

A Church is Born in Africa



In Africa you can gather people around God's word literally anywhere

I have left both shoe leather and sweat on the streets of suburban subdivisions and communist-built housing blocks. I have offered Tennis Camps, Renaissance Faires, Bible giveaways and free English lessons to attract my busy neighbors' attention. It is no small task to establish a new church in either a home or a world mission setting. But God's promises still encourage church planters today: "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Cor. 15:58)

For the last nine months the members of Chikulupiriro (Faith) Lutheran Church in Lilongwe, Malawi have been conducting worship services in the village of Saera, about 18 miles away. It's a thirty minute rumble over rocky roads by car - but the lay evangelist usually travels by bicycle, after working all night long. The pastor makes the trip every other month by motorcycle, which is much easier to get unstuck from the mud than a car once the rains begin.

Some WELS Home Missions begin their existence in a member's home or in a school cafeteria. When the Lutherans roll into Saera, they set up shop under the shadiest trees and the children come running. Judging from their

excitement, you'd think that Martians had landed. Some WELS Home Missions offer outdoor Easter services in a park or on the beach, but I wonder how many of them have been graced by the presence of goats, pigs and chickens?



Everyone is welcome to visit worship services in the village

Some WELS Home Missions are blessed with a keyboardist or a computer that plays digital hymns through a P.A. system. The worshippers in Saera hear the evangelist's singing and preaching via a battery-powered bullhorn. WELS members of a mission church are well acquainted with "Lutheran exercises" - working up a sweat before the service setting up chairs, chancel furniture and tables, and then taking it all down afterwards. Worshippers in an African village church find their spots on benches, stumps or the ground, the sweat running off their faces induced by the sun.



The first order of business is setting up the chancel area

There is no budget for mass mailings or targeted ads on social media. Word of mouth is the LCCA Malawi's primary method of outreach in new areas, supported by Bible tracts and the occasional visit by the talented student choir of the Lutheran Bible Institute (LBI). New preaching stations are always the result of a personal connection with a member of the LCCA. Saera is the home village of a current LBI student. Once the connection is established, the supervising pastor identifies a local man who can serve as the congregation's chairman and begins preparing him to conduct the worship service. It is also important to establish a solid connection with the local authorities, who in African villages are hereditary chiefs. On the day I visited Saera there were 3 chiefs in attendance at our worship service.



The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these (Mt. 19:14)

In remote places like Saera there is a greater hunger for the Gospel than in the busy urban centers. Nonetheless, even in a sleepy village the devil is active and is working hard to distract people from the one thing needed. The pastor is seeking permission to put up a grass structure on the outskirts of the village, in order to put some distance between his flock and the occasional Sunday drunks. The villagers are poor, primarily surviving off of what they can grow, and they have large families with many mouths to feed. The total offering taken on the day of my visit was just under \$5, half of it given by me. Few of the people are educated beyond primary school, and Bible teaching proceeds slowly. The pastor and evangelist must patiently instruct people about the differences between the true teachings of the Bible and the false teachings of other church groups.



In town or in the village, the focus of worship is Christ

A total of 82 people attended worship that Sunday in Saera.

In spite of the many logistical and spiritual challenges, the Holy Spirit is blessing this outreach effort which is being conducted entirely by our local partners. Once the Gospel seeds have been scattered, they sprout and grow by the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit without our direct observation (see Mark 4:26-27). What a privilege it is to witness the zeal of these church planters in Malawi!

*Missionary John Roebke lives in Malawi and is the
Communications Director for One Africa Team*

Please

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about our mission fields in Africa and how the Holy Spirit is working faith in
people's hearts <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/africa>*