

No Expectations



Paul, Susan and Henry Nitz in 1995 in the city of Mzuzu, Malawi

Go in without expectations. That's a maxim I've found useful when I've had to cross cultures. Many years ago as a seminary graduate, I moved to Malawi to serve as a missionary. I tried to go in "empty", but it wasn't easy to do.

It is difficult to go into a new place "empty" of expectations. People often want to find out everything they can so that they feel prepared. After graduating from seminary, it took five long months to wait for a visa so that we could move to Malawi. I suppose I should have studied up on Malawi, gotten a head start on learning language, and talked to many people to get advice. I didn't. Someone had told me not to build up expectations in your mind before moving to a new place. They said that was a sure way to make the culture shock be worse.

So I went in empty and uninformed. I learned what Malawians were like by talking to Malawians. I figured out what it took to live in the country by living in it. I learned the language by using it. That worked well for me. But in spite of my best

efforts to be entirely empty going in, there was one expectation that I had built up in my mind. I had the picture in my mind that our WELS mission was huge in Malawi. What I found was that there were many, many large Christian churches already well established in Malawi. I was feeling disappointed. Did we need to be here?



Hauling sand for church building projects in Mzuzu - 1995

But my attitude changed when I started learning the local language. I walked around the neighborhood and used what I knew, adding a new phrase or two every day. After a few months, I had gotten to the point of asking things much more complicated than, Muli bwanji? [How are you?]. I was going around asking things like "If King David in the Bible was a murderer, then how do you think he got to heaven?" Through thousands of conversations with Malawians, I became very happy that I had been sent as a missionary to Malawi. I found that no one I talked to (even the churchgoers) had actually heard the gospel.

I started to serve our Lutheran churches once I knew enough Chichewa. I found that so many people were hearing the gospel for the first time. During my ten years preaching in churches, not a week went by when I did not see that eureka of the gospel in an adult's eyes. A few times I literally saw tears of joyous amazement over the grace of God in Christ. And then there were over one thousand babies I brought the gospel to through baptism.



Church at Mzimba, Malawi - 1995

After those ten years, I began teaching at the ministerial school. I've had the blessing of teaching dozens of men who are now pastors or will be pastors. They are now going out and seeing the eureka of the gospel, baptizing, preaching, teaching, and giving the comfort of the Lord's Supper.



Celebrating Erin Nitz's confirmation at Crown of Life Lutheran in Lilongwe - 2009

In the past four years, I've also been blessed to lead our team of Africa missionaries. Our focus is on building up the 125+ African pastors in our sister synods in Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Cameroon, Malawi, and Zambia. We offer advanced classes and workshops and we also still support the training of new pastors. On top of this, we're finding new places to bring the gospel. There are groups of pastors and their congregations that have called us in to teach the Word in countries like Liberia, Rwanda, and Uganda.

It's been a wonderful blessing to be a missionary in Africa. It has exceeded expectations! Now we'll be moving. My new job will be to support all our world missions worldwide as a missionary advisor. We'll be living in the United States again. After 27 years away, that's almost a foreign country to us.



The faculty of the Lutheran Bible Institute in Lilongwe, Malawi - 2020

I'm already trying my best to go in empty, without expectations. I know the USA and culture has changed hugely since 1993. We've had a dozen long visits back to the USA and seen some of it, but we haven't lived in it. It will be a big adjustment, but one we trust God will bless. We will try not to build up certain expectations about how people act, what traffic is like, or how great the pizza is. We'll wait, and live it, and learn it as it comes. But we do have one big expectation. We expect we'll

keep on being surprised by grace in our own lives and seeing how powerful and effective his Word is in the lives of others around the world.

Paul D. Nitz will continue to serve WELS World Missions as the One Team Counselor

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>