

Hills to Conquer

Oh, the *hills*. How striking they were as Howie Mohlke, his wife Leslie, and I drove east from Lilongwe, Malawi down toward Lake Malawi.

So were the sloping tea fields and the hills and valleys in the Sondu area of western Kenya when I saw them a few weeks later with Anariko Onunda: stunning.



Tea fields span the slopes in Western Kenya for miles

Why tell you about hills?

From Flatlander to Hill Runner

For years I was a flatlander. I had not lived among hills since I was a vicar in Marietta, Georgia (1990-1991), whether our family was in Illinois (1992-2001),

Florida (2001–2015), or Minnesota (2015–2019).

Since December 2019, though, my wife and I have lived in Lusaka, Zambia, 4,200 feet above sea level. For exercise, I run hills.

I recently picked up my new U.S. passport from the U.S. embassy here in Lusaka. The complex sits atop one of Lusaka's tallest hills. On many runs I look for it, gleaming in the morning sun.



the United States embassy in Lusaka

Lusaka's hilltop embassy makes me think of friends and family I miss in the States, as much as I enjoy serving the Lord and you here in Africa.

True Stories, Well Told

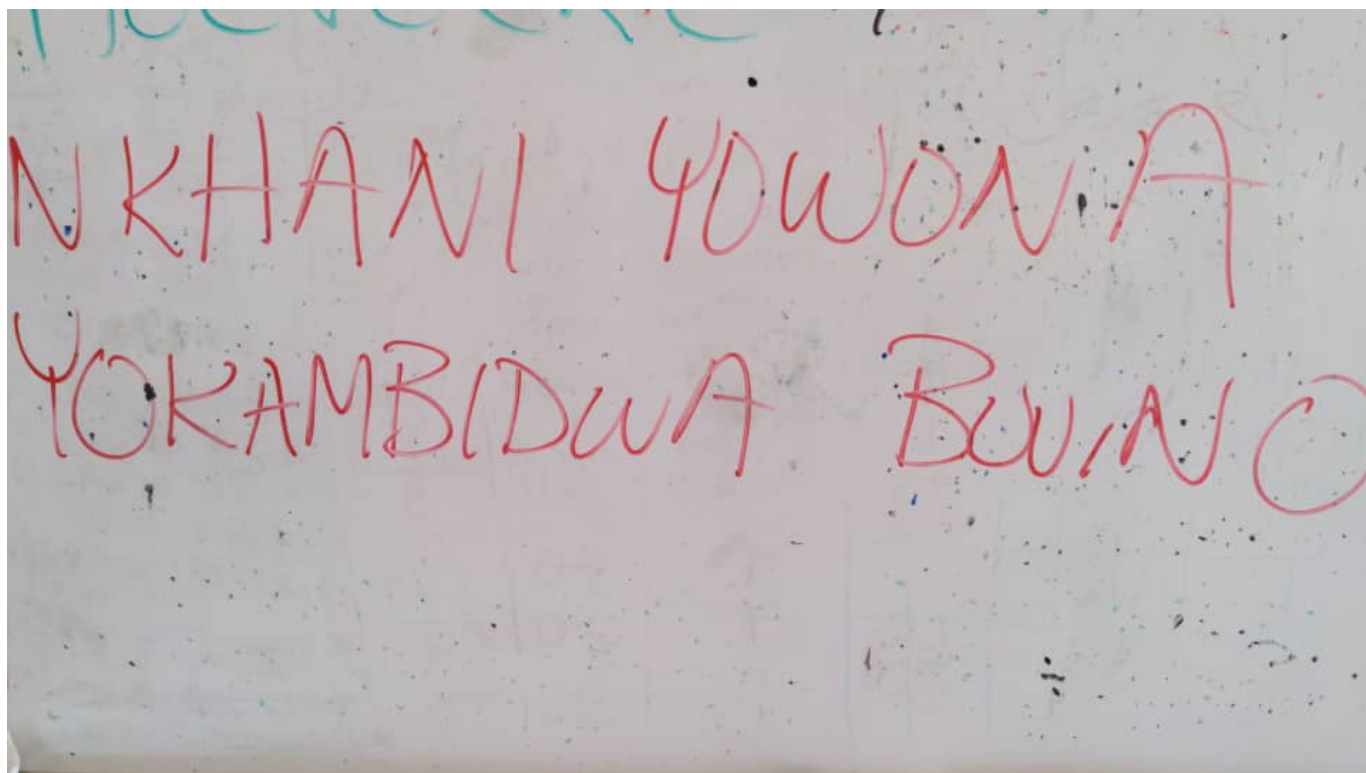
September 20–29 I had the privilege of traveling from Lusaka to Malawi. There I met with six pastors of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa – Malawi Synod. Pastors Chumba, Macharenga, Mandevu, Mitengo, Mukhweya, Mulinga, and I studied African church history biography together as part of their formal continuing education.



Malawian pastors enrolled in the BDiv program

Since that week, each Malawian pastor in the course has sent me a story suitable for a 7-12-year-old, a story about a figure in Malawian church history.

In part, those projects are to help that pastor's own family and congregation. In part, they are to help pastors in other countries in our Bachelor of Divinity (BDiv) cohort—pastors in Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia. And in part, all the pastors' efforts to research and communicate "true stories, well told" (our motto for the week) about fascinating figures in their country's church history are to help *me*.



The translation is, "true stories, well told"

Receiving the Crown of Life

It is not just that I am new to African, as well as African church history. More importantly, stories about important believers from different parts of Africa, once we collect and distribute them all to all our BDiv brothers, will allow them to teach each other about real-life faith and love.

Due to Covid-19 related issues, the twenty pastors in our cohort have not been able to meet yet face to face, though we began classes over a year ago. Pray with me that face-to-face classes for us all begin in 2022.

Back then to true stories, well told. Such stories not only have the potential to *build up* brotherhood, by God the Spirit's power. They can *break down* super-tall hills, hills which so easily divide those whom God wants united: hills like time, distance, and cultural misunderstandings. These are stories where brothers can see trials our Father has sent in the past. These stories can connect us to believers in distant places and times.

Be faithful, even to the point of death,” good stories remind us—stories like those of some of Africa’s first martyrs for Christ, Perpetua, and Felicity, remind us. In our classes, we watched a video about them. “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Jesus promises this to persecuted believers in ancient Smyrna and to us too.

Across the Rift

October 8-18 I traveled to Kenya to teach my BDiv level course. In both Malawi and Kenya, the pastors and I did not just talk history. We also discussed being faithful today, even to the point of death. We conferred about the confirmation classes which the pastors supervise and teach, and the steep hills young people climb as they learn to follow Christ.

dedication of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in Kindu

One difference between the church history biography course in Malawi and the one in Kenya was that on October 10, before the class in Kenya started, I had the honor of preaching in Kenya for the consecration of the new building of St. Peter Lutheran Church in Ramba parish, served by Pastor Samwel Omondi. He translated my sermon from English into Luo. It was a joyful Christ-centered service, complete with the Lord’s Supper.



LC-MC Kenya Leader Rev. Mark Onunda and OAT Missionary Dan Witte distribute communion to members of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Kindu, Western Kenya

It was my first trip to Kenya, so I had much to learn. The pastors and I met in the shade of the center brick-and-grass open-air hut.



L-R: Pastors Mark Onunda, Owidi Osome, Dan Witte, Samwel Omondi, Richard Amayo

After the week's class, Pastor Onunda drove me back up to Nairobi, a city even higher in elevation than Lusaka, and three times bigger.

On October 17 Pastor Onunda introduced me to part of his city congregation, a much smaller group than the rural congregation the previous Sunday. In Nairobi some Christians Pastor Onunda serves are starting to meet separately as a daughter congregation. Elders were leading the service of that new congregation the morning I visited.



The Great Rift Valley of Africa

The King of the Hill

Such outreach efforts, even for an experienced pastor, get bumpy. Make that *hilly*. Sometimes we all feel as if we are barely able to put one foot in front of another, trudging uphill. Demons, this dying world, even our own deadly flesh whisper “give up” when hilly slopes get steeper.

But our Lord said, “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14). That’s true of both Nairobi and wherever you gather with other believers for word and sacrament. Someday even the mightiest mountains will fall. But not God’s promises of mercy to us in Christ crucified.



Kenya's Mt. Kilimanjaro is the tallest mountain in Africa

Jesus lives. We have been baptized into him.

"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you (Isaiah 54:10).

Missionary Dan Witte lives in Lusaka

Please pray for those working in fields that are ripe for harvest. Share their story, engage with future news and receive updates. Learn more about our mission fields in Africa and how the Holy Spirit is working faith in people's hearts at <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/africa>