

Manna from Heaven



Malawian Lutherans meet at church every Sunday to dine on the riches of God's Word

It's Sunday morning. You wake up and get yourself dressed and ready to go to church, just like you do every Sunday. You arrive at church and quickly get caught up in a conversation about your favorite football team's chances of winning the Super Bowl this season. The bell starts ringing and you quickly slip into the fourth pew from the front on the left side, where you always sit next to Mr. & Mrs. Keaton, the delightful retired couple from Michigan. The quiet rumble of friendly chit chat immediately ceases when the organist introduces the first hymn...and then you notice that the pastor's chair is empty.

Have you ever been to a church service without a pastor? Maybe your pastor is on vacation and has left an elder in charge of conducting worship. Maybe your pastor has taken a call to another congregation and you're in the process of calling a new one. Maybe your congregation shares your pastor with another congregation, and you listen to his sermons online.

It is possible to worship God at church without a pastor in the pulpit. But what if there's no sermon? What if the person leading worship is unable to present an encouraging message from God's Word to you? Even if every hymn that day is one of your favorites, and the choir's anthem echoes the praises in heaven, and you hear the lessons and the Psalm read with dignity and clarity, you'll come away from church that Sunday still hungry, as if you'd just finished a vegetarian Thanksgiving dinner. The sermon is the part of the service you look forward to most.



Lay volunteers conduct worship in 75% of the congregations of the LCCA on Sundays

On any Sunday in the LCCA Malawi, an ordained pastor serves at worship in only a quarter of the congregations, and laymen lead worship in all the rest. Although the LCCA is diligently training new church workers, there are only so many pastors that the church body can support. Many pastors serve parish unions of four or more congregations. These congregations pool their limited financial resources to pay the pastor's salary. These parish unions would dissolve without lay leaders conducting worship on the Sundays when their pastors are serving elsewhere.

Lay worship leaders are spiritually mature men with a good

name in their local community, but most of them live in remote areas and are not well educated. To ensure that church members are being spiritually fed with the pure word of God, the LCCA has relied on books of sermons that the lay leaders can read during worship. The sermons were written by American missionaries, translated into the local languages and then edited by an American missionary responsible for overseeing the publications program.



Malawian choirs are a favorite part of the worship service

But the multitude of new opportunities for outreach are driving OAT missionaries to reexamine their mission strategy in Africa, and to engage their local partners in much different ways. There is no longer one missionary dedicated to publications work in Malawi. Instead, one missionary is responsible for facilitating publications work across the entire continent, working closely together with local pastors and publications committees to produce the materials they need the most.

In Malawi, a national pastor oversees the production of new sermon books. This pastor sets up a schedule and assigns sermon texts to other Malawian pastors, who are able to write sermons in their native tongue and to include examples from everyday life. The Malawian pastors produce sermons that flow much more naturally than anything an American outsider could ever write. It is somewhat of a challenge to collect and compile the sermons, since most LCCA pastors do not make regular use of email or internet in their homes. Still, under this new system the LCCA has published

five volumes of sermon books so far, and the plan is to keep producing new books once a quarter in two of the languages spoken in Malawi.



Malawian pastors are writing and editing sermon books for their church body. In the West, we are drowning in a daily deluge of downloads and data. It's hard for us to imagine the life of a Malawian villager, who might listen to the radio every once in awhile but otherwise has little connection to the outside world. For that Malawian villager, attending church on a Sunday morning to sing hymns, to sway with the choir, and to hear a Gospel-centered sermon on Sunday is the highlight of the week, the place where he may "eat what is good, and delight in the richest of fare" (Isaiah 55:2).

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Please

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people's hearts <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/africa>*