

The Gospel Keeps Moving Forward



Getting around Malawi in the rainy season is challenging no matter what mode of transportation you use

You can't believe how bad the roads are in Malawi during the rainy season until you drive them yourself.

My first attempt to deliver books to Pastor Chumba was a fiasco. I have no one to blame but myself. My first mistake was to drive alone. With only Google maps to guide me, I lost my way near the town of Migowi. I turned onto the first eastbound road, unpaved like the majority of roads in rural Malawi. I soon met up with a trio of women warning me about “matope, matope” (mud). The fields on either side of the narrow track were waterlogged, so how was I supposed to execute a Y-turn? I kept moving forward.

My Toyota Prado is equipped with four-wheel drive, but even in low gear it handles like an elephant on ice skates. I turned the steering

wheel hard left, but the car kept sliding towards the right-hand side of the road. My all-weather, steel-belted radial tires became muddy donuts – skis would have been more useful. I knew I was going to get stuck, and then I buried my car up to the axles.

Due to Malawi's high population density, there are farmers everywhere working in their fields by the side of the road. They pushed my car about twenty feet forward in the ditch, but I was unable to climb back up onto the steeply banked road. My new friends had me back up, they dug out the soft silt in front of my wheels with their hoes, and then pushed me out of my sticky trap. This victory of man over nature was celebrated with shrieks of *ululation* (if you don't know what that is, [click here](#)) and payment of the equivalent of \$15 USD. I kept moving forward – but not for long. The road narrowed, the ditches deepened, and the creek washed away half the road. I was stuck between a rift and a wet place. I chose the water, knowing I was going to require help to continue my trip. Sure enough, the locals came to the rescue again with hoes, rocks and bricks. Twenty minutes and \$15 later I was moving forward again.



Pastor George Chumba faithfully serves four congregations in his parish union with

the Means of Grace

I picked up a local school teacher who wanted to hear me preach. I don't preach in the pulpits of the LCCA but I did use the opportunity to encourage him in his work and to give him a Bible. I didn't take in his comment about "crossing the river" until the road we were following abruptly ended at the banks of a swiftly running stream. I should have checked Google maps' satellite view - or even better, checked with the local pastor. My passenger showed me an alternate route to a paved road, which I reached just before the skies tore open above us.

Second Attempt

Two weeks later I made my second attempt to deliver books to Pastor Chumba. I met him in Migowi so that he could direct me personally. I also took the venerable Toyota Landcruiser, a vehicle which truly lives up to its name. Overcast skies let loose once we arrived at Namikundi church. The boxes in the truck bed were soaked, but the books inside were safely sealed in plastic. I witnessed the comforting power of the Gospel as a dozen children were baptized, and Pastor Chumba and I distributed Holy Communion to the members. In spite of human limitations, the Gospel keeps moving forward!



“Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies.” Psalm 8:2

I took advantage of a break in the rain to drive Pastor Chumba back to his home village, using a dirt road shortcut. I saw the tracks of cars that had slid into the ditch and said a silent prayer of thanks to God. However, while we were visiting at Pastor’s house the second round of heavy showers passed through the region. I emerged from his home to discover an inch of sticky goo covering the yard where my vehicle was parked. I will never forget the drive home. Farmers dug canals to drain their flooded fields, shunting the water onto the road. I saw people pushing their bicycles along the road calf-deep in water, so I knew it was safe for me to pass. I saw streams turned into raging rivers. In Malawi, a “bridge” is often a concrete half-pipe that you use to drive through running water. The rain provided economic opportunity. At a larger stream, flooding had washed away part of the road leading up to the bridge, but an enterprising local man had already filled the gap with bricks and rocks and was collecting a toll from everyone who wanted to pass. I paid, but only after I successfully made it to the other side.



The Sunday school of Namikundi Lutheran Church

I came up behind a truck making deliveries to a local trading center, totally blocking the one-car wide road. It took a few minutes of grinding gears for it to get moving again. I took a wrong turn and ended up in the uncharted regions of Google maps, but the locals kept me pointed in the right direction. I passed through muddy stretches that would have stopped the Prado in its tracks, but the Landcruiser's knobby tires kept churning on. Finally, I caught sight of the paved road – what joy! It took me two and a half hours to get there from Pastor Chumba's house – a distance of about 13 miles.

Takeaways

As I write this it has been raining non-stop for three days, due to tropical depression Desmond parked in the Mozambique channel. During the rainy season, travel by car to rural areas is almost impossible. Some LCCA pastors have access to motorcycles which they can push through muddy stretches. Many pastors like Pastor Chumba use bicycles. When he makes the monthly trip to Namikundi he gets home around 5 p.m. WELS is helping the LCCA by providing funds to purchase motorcycles for pastors serving in remote areas.



The book, “Bible Stories in Pictures” depicts the entire Bible through illustrations in comic book style

Distributing literature to the congregations of the LCCA is a difficult nut to crack, but people are extremely grateful to receive the materials. In rural Malawi, people have no access to bookstores, television or the internet so any printed materials are welcome. Unfortunately, groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses are flooding the country with high quality printed materials. It is vitally important that WELS, through Multi-Language Publications, continues to assist with the production and distribution of Biblically faithful, Gospel-centered tracts, newsletters, sermons and books here in Malawi and elsewhere in Africa.

The Gospel always keeps moving forward!

Missionary John Roebke

lives in Malawi and serves as the Communications Manager for One Africa Team

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>