South and Southwest. The 580 kilometre Lake Malawi (formerly Lake Nyasa) runs along the Eastern border.

The Anglican Church came to Malawi in 1861.* It now has four dioceses namely: The Diocese of Lake Malawi bordered by the Diocese of Southern Malawi to the South of the country, the Diocese of Upper Shire in the Eastern part of Malawi, and lastly the Anglican Diocese of Northern Malawi to the North. The Diocese of Lake Malawi includes the capital city, Lilongwe.

LIFE OF AN ANGLICAN PRIEST IN MALAWI

The life of an Anglican priest in Malawi varies from diocese to diocese and from parish to parish within the diocese. For instance, in the Diocese of Lake Malawi there two types of priests. Those who serve in the city and urban centres, and those who serve in rural areas.

Those in the city and urban centres are perhaps better placed than those in rural areas. They enjoy some relative luxury in life as opposed to their rural counterparts.

Being a priest in the Anglican Church in Malawi is always regarded and viewed as a blessing from God which in fact it is to some extent. However, it must also be pointed out that being a parish priest in Malawi is the most sacrificial service one could offer to God. Parish priests in Malawi are always on duty 24/7. Parish sizes matter too.

Many parishes in the Diocese of Lake Malawi are extremely big for a single priest to serve. Most of the priests are not priests in-charge but rather assistant priests who are supervised by their archdeacons. The average parish in Malawi has about seven outstation churches.

BASIC DUTIES OF A PARISH PRIEST IN MALAWI

There are many similarities to the work of priests elsewhere in the Anglican Communion but also many differences.

Some key duties and responsibilities of an Anglican priests in Malawi:

Pastoral

- To be a servant and pastor of God's people at all times.
- To teach and preach the Word of God in church.
- To pronounce absolution in the Name of Jesus Christ.
- Conducting pre-marriage and other counseling sessions
- Officiating weddings.
- Conducting baptisms and preparing candidates for confirmation.
- Celebrating Holy Eucharist.
- Leading house and church prayers, praying for church members, and encouraging them.
- Leading in prayer services such as Matins, Evensong, Angelus, Compline, Wednesday (mid-week) prayers.
- Providing pastoral care through visiting church members in their respective homes.
- Praying for the sick and giving hope to the dying.
- Conducting funeral and burial services.

Administration

- Facilitating formation of parish work plans.
- Managing daily affairs of the parish.
- Overseeing the preparations of reports by all church groups (guilds)
- Calling and chairing Parish Annual General Meetings, Parish Church Councils, and Parish Executive meetings in consultation with the archdeacon.
- Organize and to delegate other people to preach and lead church services in other outstation churches.

Missions and Evangelism

- Training church member ways of effective witnessing and Evangelism with the aim of revitalising community churches.
- Sharing Christ to the local community
- Leading the church in reaching out to those in need and in crisis.
- Reshaping or restarting existing congregational churches.
- Helping in church planting activities

The Joys

- It is always a joy to see that the preached Word of God with clarity is resulting into positive change of people's lives.
- It is a great joy to see people's lives are experiencing new birth by the power of God's Grace.

- Seeing the levels of prayer life in the parishioners and hunger for more of God's Word, keeps priests going with faith and hope in the risen Lord.

CHALLENGES FACED

No Quota, No Stipend Policy

Anglican priests in Malawi are very hardworking people. They are very committed and dedicated to the call they received from God. They are always on duty 24/7 with minimal time for rest. Some priests have been assigned to parishes with as many as 10 to 15 outstation churches. They still have to fulfill all their duties pastoral, mission and evangelism, as well as administrative duties. The pressures on them and their families can be considerable.

For example, they may come from a funeral prayer service, to find a message at home saying they have to proceed with visiting someone who is sick and who is asking for urgent prayer from their priest. This is a frequent kind of pressure but the priest is left with no other option but to go back out, despite the often-considerable amount of travel involved.

However, there is a well-known issue of the failure by most parishes to meet their diocesan quota obligation. This is because the parish has not managed to raise enough money through Sunday collections and other offerings. Consequently, clergy do not always receive their monthly stipends as the diocese does not have enough money to pay clergy without income from parish quotas. This becomes a huge challenge and creates demoralisation for the advancement of the kingdom of God. No Quota, no stipend, becomes a heavy burden on the priest and his family if his parishioners cannot meet the Quota. In some cases, a priest may go for four to eight months without getting a stipend payment.

Modes of transport

It is very sad to note and see a parish that may have about seven outstation churches but no reliable mode of transport for the clergy who serve them. In such a scenario, the priest can be much troubled struggling with how far away some of these outstation churches are located. Some outstations churches can be 15 to 20 kilometres away from the priest's home. The only option for these parishes is to hire a bicycle for the clergy to use on a particular Sunday or on any day when he is required to travel for pastoral duties. Generally, clergy do not have access to cars and off-road outstations are normal, so access is slow and difficult and frequently on foot.

Health Care

Many dioceses here in Malawi, are unable to provide health insurance. This renders clergy and their families vulnerable in times of sickness. There are no relief packages or any emergency funds should clergy or family members become ill. Consequently, most priests end up being in debt because of the cost of healthcare.

HOPE IN GOD

In all these challenges for parish priests there is confidence in God. We are reminded that God's Grace is sufficient and that power is made perfect in weakness. (2 Corinthians

12:9-10). What keeps us going is what God is doing in our midst. Priests are faithful to scripture that reminds us that though our trials seem endless, they are just for a moment in a relation to the eternity of joy God has prepared for those who faithfully serve him. (2 Corinthians 4:17). The more these struggles mount in the life of a priest, the more we are compelled to trust God more day by day.

In His Service

Fr. Daniel Hendricks Chunga
Kasangadzi Anglican Parish
All Saints-tide, November 2020

*In 1861, the first Anglican missionary to the area was Scottish born Charles Mackenzie who arrived with David Livingstone the explorer. In 1860, Mackenzie had become head of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa. Subsequently, he was consecrated bishop in St George's Cathedral, Cape Town on 1st January 1861. Mackenzie became the first missionary Bishop in the area that later became known as Nyasaland, today's Malawi. He died of Blackwater Fever the following year.