

## The story of support for a rural village in the heart of Malawi - Zuwayumo



It was in the first quarter of 2002 when Chrissie first mentioned that hundreds of Malawian people were dying of starvation and related diseases. Little did we know that we would become involved in this part of the world.

Figures on the numbers of deaths were difficult for authorities to obtain. The population, in Malawi, is spread over a large area with many isolated settlements with rudimentary and poor infrastructure, dirt roads, no electricity, no communications, etc. The numbers of deaths will never be known however, the government's figure of 300–500 was widely accepted as a lower estimate. Civil society groups suggest that a figure is more likely to be in a range of 1,000–3,000. What caused this famine which started in March 2001 was a period of abnormal rainfall with waterlogged fields which then had a severe impact on the harvest and maize stocks, the staple food.

The Government severely underestimated the availability of food and released misleading information on stocks and availability. Their 'Famine Early Warning System' was insisting that Malawi had a national food surplus in 2001/02. However, in addressing the famine the government ordered 150,000 tons of maize from South Africa but, with movement in financial exchange rates, only 134,000 tons were purchased. The distribution of maize was not handled well and many settlements, including Zuwayumo, suffered.

*[This part of history is dramatically revealed in a film called "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind" which is a true story of a boy who invented and built a wind turbine out of old bicycle parts which irrigated their village maize plants in 2002.]*

### Fund Raising

Chrissie was born in Malawi and has family and many friends there. Chrissie had mentioned the famine in Malawi and the impact on the villages within Zuwayumo where she was born. Chrissie's mother and families lived in the villages of Tombolombo and Zakahet, in Zuwayumo, which was home to her, her family and friends. This is an area which consists of many remote settlements of subsistent farmers.



A team of ladies from Our Lady Queen of Apostles Parish, Cheddar, Church (OLQA) got together to arrange a garden tea-party to raise money for maize seed to go to the farmers of Tombolombo, in this area of Zuwayumo in Malawi. Not to be out-done, the Men's Group thought some entertainment would also go down well and would encourage more generous donations with all proceeds going to The Malawi Famine Appeal.

It was decided that we could actually put on a classic performance and 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' would be ideal. We soon honed William Shakespeare's tome down to the part known as the 'Mechanicals'. Casting was easy with the performers : Stuart Edmonstone as Puck, Richard Parker as Peter Quince : A Carpenter, Adrian Martin as Snug : A Joiner, Mike Powell as Nick Bottom : A Weaver, Joe Hogan as Francis Flute : A Bellows Mender and Bob Vale as Snout : A Tinker. With Ted Sweat as the Duke of Athens – Theseus and Anne Poole as The Duchess Hypolita. It took weeks of fun and laughter and many rehearsals but we finally got it and our costumes together. The stage was Pat Moon's garden and, after all those



attending had had their fill of a traditional English afternoon tea, the ladies, holding the Malawi flag, were led into singing the Malawi national anthem by Chrissie. The play went down well and substantial funds were raised and were sent to Malawi via our Church. The funds were sent to the nuns of the local MIC Convent in Mzimba.

The nuns hired a big lorry to take the maize to Tombolombo Village where Chrissie's mother lived, for distribution. Unfortunately the Headman considered that anyone connected to Chrissie was having sufficient help from her, as she lived in the UK. He therefore omitted Chrissie's mother and many poor and needy families who didn't receive any aid.

Zuwayumo is about 15 miles away from Tombolombo and is Chrissie's mother's ancestral home and burial place. Many of her extended families still live there. However there was some money left over and Sister Theresa, from the MIC, used it to have a water pump installed in Tombolombo.

After this news, all collections and donations from OLQA were distributed, by Chrissie on her annual visits. This ensured the impoverished and needy communities, around the area she knew and visited, were positively supported without partiality to any of those in need.

## **Visiting Malawi**

In 2009 Chrissie's mother, Clementina Kakota who had lived in Tombolombo, sadly died. In 2010 Chrissie invited Elizabeth and I to accompany her to Malawi and Zuwayumo for the celebration of her mother's life including the building and dedication of a memorial to her. So that was how Elizabeth and I started to support Chrissie in Zuwayumo and experience a third world country during our three week visit to Malawi.

On arrival at Kamuza Airport in Lilongwe, Malawi, we were greeted by a friend of Chrissie who worked at the airport and made sure we were OK and guided us to a car where Steve, another friend of Chrissie was there to collect us. Steve was one of the better off in Malawi as he worked in the capital of Lilongwe for the Government in Highways, his wife also worked for the health authority. On the way back to his house we passed young boys, standing by the roadside, holding sticks with something impaled on the end. These were cooked mice impaled on a stick and roasted – was this a cheap source of protein or a delicacy people would eat on their journey home? Luckily we didn't stop to find out but my concerns over the types of food we would encounter were raised somewhat.

## **Mzimba**

We were driven to Steve's house in Lilongwe where we stayed for a couple of days. The approach to Steve's house was through a residential area in an enclosed development of houses where public employees live in single story, brick buildings with two or three bedrooms, a kitchen, bathroom and living room. Water is pumped from wells and electricity is available, although power cuts are a regular occurrence at least twice a week. The houses are more like 1950 bungalows in England with plumbing and electrical installation reminiscent of that era with the real shortage of plumbers, electricians and builders, and it shows. Earning families do have common 'luxuries' such as cars, television and music systems but appear to have insufficient resources for the upkeep of the fabric of the houses. The houses are in estates and each has high walls and a security gate. Many householders employ a security guard from the poorest of the population. Here most of the main roads have tarmac, minor and local housing areas have dirt tracks.



We drove up to a large solid steel gate which was opened by a poorly dressed man. This was Steve's gate-keeper who, I believe, lived or slept in a small shed and was probably paid a small amount but given his meals. This was a first glimpse of the poverty. We were warmly greeted by Steve's wife Deliwe their lively young daughter. We had a lovely welcome and a sumptuous meal with good wine. There was a comfortably furnished living room with a large television. A tour around their house and garden revealed their maize store which looked, to us, as being out of place but was, obviously, the sensible way of providing flour. They had vacated their comfortable bed for us and treated us so well for the couple of nights. The next day we were taken for a trip around Lilongwe visiting the tomb of Hastings Kamuzu Banda (who was Prime Minister and President of Malawi for 30 years), the war memorial, the parliament building and other places of interest. The next day we explored the 'Old Town'. Here was where the poorer people live in small brick and mud dwellings which are packed together and have no electricity, running water and have communal lavatories. This is where you see street/roadside businesses and skilled craftsmen making and selling their handmade goods. There were so many industries here you see people repairing shoes with old lorry tyres, people crushing rocks with hammers, selling firewood, mending bicycles, making grave stones, selling sugar cane, bundles of grass for roof repairs, making doors and ramshackle stalls selling produce from the many subsistence farmers.



Steve took us to exchange our UK pounds into Malawian kwacha. We drove into a small estate and parked outside a house that was encased in barbed wire with rather large men who appeared to be on a look-out with more large 'aides'. Steve spoke to them and, shortly, a large man appeared with a very large wodge of bank-notes. Whether it was just me, or perhaps it was everyone, but the tension was immense. Steve negotiated the exchange rate, we exchanged our UK pounds for kwacha's and made a gentle, but quick, exit with a largish bundle of money.

Later we visited another of Chrissie's friends who lived in a lovely house complete with a swimming pool. We had a very warm welcome and a glass of wine and learned that their business was alligator farming – luckily there were none in their pool!

### **Our 'Base Camp'**

The next day Steve ordered a taxi to take us to our base-camp. Chrissie had arranged for us to stay at the MIC Missionary of Canada on the outskirts of Mzimba. The taxi was quite small and we had difficulty getting our luggage into the car because Chrissie's annual trip included lots of provisions which the villagers could not get or afford, including medicines and clothes for the needy. To say the car was not big enough was an understatement. Cases were crammed in, piled to the ceiling and on all our laps

The suspension on the car was severely tested as we heard the bumps and scrapes as we negotiated the bumpy tracks/roads. On the way we had a slight detour to visit Chrissie's house in Kamwazeka. The taxi driver was too nervous to take the heavy car over a narrow and somewhat rotted wooden 'bridge' (consisting of two ancient planks), so we walked the few yards to the settlement. People of all ages immediately emerged from no-where to enthusiastically greet Chrissie. This was Chrissie's family house built by Sr. Theresa. We were enthusiastically welcomed and taken on a tour around the house and garden. The garden was devoted to growing food. The enthusiastic welcome given to Chrissie was a memorable moment and an insight into the strong bonds these people have for their friends and families.



Our final stop took us along a fairly wide mud road (which we learned was the A1) to a long single storey brick building behind a substantial wall and gates.

This was in the convent of the MIC missionary of Canada, located on the outskirts of Mzimba and was our base-camp. This mission has built many schools, some have been taken over by the local education department but the infant and junior schools are still supplied by this mission. Within the complex is an infants school where local children are provided with uniforms (made and provided by the nuns) a free breakfast and midday meal as well as their education. A secondary school is to the rear but is now provided with government employed teachers. It is not unusual for each class to comprise of 100 or more children. The pay for these teachers is very low.

The mission has also built and equipped diesel maize mills for villages and continues to pay the required government licences and the general running costs.



This mission was run by two French-Canadian nuns Sisters Huguette Turcotte and Marie-Paul Sanfacon aged 72 and 80. There were also three other much younger African nuns who were educating six Malawian novices all from Malawi or Zambia.

A tour round the grounds revealed a very well organised vegetable garden including poultry and rabbits which ensured they were almost self-sufficient in food. Various tasks are undertaken by employed local people who are also paid a small pension when they are retired.

The business acumen of these nuns was a bit of a surprise. They did have one old computer for their business and training needs and more had been donated but not installed or set up. This was my first job which, despite the limited times the mains electricity was actually available, I managed to install and set them up on their network.

The nun's responsibilities encompass the running of a convent, with accommodation and meals for nuns and visitors, provision of food for students, provision of schools and teaching, provision of schoolrooms for remote villages and provision of mills for maize in remote villages. They maintain a deep relationship with many villages over a large area. We met people who live over 100Km away who have been assisted by the nuns personally. For example, a shop in Muzuzu sells cards, lamps and carvings as well as books and other things and the local nun also teaches carving, lampshade making, greeting cards made from re-cycled papers, and African paintings. This gives the trainees self-confidence and a small income. Such is the influence of these impressive nuns.

St. Paul's Catholic Church was adjacent to the Missionary. We went to Mass which was filled with the amazing singing which is so common and plentiful in Malawi. When it was time for the church offertory vegetables, chickens and even a goat was taken to the alter.



## **Maize mill and bricks**



A senior nun had been visiting the convent and offered us a trip out to visit a maize mill they had built. She drove us along a pretty good road and after a few miles she veered off into a narrow tract into the wilds. After some time we saw a large brick built building which was our destination. Inside was a massive machine. This was a communal maize mill where people could bring their maize

and for a small charge to cover the cost of diesel. The milling machine was powered by a large ex-lorry diesel engine. A young lady was ushered in to demonstrate the process. It was very noisy with the noise of the large engine and the clatter of the milling stones but white flour spilled onto the floor. Having shown an interest in the brick building we were invited to see how bricks were made. A walk through the tall grasses and shrub brought us to an open muddy pit where three men were working. Wet clay was being dug and shovelled into a compartmentalised wooden frame. This was left out, with many other frames, to dry. Once dry they would be stacked up, surrounded by wood and fired over a long period and the solid red bricks were ready for local use or for sale. On our various walks we would see many piles and stacks of bricks on the roadside, presumably waiting for a buyer or just dumped.



## Exploring

We had no transport as Chrissie was using the car to get materials and working on the memorial for her mother in the settlement of Zuwayumo. Our home-base was about three miles from the nearest town of Mzimba.

Three visiting nuns had finished their work at this mission and were arranging for a visit to some of the local countryside. We were invited to join them. We were driven out into the bush and arrived at a park which had a large lake, lovely walks and a café. This was our first outing into the amazing wild countryside and our first encounter with the amazing colours of the flowers, birds, butterflies, trees and enormous spiders. There were vast narrow roads, wild open countryside with no cars or lorries. On this occasion we had sight of a man peddling a bicycle with a massive pile of logs on the back of his bike and up and over his head. This, as we realised later, was the common practice to get the fuel for their cooking.



We would regularly walk to the town either by the main road or by a short-cut which took us through a small settlement. Here we would receive some strange looks but generally a wave and a hello with a nice smile and wave. Sometimes we got a more negative look. The town had a high street, bus station, a few shops, a small bank and a large market which sold literally everything. The sight of oxen pulling a cart, the small numbers of poorly dressed people and the wide open dirt road was certainly different. On a small track off this road we were surprised to find a large and very busy open market with a huge number of stalls selling literally everything from small fish to clothes, vegetables to solar panels.



Our daily walks brought us close to the local population. We became familiar faces to the local stalls selling the lovely tomatoes, onion or sugar cane. The children delighted in saying "Hello!" or "Good morning, how are you?" to which the reply has to be "Fine, and how are you?" Smiles and giggles of joy were the usual result, especially when we took photographs and showed it to them. Occasionally we had a cluster of them following us. Adults were greeted with a raised hand and a "Moni, muliwuli?" which received a response of "Yewo" and a broad smile. We were a little surprised to come across a full sized football pitch which was used by teenagers. The pitch barely had any grass, there were goal posts and half the boys played in bare feet but they had no referee but were disciplined and impressive. Then there were the children of all ages and we seemed to be a bit of



a magnet to them. They loved joining up with us chattering, laughing, showing off and just friendly and curious about us, our whiteness, strange language (which some copied) and clothes.

We became very aware of small children looking after smaller children here. We met a number of young people in their teens or early twenties who had the responsibility of caring for their siblings. We had conversations with one young man whose parents had been shot on their way back from South Africa and so he had to take on the responsibility of supporting the family and providing money for education. He was longing for the day when he could get educated himself and had aspirations of running a chicken farm. A similar story came from a taxi driver who lost his parents to AIDS and took on work to pay for his own education and driving lessons. The need for education is recognised by all the young people we met but it is out of reach for so many as they miss out on education because they have to feed and look after their younger siblings.

## **MUZUZU**

One of Chrissie's many friends had offered the use of his car from Mzuzu, the next large town to the north. This friend was a Malawian Priest, Fr Nazarius or as we knew him, Father Naz, he played an important role in our 'Safe Water' project. We walked down to the bus station in Mzimba to what seemed a chaotic scene of mini busses, coaches and people. Luckily Chrissie had the experience and helped us to get the right bus and soon we were squashed into this mini-bus with about 25 others. The passengers brought most things with them including large bags and building material. There were a few bus stops and police check-points on the way. At one stop a large well-dressed man got on board and ordered a poorly dressed man off to make room for himself. We were shocked but learned that this was common practice. The journey took us through tobacco fields and wooded areas, lots of saw mills, piles of cut timber, fields with newly planted tree saplings and rubber plantations.

Arriving in Muzuzu was a bit of a shock. It was very busy. There was a new development area where a huge new bank stood proudly above all other buildings. This was obviously going to be a more important commercial area. One image sticks in my mind was that of a normal bicycle with a large square box at the rear. The box was a vivid yellow with 'AMBULANCE' written on the side. I was assured that it was actively used.

Chrissie wanted to visit a shop which was run by the same order of Nuns as in Zuwayumo. (was she a teacher for Chrissie) This shop sold cards, lamps and carvings as well as books and other things, The local nun teaches carving, lampshade making, greeting cards made from re-cycled papers, and African painting which gives the trainees self-confidence and an income. Such is the influence of these impressive nuns.

Eventually we collected the car and, because it was getting dark, I drove back to Mzimba. I found the drive very difficult as it was a normal dark metalled road, with no verge, not too flat, trees either side and people walking on the road with dark clothes. I slowed down when we came across a number of tree branches on the road. Chrissie understood this sign. As we approached we saw a group around someone who had been knocked down and killed by a passing car. Needless to say, I drove very carefully the rest of the way.

The roads are poor. There are a number of 'trunk' roads which have tarmac. We know that they have an M1 which runs from South to the North (some still under construction) and eight others. All the other roads are dusty, rocky and sandy tracks which are cruel to vehicular suspension, as one can see by the numbers of broken vehicles. Sign-posts are available for major trunk routes but most tracks are unmarked and readily missable. We were surprised, when we visited a maize mill, as we suddenly drove off the road into the bush where we eventually found a few houses and the mill.

Our visits around villages were very special. We visited a number of small settlements to visit and took maize to them in a rather old and dented open backed truck. I was privileged to be invited to sit in the front by the driver while Elizabeth, Chrissie and four others had the back of the open truck along. There were no roads, just tracks which were uneven and with plenty of pot-holes which made it very uncomfortable for anyone in the back of the truck.

Our first stop was at a very remote school to give them a small solar panel sent by Fr Naz which, I assumed would be to charge the mobile phones of the teachers so they could be in touch with the education authority.

We then started visiting various settlements. The greetings we had were amazing as they were overjoyed to see Chrissie and made us very welcome.

When we arrived to one village called Kmszalanga or, as we called it 'Orange Tree village', it was like a huge celebration. We were surrounded by excited small children and it seemed that the whole village came to meet us. Looking around you could see oranges, lemons and bananas hanging from trees, tobacco leaves drying in an open shed and two women with babies slung on their backs with pots of water balanced on their heads. Another lady was sitting on the dusty earth by her house, winnowing the grain among some harvested wood. However this apparent idyllic existence is very



delicate, one can easily forget that these subsistence farmers are reliant on the weather. A drought could soon lead to a severe food shortage and famine as happened in 1992. We were invited into one house where two brothers lived (one was the head of the village). It was pitch black inside with no windows, presumably to avoid the heat from the soaring sun. I took a photo of them which revealed a bicycle, comfortable seats and a large portable silent radio, no electricity here! We joined others sitting under a tree chatting and were so pleased to see us. We had no idea that one of these young ladies had an ambition to be a teacher and that we would be funding her three year training course.



On the way back to the Convent we stopped off at the village of Tombolomba the home of Chrissie's late mother. It had got dark by then **and dark means really dark**. From out of nowhere we saw many eyes, and then faces as people appeared out of the darkness as they (somehow) knew Chrissie was here. The reunions were lovely to see.

Villages consist of mud-brick houses or mud-straw houses with either corrugated iron sheeting or grass for roofing. No running water, sanitation or electricity. The dusty ground is swept clean of leaves and debris and each house has a small plot of land for the subsistent farming. A few goats roam about and chickens scratch the undergrowth for anything tasty. In wealthier villages a cow or two and a goat or a pig may also be running around quite freely. The maize had been collected and was being stored in cane silos and this had to last them until the next harvest. In the remote villages the water has to be collected from the nearest water pump which may be a number of miles away. Women would take the journey in the early morning, when the sun was not too hot, and collect the water in 10 - 20 litre pots which they balanced on their heads for the return journey. Children would help in the collecting of firewood, from the bush, which is used for cooking on open fires. We realised just how one gets blasé about this when we didn't flinch when seeing a young lady carrying a 10 foot x 9 inch diameter tree on her head!

## Wild Life

Being in Africa we were keen to see the wild nature of Malawi. We were told of the reserve in a place to the north of Mzimba called Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve.

We walked to the bus station and boarded a mini-bus for Mzuzu. The bus was overloaded with lengths of timber slid under our feet, bags of cement in the boot and people carrying huge parcels. On the way we suddenly stopped and a number of passengers were forced off the bus and we drove off without them. A little later we came to an armed police security check-point where the drivers' papers were checked and the number of passengers counted. We thought the police were rough and over-officious which made us a bit concerned.

Arriving in Mzuzu we went to the taxi area for our journey to Vwaza wild life reserve and were spotted by a young man, a taxi driver, who offered his services. He introduced himself as and would take us to the Wildlife Reserve. On the way he told us his story of how both his parents died of Aids and he was left to care for his three siblings. This meant leaving school to work so that he could support his family. On the way, he asked if we could pick up other people and one lady joined us. Later another young man joined us. He was a bit odd in his manner and seemed to introduce an atmosphere in the car. After a few miles we were going through Rumphu village when we pulled up beside a policeman and this man was taken by the police. According to our driver he was a known criminal.



We arrived at the Vwaza site in the afternoon to an amazing location. It was a lovely wide open wild area with a huge lake with hippo's wallowing. The place was a bit run down but, to us, this was natural and perfect. There were four lodges bordering the lake, all were vacant and we were given the best. Our lodge was a typical African raised hut with a large balcony overlooking the whole reserve. Luckily it had a proper toilet - which meant we didn't have to use the traditional pit located near the entrance to the site near the viewing

area. Immediately in front of us were lots of noisy hippos in the water with only their nose and eyes showing, or standing on the margins of the lake.

A young ranger responded to our enquiries about sighting elephants and took us on our first trip to find elephants. He was dressed in an army type of uniform and carried a rifle on his shoulders. He was nervous and careful to point out that elephants could be very dangerous. That made me a bit nervous and changed our talking to whispers. He led us along a track as he searched for indications that the elephants were about and we did find a huge sign – some elephant poo! Unfortunately it was cold so we didn't see any other parts of elephants that day.



As the sun went down over the lake we sat on our balcony as the evening drew the typical sounds of birds and animals that joined the grunting and bellowing of the hippo's which filling the air with this special chorus.

The next day, the cook asked us about our evening meal. It dawned on us that we were to provide the ingredients and so a trip to the nearest shop was planned. We had to walk a few miles to the nearest village. On the way we passed over a bridge and on the muddy bank were two women doing their clothes washing which seemed a bit dodgy as crocodiles were common in these rivers. We eventually reached the village. Unfortunately we hadn't realised that the small open market opens in the early morning, before the sun makes it too hot, and the market was almost cleared and closed down. There were very few

supplies left. We did our best to ask where the nearest shop was but soon realise, by expressions and looks, that there wasn't a 'nearest shop'. We searched the remnants of the stalls and found a few handfuls of greens which Elizabeth shared with one of the more needy villagers. Our walk back demonstrated just why the market closes early, it got very hot.

Returning to the Reserve, the cook/chef looked a little surprised at our bounty but when our meal came it was delicious and well received although I can't remember what it was.

In the evening we were sitting on our balcony absorbing the views and noises of all the animals and birds when, in the distance we saw a large herd of more than 25 elephants. Led by the large male, they were on



their way to us! As they walked around the lake towards us we could make out a large number of the young some quite small and keeping close to their mum. After a little detour they came straight towards heading for us in our lodge. We were bundled out and continued our elephant watch within the security of a brick viewing platform – just in case they were spooked by us. It was a



magnificent sight. When they were almost gone I took a chance to go out of the safety of the viewing area to get a picture of them moving into the long grass. It was going fine until the large male spotted me, turned round and looked me in the eye, took one step towards me and gave a warning bellow as his ears extended horizontally. I took the hint and immediately turned tail and sought sanctuary in the viewing platform.

In spite of all this excitement with the hippo's lay we spotted a crocodile on the sandy bank by the lake snoozing as if nothing had happened. He would open his mouth as he probably had too much sun and, presumably this helped him cool down. He wasn't bothered about us.



Feeling extremely happy with our sightings we went back to our lodge and sat on the veranda and thought we were so lucky. We became aware of something heading towards us. It was a young male elephant who, being expelled from the heard by the dominant male, was following behind, at a distance. He came very close to us as he searched for fallen fruit from the tree immediately adjacent to our lodge. It was lovely to see how delicate he was in finding fallen fruit and blowing the dust off before lifting it into his mouth. That was another special moment.

Our stay came to an end the next day and our same driver arrived to take us back to Muzuzu and then on to the bus back to the convent. A fantastic few days !

### **The Thanks giving service**

Our main purpose was to attend the thanksgiving service for our friends' mother and the day came after two weeks into our visit.

The day started with the arrival of a 'taxi' for people from Mzimba. A large open truck arrived for everyone to climb into. This is the means of travel from town to the remote bush villages, and quite a shock for us. Young and old boarded and were rattled along the bumpy track for over an hour, it seemed like a hundred miles. We were lucky as we, as honoured guests, were transported in the local priest's car on a fast, scary ride through clouds of red dust from the dirt track.

On arrival, about twenty women of the 'Women of Mercy and Love' in matching purple African dresses were there to greet us with traditional singing and led us on the way to the memorial graveyard. We were led through all the houses in this small village of Zuwayumo. We were led to the house of the head of the village where we



were welcomed inside. A long walk from here into the bush brought us to the local graveyard where chairs had been put under a tree for us while others, facing us, had to endure the sun. The service, taken by both Catholic and Anglican clergy, was full of singing and swaying and many speeches from relations. We don't understand the local Tumbuka language but were caught up in the rhythm richness of their celebration of Clementina Kakota's life. People had come from miles to show their devotion to this woman some had spent hours walking to this village. Typically, one man arrived late as he had spent three days on a bus coming from South Africa - and had to walk miles to get to this particular village.

During the service I couldn't help noticing a very small grave memorial amongst all the other larger ones. We later learned that this boy had drunk 'bad water'. I got the impression that this was not uncommon.

The beautiful memorial to Chrissies mother was surrounded as many of the crowd as could be squeeze in. The priests and a rector gave the blessing – a very memorable moment.

We then followed the crowd of people back to the village where, outside under a grass canopy, a number



of fires had pots cooking a feast for all those here. Everyone was smiling on this day of celebration for Clementina's life. As visitors we were ushered into the Head Man's house and greeted by Felix and his wife. This was a small brick built building with 3 rooms and no noticeable furniture. We were directed to a very small table and the chairs and were served tea and food. They obviously didn't

have enough of the enamel plates or spoons to go round and Felix and others sat on the floor and, presumably ate later. As guests, we were treated like royalty. A cow, a goat and a sheep had been given by villages, other than the host village, for our celebration. The food was simple but delicious. We were honoured by these people and treated like royalty. I got a real sense of the poverty and hardness's they face every day, very humbling. Everyone sought the opportunity to greet us and make us feel so welcome and was a significant part of their day.



We later learned that the nearest water supply to this village was a pump over three miles away and so teams of women had to collect all the water not only for the cooking but for mixing cement in the construction of the memorial. The importance of clean water is obvious. The danger, especially to children, was emphasised with the recollection of the small grave of the infant boy who had

taken some infected water and died.

At one point Felix talked about the problems of their water situation and humbly asked if there was anything we could do. Unfortunately we had no answer to this request but the message stayed with us.

## **Lake Malawi**

Chrissie insisted that we must go to Lake Malawi. This large lake follows part of the Great Rift Valley running from the Red Sea through Ethiopia, Sudan, Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and Malawi.

We hired our driver who was a nephew of Fr. Naz and ran a garage in Muzuzu. It turned out to be a small truck with an open back. Chrissie and Elizabeth chose to sit in the back to see the views and I had to sit with the driver who stopped at each place of interest. On the way passed a couple of small settlements on the way and at one there were 5 small sheds selling refreshments for travellers.

As we travelled north we were heading into a more mountainous area where the landscape started to change. We were entering an area which had more rain than southern areas and was more fertile. We passed plantations of fir trees, areas where they had been felled and other places where small saplings were being planted and stacks of sawn timber were neatly stacked by the roadside. A little later our driver pulled over at a wooded area of a rubber plantation. We were introduced to footballs made from what looked like rubber bands and, for a nominal price, we bought two. Our next stop was a banana plantation and then we were at Lake Malawi.

This was a strange encounter. We were getting used to parched fields and dusty roads but here we saw lots of green growth and even a holiday centre, although it was enclosed with high corrugated walls apparently for the security of the holiday makers.

We parked near a restaurant on the shores and got our first glance of Lake Malawi - it looked amazing. As



time was running on we stopped to have a quick lunch where I had fish and chips – fish fresh from the lake. Our driver challenged me to a strange Malawian board game of Bao. It consisted of a board with 32 cups with two rows of three small wooden balls and two each with one ball. The aim was to capture every one of the opponents' balls. It wasn't a surprise that I was severely and humbly beaten.

There was a near-white sandy beach leading to the water which was more like a sea with the strong winds pushing the waves onto the sea shore. On the beach were three or four dug-out boats, one other boat was out fishing in the middle of the lake. Further down the beach two groups of people were on chairs absorbing the sun, presumably they were from the holiday complex. We passed a group of five men who were sorting out their nets and were happy to have a chat with us about the fish and their fishing. Further along the beach we came across some small yachts by three large huts which probably belonged to the holiday complex. Nearby were two happy young men who gave us great smiles and a very warm welcome.



Night time comes very early and quickly so we had to leave this lovely place and return.

## **Farewell**

Our last days came quickly. The sisters at our final farewell send at the MIS Missionary gave us a special meal with a line of novice sisters carrying a cake and singing "we'll be sad to see you go". We were treated so well and really felt comfortable during our stay.



We travelled up to Lilongwe to say our goodbyes to Steve, Deliwe and their family, then on to where Chrissie had arranged an overnight stay at The Poor Clair's Convent. This is a closed order so any communication would be at the front desk. We were taken through a door to a picturesque closed garden to our accommodation. The next day we said our farewells. The sisters

explained that their sewing machine was broken and needed a new part and wondered if we could have one sent from England which we were happy to do.

We attended a Mass in a spectacular church with lots of African music and movement .It was quite dark inside with small windows and lots of African music, singing and swaying. An amazing experience. After Mass we walked past an annex to the church with plain red bricks and a small room. The sound of singing made us stop and listen. It was something very special. Inside were a number of poorly dressed people making this amazing sound.

After this we went back to Steve and Deliwe's house in Lilongwe to say our goodbyes. His whole family, brothers and sisters were there to say their farewells.

We were soon at the airport and on our way. As we looked down on from the plane as we left Malawi we could clearly see the amount of burning maize stubble, a practice which the authorities are trying to curb by championing the ploughing stubble back into the land. The journey back took quite some time as our linked flight was late for our changeover at Addis Ababa airport in Ethiopia. We arrived safely at Heathrow and caught the bus back to Bristol. I can't recollect how we managed to get to our home but we were tired but very happy with our adventure

### **Reflections, action and futures**

Our holiday and the people we met, the things we did, the things we saw and the needs of the people stayed with us. The gentle request for help to get clean water stayed with us. We decided to do what we could to get clean water to Zuwayumo. We thoroughly researched how to go about it. The charity Water Aid had too many committed projects in Africa and couldn't do anything for us. However, they did give useful information which spurred us on. We were determined that we could do it and so the project was under way. Our project support came from Chrissie, Father Naz and even a potential Malawian contractor so we understood what we needed and the cost of plant, material and labour.

We researched how to go about it contacting various people. We certainly needed to raise funds and from September 2011 our first donation of £50 from our youngest daughter gave us the impetus to actually do it! We publicised our mission to provide safe water for Zuwayumo and personal donations started to come in. We registered the project as a charity, publicised the project which was now under way. Now the fundraising for the next phase was under way. We arranged a Gourmet meal evening to kick-start the funds. Donations and support came from many sources - private donations, special collections at OLQA, social events and the Crook Peak Parishes' Outreach programme with very generous annual donations. By May 2011 we had just about enough funds to engage the contractor for the first phase.

The drilling started but there were a number of issues to overcome. The first borehole did not have sufficient water and, with the help from Fr Naz we engaged Mr Chuma (WMA) to independently locate and supervise another more reliable and sustainable source. A new location was found and drilling for a new borehole began just as the border from Mozambique was closed because of



Malawi's massive outstanding debt. The resulting shortage of diesel fuel hit Malawi and stopped the work leaving the workforce stranded and unable to continue. Eventually the border was opened and the new borehole and pump



were finished in September 2011 with a number of villagers being trained in pump maintenance. A washing area for clothes was added later.



Ploughing with Plough and Oxen



Delivery of Maize Seed



The three mile walk for water



Fitting the Handle on the New Pump



Priming the Pump



Enthusiastic Pumping



...and now just a short walk home...

We have, and will continue to help the people in this area to have a more secure harvest and opportunities by supplying essentials to make life easier and fulfilling for the whole community.

A significant problem is the reliability of the weather and the impact on crops. Our major contributions have been to supply maize and fertiliser, when necessary, to ensure harvests will sustain the villagers. This is the first year that they have been able to give their excess to neighbours in need.



Head Man – Felix and wife

We have been very fortunate in having had the support from so many people which has enabled us to ::

- Provide maize seed
- Provide fertiliser
- Provide carpenters tools for one man to set up a business
- Provide a cart and oxen – for transport and working the land
- Provide goats
- Provide medicines
- Provide a bicycle for transport
- Provide two wheel Chairs
- Support in building a house for one invalid lady who takes in orphans
- Supported one lady for teacher training
- Supported one man to study agriculture methods at Lilongue University (Daniel Moyo) and provided an old lap-top
- Provide solar panels and converter to charge batteries
- Provide one phone for the village
- Provide medicines
- Provide PPI equipment.

Unfortunately, Zedi Nyirenda who, over the years gave us much help and support has succumbed to the Covid virus. He was a special person in Chrissies life and will be sadly missed.