

# The Lord's Time for Mozambique



*“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.” (Acts 16:6) For 50 years the Spirit has kept WELS from entering Mozambique. We believe and pray that God is now calling us to this ripe mission field. Listen to our story...*

## **The First Look at Mozambique**

In 1962 Central Africa was still under the colonial administration of the British government. WELS missionaries had established a presence in the country of what was then called Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). There had been a major shakeup of the mission staff, but a solid foundation was set in place and growth was steady. Missionaries Robert Sawall and William Scheppe were serving at the Mwembezi Mission, while Theodore ‘Tate’ Sauer, E.H. Wendland, Richard Mueller, and Raymond Cox were located in Lusaka.



L-R: W. Schweppe, R. Cox, E. H. Wendland, R Sawall, R. W. Mueller and T. Sauer

In that year, representatives of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) visited WELS Missionaries living in Lusaka. The delegation was on its way to Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique) to explore the possibilities for mission work. After their visit they stopped again in Lusaka, convinced that Portuguese East Africa was “ripe for the harvest.” However, they told the WELS missionaries, “You are next door and are in a much better position to start work there rather than us.”

At the same time missionaries were exploring other areas to expand the work, notably the Copperbelt area of Zambia, as well as neighboring Nyasaland (Malawi). Missionaries Richard Mueller and Raymond Cox recommended that WELS enter Malawi with all haste. Plans to enter Mozambique were ‘temporarily’ put on hold. Mueller and Cox were called to Malawi in June 1963 and the Lord blessed that decision in ways no one could have foreseen. Today there are over 40,000 members of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa - Malawi Synod.

### **Second Chance**

In 1968 there was a “bump” in the road to our work in Malawi. The Malawi missionaries were told by the Office of the President of Malawi, “Your church cannot expand into any new areas without the consent of the President.” To engender good

relations with the government of Malawi, in 1971 WELS began operating the Lutheran Mobile Clinic in the Salima area where access to medical care was severely limited. Miss Edith Schneider (now Mrs. E. Hintz) was the first nurse.



An abandoned tank from Mozambique's civil war

The Malawi missionaries, who were based Blantyre, made frequent visits to Salima to support the nurses and fellow Missionary T. Kretzmann. At that time the best route from Blantyre to Salima passed through the town of Dedza, which is located on the border of Malawi and Mozambique. Due to internal political conflicts in Mozambique in the early 1970s, refugees began pouring into Malawi. An estimated one million Mozambicans perished during a 15 year civil war. The missionaries witnessed grass huts being built by refugees on the Malawi side of the border. In just a few years, Malawi's population increased from 7 million to 11 million. The Malawi mission staff asked the Mission Board to call another missionary who could work among the refugees, but unfortunately funding was not available at the time.

### **The Third Time's Not a Charm**

In 1990 a special WELS Mission offering called, "Lift High the Cross" funded the calling of Missionary Tim Soukup to serve the Mozambican refugees living in the border area by the towns of Dedza and Ntcheu, Malawi. Three years later however, Mozambique's civil war came to an end. By mid-1995 more than 1.7 million refugees

returned to their homes in Mozambique from neighboring countries, part of the largest repatriation witnessed in sub-Saharan Africa (source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mozambique>). This resettlement coincided with Missionary Soukup leaving Malawi in 1995, having only done a little work with cross-border Mozambicans together with sainted Rev. Dais Boloweza. Some national pastors continued to serve some cross-border congregations. Efforts were made to meet with a group near Tete, Mozambique but these visits were very limited because of the distance (Tete is about 200 miles inland from the Malawi border).



Missionaries Bill Meier and Paul Nitz met with local missionaries in Mozambique

### **The Fourth Attempt**

In 2005 the WELS Administrative Committee for Africa requested another survey of the Mozambique field. Missionaries Bill Meier and Paul Nitz made a visit in February 2005 to the capital city of Maputo in the south of the country. Encouraging reports about the stability of the country and the need for humanitarian work led to a second visit eight months later to the north, where there was considerably less mission activity among the most densely populated part of the country, and less crime. In the city of Nampula they met an expat missionary named Dave Lepoidevan. He encouraged them that mission work in this part of the country had just recently begun. He and other local expats encouraged the WELS Mission to use higher

education (like a teacher training college) as an effective form of mission work in Mozambique, especially if it offered English classes. They also informed the WELS missionaries that it was necessary to speak Portuguese in order to live and work in Mozambique.



L-R: Bill Meier, Ken Cherney, Alfredo Nahia (director of local teachers' college), Steve Valleskey

Not long after that, Meier made a third trip to Mozambique together with Portuguese speaking Ken Cherney, former missionary to Brazil, and Rev. Steve and Sally Valleskey, former missionaries to Malawi. They concurred with the mission strategy of using higher education as an outreach tool. They also heard from local missionaries about the necessity for learning Portuguese, preferably before coming to Mozambique.



L-R: Jeff Enderle, Artur Villares, Bill Meier

The report and proposals out of that trip convinced the WELS Board for World Missions to call Bill Meier and Jeff Enderle as missionaries to Nampula, Mozambique in 2007. They were sent to learn Portuguese in Lisbon, Portugal, where Rev. Artur Villares serves the Lutheran Church of Portugal, a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). Both missionaries made excellent progress learning Portuguese, and they also made a visit to Mozambique to look for housing. But the move to Nampula was delayed by various factors, including problems with visas and registering the mission with the government.

And then at the end of 2008 the world's economy came to a standstill in the Global Recession. Investment losses were in the billions, including investments made by WELS. Funding cutbacks forced the Board for World Missions to recall Meier and Enderle to the United States and to defund the Mozambique mission in 2009.

**One More Time**

In 2009 there were over 4,000 Mozambican Lutherans living across the border from Malawi. These people speak Maravi, a language that is almost identical to what is spoken in Malawi and parts of Zambia. Over 600,000 Chichewa speakers live in Mozambique, representing about 4% of the country. Due to government restrictions, personal visits to these Lutherans have been very limited. Work is slowly progressing on registering the mission.



Missionary John Holtz baptizing children in Mozambique

But even though the Lord has made us wait so long to enter Mozambique, he has been working quietly through the Word which has been sown. During a recent visit 61 people were baptized at a worship service! It is evidence of Jesus' words in John 3:8, *"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."* After over 50 years of waiting, we pray that the Spirit of God will finally allow WELS

and the LCCA-M the privilege of serving our fellow Lutherans in Mozambique.

*Missionary John Roebke serves as the Missionary of Publications for Malawi. He is also the Communications Manager for One Africa Team.*

*Special thanks to Raymond Cox and Bill Meier for their help with this article. Ray Cox is retired and lives in Oshkosh, WI. Bill Meier is the CEO of Kingdom Workers [kingdomworkers.com](http://kingdomworkers.com)*

*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>*