

Who Needs a Roof? by Justine Hayes

Before we moved to Malawi, we had heard about the common problems among the villages and churches.

We came to Malawi hoping to equip people to find solutions for problems for the church and their communities. Rather than dwell on struggles, we will focus on the resources and strengths of the community. This works against the "victim mentality" that is common among underprivileged communities. We knew of individuals who would travel long distances to Namikango to share their need for a roof on their church, kindly requesting financial assistance to fulfill their need, as well as asking for transportation back to their village. For the most part, Namikango encourages these churches to gather funds and build from within their own community as an effort of local commitment.

One Sunday we drove to a village and stopped in the middle of a field. Our companions pointed to a foot path, and directed us, "just drive down there." Cautiously, we drove along the foot path, by fields ready for planting to our right and our left. Several yards down a hill, we parked in front of an unfinished building. The sun was shining down directly on top as if to emphasize its lack of roof. Within minutes, people began arriving from the surrounding area, carrying a table for communion, benches for the men to sit on, sacks to spread for the women and children to sit on, and sacks to spread over our heads to block the sun. The preacher, my husband, however, was victim to the sun's blaze and without protection until the congregation had mercy halfway through his sermon . . . and allowed him to move under the makeshift shade of maize bags that shielded the congregants.

This was . . . "church without a roof." It is a testimony to the commitment of this church that they continue to meet, despite inadequate facilities. We have visited other churches that have been less steadfast and all but disappeared when a roof went amiss.

The church is not a building, nor has it ever been. It does not need a roof to exist, it is a living organism. It is the body of Christ. However, my home congregation meets in a building that has a roof. For health and safety reasons, I doubt it would have been given clearance to operate without one. I have never imagined what it would be like to attend a church without one. I cannot judge my brother or sister who becomes discouraged when they lack a roof on their building. I cannot judge their priorities nor their hearts. But we can go and worship with them. We can visit them and ask "Why is there no roof?" We can speak to them the truth of other small congregations like themselves that are gathering to praise Jesus a world away.

Church visits can be challenging - visiting a congregation we know little about, people we will likely not see again, as we will be visiting another place next week. Seeing this church without a



Church without a roof

roof was just another reminder of why we are here. We pray that our being here will be an encouragement to people. We pray that by God's grace, He will allow us to strengthen their faith and their commitment to Jesus.

As we work through Community Health Evangelism and Micro-Finance loans, we also are learning more about the people and the life of the Malawian churches that we work with. They share with us what their desires and visions are, and what they hope to see in their future. We pray that in the future we can help people to discover their own resources and strengths of the community, and not dwell on struggles and problems. We hope to see churches find solutions and gather the funds from within their own community "to put a roof on their building," as well as to provide for the poor in their community.



This church in Southern Malawi met under a giant tree

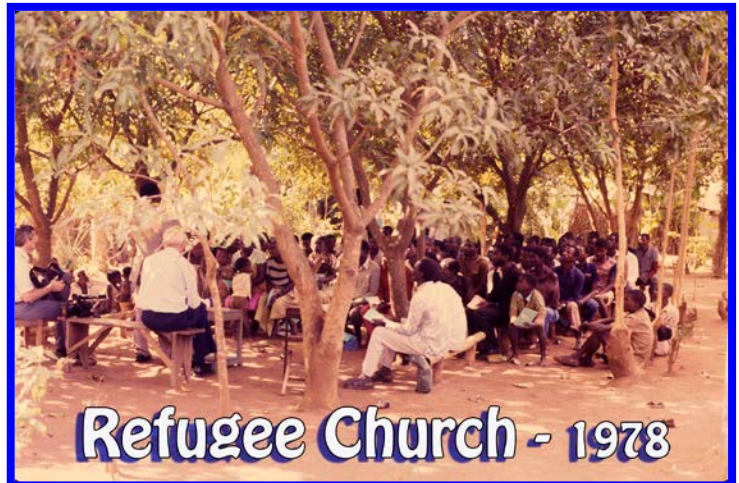
Refugees . . . 1978

This "church without a roof" report made me remember (It was 1978 I think) when I visited Malawi and Lendal Wilks, Jim Albright, and I traveled along the border area and came to a village where there was a large number of Mozambique Refugees. They wanted our group to stay and have worship services with them. We agreed, and walked with them to a wooded area with a small clearing. This clearing was their church. They began to gather and sit on bamboo poles laid on the ground. They explained the poles were their pews. All around us were trees. They said

"The trees are the walls of our church, the overhanging branches and leaves are our roof." These people were full of excitement, overwhelmingly joyful.

The children running around, playing, were in tattered clothes, but happy. Their houses were made from sticks, mud and straw. But, they did not ask us for anything.

They were totally content because now they were safe, they had a place to stay, a place to worship, and friends to share their celebration with them. This place had a lasting impression on me. Sidney



End of Year Reflections

Beloved Brethren,

As another year has passed, and we reflect on it, we see many good reasons to be thankful to God for His mercies and grace. Lillian and I are so thankful to God for granting us the opportunity to be servants at Namikango. We can clearly see God's hand at work in a powerful way.

It was a very busy year, especially with an increased number of Village Bible School Centres. We had 23 Centres actively involved in teaching God's Word on a daily basis. This is up from 20 the previous year. The number of students also increased to a record of 1,141. And as you would expect, our operational expenses for this activity also rose to \$3,505 for each location, up from \$3095 in 2013. We pray that as these students get to know the Word, they will be faithful servants who will in turn teach others about Christ. This is our mission.

Namikango has continued to be a place of peace in its preaching and teaching. Its impact on the local church and community has continued to grow through teaching the Word, and through other ministries as well.

I am thinking about the Maternity Clinic and how it is respected throughout Southern Malawi. There is also the Ntonda Primary School, with 1,500 grade school students where we teach the Bible daily. This primary school has for the second year running been the best school in this

area in terms of the examination results. Plus . . . there is the work in Mozambique that has continued to grow and we are thankful for committed brethren in that area and for the dedicated teachers from Namikango who go there to teach. We are thankful for all the Namikango team of servants, the staff and teachers. And, our prayers of thankfulness must extend to our faithful brethren in the USA, for those who oversee this work in Malawi, and for those who support it.

We are trusting God for another great year in 2015 and we pray that God will continue to bless us all.

On behalf of all Malawian brethren and their families, let me wish the directors and the supporters a very blessed and fruitful New Year.

In Christ, Bisani





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**Justine, Amelie and Ryan Hayes
At Work in Malawi**

Greater Appreciation

Our time here in the States has come to an end. It's hard to realize the time has gone by, and even harder when thinking about the goodbyes that are coming in the next few days. But we know this is part of the process and we cannot give anything but thanks to God for the time we've had here. It's been very refreshing to be with friends and family through the holidays, as well as through the birth of our child. Our kids were able to reconnect with their cousins and enjoy many of the things living here gives.

We have been excited about interest we have received about the work in Malawi from so many of the churches and people we have visited.

This trip has been an opportunity to make connections that will aid different areas of the work in Malawi that we see happening in the near future, and that gives such a good feeling. It's great to meet new people, but even more rewarding when God links talents and gifts to places and people that previously had not been realized. And getting to watch that happen is a blessing.

One phrase that has been interesting to hear, from our oldest son Braylon over the course of this furlough is: "When are we going home to Malawi?" While our kids recognize that they have

a home here, there is also an understanding of where God has us living now. And though there is a part of us that wishes we could stay with family here, we also recognize where God has placed us and feel ready to return. So as we wrap up these next couple weeks, we want to again say thank you to all. The experience of living overseas can be challenging. But having the chance to come back home for an extended period of time that is mostly spent with family is also a blessing. It creates the awareness of how special such times are, and leads to **greater appreciation.**

We would not have the chance to experience this if it were not for all of you supporting us. So, again, thank you!

Blessings,
The Hayes
Family



The Hayes Family