

Kingdom Workers in Malawi



L-R: Dan, Milo, Juniper, Liana, Solomon

The 1987 WELS Synod Convention encouraged the establishing of a lay organization to support home and world missions. The organization, now called “Kingdom Workers” (www.kingdomworkers.com) has been involved with Africa missions for a long time. Among the first projects associated with Kingdom Workers was supporting a full-time lay couple to assist the WELS mission in Zambia, Africa. In 2010 former WELS World Missionary Bill Meier became the national executive director of Kingdom Workers. Currently, Kingdom Workers partners with the Lutheran Church of Central Africa - Malawi Synod congregations to include people

with disabilities in church and community life. This week's post features Kingdom Workers staff members Dan and Liana Tyrrell, who manage and train local staff and volunteers, as well as coordinate short-term mission trips by WELS members to Malawi. Listen to Dan and Liana tell their story:

Although we had met briefly several years earlier, our relationship started once we were both living in Shanghai, China. Dan had been living in China for three years when Liana first arrived in Shanghai. Liana had grown up on the WELS mission field in Taiwan so had some experience in that part of the world as well. We were working as part of a team, teaching English, building relationships with Chinese friends, and studying the Bible in the evenings and on weekends. Our relationship grew in part out of a mutual love for the work we were doing, and for China in general - especially its people and food, and for travel.

After returning from China in 2014, we settled in Minneapolis for a year. When the opening to work with Kingdom Workers Malawi appeared, Liana applied since she was the one with a background in non-profit work and some community development experience in Kenya during her college days. We were not planning on going abroad again so soon after returning from China, however after conversations with Bill Meier and other Kingdom Workers leaders, we felt that God was leading us in the direction of Malawi. Once it became clear that both of us could use our gifts in positions with Kingdom Workers in Malawi, we made the decision to move after prayer and discussions with family.

We Plan, God Laughs

When we initially accepted positions with Kingdom Workers and began plans to move to Malawi, we had the usual things to take care of that a young couple might. Giving notice at our jobs, selling some possessions and putting some in storage, alerting our landlord that we would not renew our lease, spending extra time with family. These things were going smoothly, and we planned to move to Malawi in September of 2015. However, about one month before our departure date, God gave us what has been the biggest surprise of our lives so far. We found out that Liana was pregnant, and at our very first ultrasound discovered not one, but three beating hearts - triplets. The next weeks were a blur of shock, joy, uncertainty, and

specialist appointments. After meeting with the specialist, we decided to keep the same departure date, but return to the US in a few months' time for the remainder of the pregnancy, birth, and subsequent hospital stay.



Triplets!

Leaving Malawi after only being there for a few months was difficult. We had no idea how long we would be gone. We had been given a due date but triplets are rarely born full term. Just how early they would be born was out of our control, and so was how long they would be in the hospital after birth. We did not even know if a return would be possible at all - it was a very real possibility that one or more of our children would be born with medical needs that would prohibit an international move.

What followed was a period of giving up - giving up our plans, giving up stability, giving up ideas of a "perfect" pregnancy and birth story - giving up control, or the illusion of control. Giving those things up and realizing that they were never ours to begin with. All that we had - jobs, precious new lives inside Liana, a future in a new home - was all God's in the first place. We also had to give up, in some ways, the plans that we had formed for where we thought the ministry in Malawi could go. In the short time we had been working for Kingdom Workers, we had learned about the amazing work being done to serve people with disabilities. We had gotten a chance to see the intense need for this work and see how far it still had (and has!) to go. We had met dedicated pastors and volunteers and staff, and we wanted to help set the direction and make a strategic plan. But, this period of being away and working remotely forced us to see that we were not the drivers of this ministry. First and foremost, God was and is. He is going to take care of His lambs in Malawi whether

we are involved or not. Just as we were being blessed with three new lives to take care of, God had also blessed us with the opportunity to be involved in this ministry in Malawi. It is His ministry, not ours. And our first task was not to come in, take charge and make changes. It was to listen, to learn, to get to know the leaders on the ground who had been doing this work before us. And what God showed us was that the physical distance between us and Malawi that was created as a result of Liana's pregnancy was perhaps what we needed to truly listen and learn. Dan was still able to be very involved through the miracle of technology, but our physical absence meant that local volunteers and leaders were able to build the foundations of ownership of the Disability Ministry. That ownership is the key to making this ministry sustainable - not our presence!



Juniper, Milo, and Solomon

Looking back, Liana's pregnancy was a humbling time. A time to realize God is the

Director, not us. And a time to be humbled by the amount of prayer and support we received from all over the world. From family and friends in the US, from those in our former home of China, and from our new home in Malawi. Our babies were born 11 weeks early and spent about three months in the hospital. When they were 6 months old, we were cleared by their doctors to return with them to Malawi. And if you're reading this and wondering what a cross-continental flight (or two) is like with infant triplets, I will just say that we have learned it is much easier than a cross-continental flight with *toddler* triplets.

The Least of My Brothers and Sisters

Kingdom Workers mobilizes Christians to connect people to Jesus while addressing physical needs. The disability ministry in Malawi began in 2012 when former KW Field Manager Stefan Felgenhauer recognized that some people with disabilities were hidden in homes and not part of church or community life. Stefan began working with Jesus Cares Ministries to bring Worship at the Cross (worship designed for people with intellectual disabilities) to Malawi. A small group of Lutheran Pastors were willing to try to reach out to people with disabilities although they knew this would be very challenging in their communities. The Pastors organized volunteers from their church, met with village leaders, and started holding special worship services. It took time, and encouragement from God's Word, for the volunteers to begin to actually interact and touch the people they were serving. Stigma which came from false beliefs about the causes of disabilities and had taken root in the communities took time to overcome.



Training parents to do physical therapy with their children is important to destigmatize the disabled in the community

The home-based care portion of the program began in 2015. Giving the volunteers tools to help children practice and learn new skills at home was a big turning point for the volunteers and program. Home-based care is also right in line with KW's vision to partner in sustainable ways to address physical needs. In 2017, the LCCA leaders encouraged our KW Malawi team to focus our efforts on improving and expanding the disability ministry. Now, we are actively working with 12 disability outreach teams who serve over 500 people. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, people have been baptized and confirmed. Parents have been encouraged and shown ways to continue to help their children develop.



Watch a brief video about Kingdom Workers disability ministry here:
<https://player.vimeo.com/video/241564772>

Although we were both hired for full time positions, after the triplets were born we decided that Liana would work part time and Dan would remain full time. We do our best to give Liana a day outside of the home to work from the KW Malawi office, but she is often seen sneaking into our home office to work remotely while our housekeeper, Esther, watches the kids. We have found that the key for Liana working during this season of life is to be realistic and honest about which tasks she can take on, while still taking care of 2-year-old triplets. We make it work in a large part thanks to Esther, who the children love, and to KW as an organization and allowing us to have flexible schedules!

Our roles with KW are indefinite and but our roles may change as we see developments in Malawi programs, in local leadership, and in other opportunities to serve. We will have to see how the Lord blesses and leads these outreach programs.



L-R: Dan Tyrrell, Davie Duwe, Tendai Lusio, Allena Chaima

The work we are a part of would not be possible without our local team. Dave Duwe (Disability Outreach Coordinator), Tendai Lucio (Field Assistant), and Allena Chaima (Field Assistant) are all doing their best to support disability outreach teams. Our KW Malawi team would like to continue improving the support we provide to disability outreach teams and work with more LCCA churches throughout Malawi. We are working with about 10% of LCCA congregations right now in Malawi. More congregations would like to partner with us so we hope to increase this percentage significantly in the next few years. We are seeing our Malawian staff continue to take up more responsibilities in Malawi and we are encouraging this.



A typical short-term mission trip lasts one week

Kingdom Workers is supported by individual WELS members. Donated bicycles help volunteers visit homes to provide devotions and physical care. Donors also support the cost for training workshops, visits from our staff, and materials for disability outreach teams. You can also visit us in Malawi! We regularly offer service learning opportunities for mutual encouragement to take place. Find out more at www.kingdomworkers.com or contact the Kingdom Workers office directly at 414-771-6848.





Malawi is a country of incredible physical beauty, and its people are kind and welcoming. Its challenges are many, also - from damaging colonial policies that still affect the economy, to corruption in government, to many people living below the poverty line. Our encouragement to anyone who comes to Malawi or who is thinking about coming here is to take the time to listen to and encourage our fellow Christians here. It is easy to think we can enact change in a short amount of time, but the reality is change comes through building relationships and trust- and those things take time! And most importantly, change is not brought about by us or by our Malawian brothers and sisters - but by God.

Dan and Liana Tyrrell live in Blantyre, Malawi

Please pray for those working in fields that are ripe for harvest. Share their story, engage with future news and receive updates. Go to this link to learn more 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>

Editor's Note: Last summer I had the privilege of traveling to Malawi to observe the work being done through the Disability Ministry. Every volunteer I meet was

absolutely thrilled to be sharing the Gospel through their service to those with disabilities. Pray that their work might continue, and that their service to others might spread the love of Jesus to even more people.