



Faith in action: A Scotland-Malawi Church networking event

Event Details:

Venue: Giffnock South Parish Church, Glasgow, G46 6QX

Date: Saturday March 18th 2017

Time: 11:00-15:30

Attendee list:

Name	Organisation	Email
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Alex Brown	Churches of God - Fellowship Relief	aandjbrown@blueyonder.co.uk
Len Burgoyne	Churches of God - Fellowship Relief	lenburgoyne@btinternet.com
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Aims of meeting:

- (1) To create an opportunity to bring our faith-based members together, for them to connect and network with each other;
- (2) To listen to our faith-based members, in particular to hear about their experiences with Malawi, and priorities going forward;
- (3) To provide a sense of overarching bilateral relationship and the support and opportunities available from the SMP.

1. Welcome and introduction: (Kathryn Chipperfield, Scotland Malawi Partnership)

2. Opening worship (including Malawi hymn): (Carol Finlay, Church of Scotland)

3. Sharing and Connecting: (Charlie Bevan, Scotland Malawi Partnership)

A representative from each church gave a quick summary of their work with Malawi.

4. Supporting and Sustaining links:

Carousel discussion activity on the following topics:

i) How to ensure good communications with link church (Stephanie- Church of Scotland)

- Keep communication regular
- Sustaining Communication:
 - Starting communication is often difficult
 - Link not only with one person, groups to groups, coordinators, committees
 - Communicating with one person and then allowing that to filter down.
- Set Expectations
 - Outline priorities and expectations from early on in the relationship to try and reduce any friction.
 - Have an understanding; communication is not as easy for some as it is for others.
 - Understand cultural communications
- Realistic and Respectful for Requests

- Social Media
 - Careful about the blurred line between personal links and church links. Adding to your friends list. Is it appropriate?
- Personal links and any frictions that form from that, not to listen to gossip
- Keep communication regular
 - Communication in Malawi can go up and down with power cuts etc
- Use text/emails
 - What's app and Smart phones
- Use phone
 - Be aware of some difficulties with phone calls
- Be mindful of Data Protection and Safeguarding
 - Is training needed?
- Face to face communications/ visits
 - Use skype if available
 - Talk to each other, talk about differences and difficulties
 - Be mindful of cultural differences and talk these through
 - Speaking directly
- Keep in mind that English is not first language
 - Be mindful of words and phrases and use of slang terms.

ii) **What SMP services would you like to see to support your church links? (Facilitated by Kathryn Chipperfield- Scotland Malawi Partnership)**

- Continue the annual church networking event at different locations
- Support from Emily (Youth and Schools Officer)- linking to schools, support with curriculum partnerships, access to her education resources, help getting a youth perspective and encouraging more young people to get involved.
- Continuing support from SMP to access politicians, for example through the CPG.
- SMP support and communication through email and phone has been excellent- keep up the good work
- Better knowledge of what the SMP can offer
- Meetings that look at how to set up a church partnership
- Communicate what MaSP is doing and help churches to access MaSP
- A staff exchange between a member of SMP and MaSP
- A faith newsletter containing case studies of what others are doing.
- Handy hints/ideas documents e.g. on scholarships, goods to send/not send
- Church link mapping document
- Recommended reading list before visiting Malawi
- Information on culture specific to each region
- Visa support and information
- Where to apply for grants
- Provide up-to-date information of the situation on the ground in Malawi such as famine and drought in particular locations.
- Map/monitor resource/project distribution. Are there areas missing out on support?

iii) Visits to Malawi/Visits to Scotland (Rebecca- Church of Scotland)

- How to plan visits either way – structure vs flexibility
- Some tension over whether visits are just tourism. Could the money be better spent elsewhere?
- Visits either way are crucial, it makes the relationship real. Face to face chats are invaluable at building relationships.
- Get young people involved!
- Issues over bringing Malawians to Scotland – it could be unsettling and difficult for them to see the richness we have.
- Visits need to be well managed, it is important to choose the right people to come – discuss this with the Malawian church beforehand. Make sure some women come!
- Visiting Scotland can affect their lives back home. Visiting Malawi can affect lives back home.
- There are some issues over gifts given.
- Ground rules for hosts, and some guidelines should be given to visitors (how to use everyday items in houses) as it could be intimidating for visitors.
- Debriefing is crucial, overcoming cultural differences, talking about money.
- Visits to Malawi should have a specific purpose – it is not just a 2 week holiday, work needs to continue when the visitors come back to Scotland to get the congregation involved and excited.
- Visits are important to see the priorities in Malawi, ask and see what is actually required rather than deciding from Scotland.
- When you visit you see what poverty really is, it is important to stay in the village to worship and live with them.
- You see the faith that is so central in people's lives.
- You can visit to see where money from Scotland has been spent, accountability.
- Malawians know they have not been forgotten when they are visited.
- Safety is paramount, risk assessments should be carried out, and in-country travel arrangements confirmed and checked.

iv) Cultural differences (facilitated by David Hope-Jones- Scotland Malawi Partnership)

General points:

- Too easy to think when observing cultural differences that “we have it right” – need to really understand the wider context in Malawi and to recognise the value of differences as well as similarities. Self-awareness and humility is needed as we recognize the many cultural quirks and idiosyncrasies in Scotland as well as Malawi!
- Generally, many of the cultural differences between Scotland and Malawi are decreasing over time. Perhaps the result of new technologies (social media, television, internet, etc.) and a homogenising, or ‘westernising’ of global culture. This is perhaps most visible amongst the younger generation.

Age:

- There is perhaps greater respect given to age and wisdom in Malawi than Scotland

- Older people are well respected – even if there were funds available, unlikely you would see many elderly people in Malawi in care homes because they are seen as integral parts of the family
- By contrast, younger people sometimes have less of a voice in Malawi than Scotland
- There can be a big divide between the young and the old in Malawi, with the young greatly influenced by technology and, through this, more worldly-wise perhaps

Hierarchy:

- There is, traditionally, more of a sense of hierarchy in Malawi
- Often Malawians are keen to show respect and recognise seniority in every-day encounters more than in Scotland, even in how you shake hands

Community and family:

- Perhaps a greater sense of community and communality in Malawi
- The home is just where you sleep in Malawi, rather than where you live behind closed doors; more time is spent in shared spaces
- Family and community are the essential units in Malawi, more so than friends
- It is common for Malawians to have dozens of financial dependents back in their village of birth, across their wider family and immediate community. For many Malawians, providing for these dependents is their single most important role
- Malawians often have comparatively large families
- The effects of the HIV pandemic can sometimes be seen in families, with grandparents looking after grandchildren
- Malawians often struggle to comprehend how there is poverty and homelessness in a country as rich as Scotland. This can stem from this idea of communality – of everyone looking out for others. Why, in a Malawian's eyes, can one person be homeless if another has spare bedrooms

Material possessions:

- It is easy to forget just how few possessions many Malawians have
- Without wanting to put a halo around poverty, Malawians often have less of the “baggage” that comes with wealth. There is far more laughter, happiness and joy in Malawi, with perhaps less focus on material possessions.
- Sometimes it seems physical objects are less well looked after in Malawi. This may just be that it can be a more attritional environment (rain, sun, dust, termites, etc.) but there may also be a cultural dimension. It is often said that people are more important than things in Malawi compared to Scotland
- However, it is common to get lists of things required by partners in Malawi. Sometimes this can seem a little mercenary but we should remember how we must appear to many in Malawi, with seemingly endless possessions and limitless finance

Faith:

- Churches are usually full to bursting in Malawi

- It is unusual to not go to church in Malawi
- It is common for the CCAP to move Ministers around every six months or so. Some wonder whether this could be because of inter-personal politics, rivalries and hierarchies – that if a church partnership with Scotland is seen as going ‘too well’ the Minister might be moved, so others ‘benefit’ from these links
- Important to not just translate hymn books into Chichewa, need genuinely Malawian hymn books which are culturally appropriate and relevant
- Malawians visiting Scotland can find the spiritual apathy they encounter in Scotland as extremely challenging, given how different it is to what they experience in Malawi
- Services in Malawi are often much longer and much more lively, with active singing, dancing and lots of movement

Gender:

- More traditional gender roles and assumptions in Malawi
- Can sometimes see polygamy in Malawi, although important to know the context – often this is where a lady is widowed and requires additional support

Dress:

- Historically more formal dress in Malawi although this seems to be reducing now
- Less traditionally African dress now than even ten years ago
- CCAP have in the past given strict orders about the length of ladies’ dresses
- More common now to see women in trousers

Language:

- Historically more formal language in Malawi
- Similarly, meetings in Malawi can be very formal affairs
- There can be some differences in language use and norms, in which Malawians can sometimes appear to Scots to sound quite rude at times – for example, referring to other people around the table as “you” or “he/she” while pointing, in a way that could seem rude in Scotland
- We should not assume that our sense of humour will always translate to Malawi and vice versa

Food:

- Nsima (starchy mash potato-like food made from maize) is the ubiquitous staple across most of the country
- Nsima is usually eaten with fingers
- It is common to buy fresh vegetables from the roadside

Reciprocal visits:

- Cultural differences can be most visible, and most challenging, during reciprocal visits

- We can sometimes fall into the trap of thinking that Scotland in some ways is simply 'better' than Malawi in some of these areas of difference, and that Malawians visiting Scotland will be 'grateful' for this exposure. We should always challenge these notions.
- Some have found that Malawians visiting Scotland are keen to return home at the end because of these differences, others have not found this

Across all of these cultural differences and similarities, real and perceived, it is important to continue to be driven by a sense of mutual understanding and mutual respect. Self-awareness, a contextual understanding, and humility are needed to ensure we always challenge any sense of 'we know best'. The more we understand these cultural differences the more we can be sensitive towards them, and the less we risk either offending or misunderstanding our friends and partners

v) Money...help or hinder? (Facilitated by Carol Finlay- Church of Scotland)

- Knowledge is important e.g. what is the situation on the ground?
 - What is the need? Ask/assess
- Money is not the only 'thing'
 - It can limit relationship
 - Things that money can't buy
- Projects should be managed by Malawians in partnership with Scottish partners not driven and managed from Scotland.
- Do not give unsolicited money, give through the correct channels. This is particularly important advice to give to travellers who go in the name of a partnership (head over heart!!)
- Accountability
 - Monitoring and evaluation training
 - Evidence: Reports/photos. Do not put too much burden on partners to produce huge reports
 - Often our expectations are different; don't measure other cultures by ours.
- The Power of Money
 - People on the ground to drive money
- Develop Trust
 - Do not set up accounts to individuals
- Setting up of Charity in Communities in Scotland.
- Jealousy
 - Transparency – particularly in giving money and gifts – public rather than private
- Building of Economy
 - Send container or locally bought? The latter is better for items which can be locally sourced – pencils, soap etc. or items which require parts or servicing e.g. photocopiers. Containers cost a lot of money – is this good stewardship. Also who benefits most in 'sending stuff' – often it makes the giver feel good!
- Ability/Skills
 - Training on accounts, set up systems
- Break Culture of expectation

- Dependency Culture – develop
 - IGA's
 - Self-sustaining
 - Ownership
- Priorities Change – keep in good communication, ask the right questions and listen well for the answers!
- Status in Malawian communities
 - Often seen as People's right to appropriate funds
- Government Issues – corruption.
- OSCR – we have to remember our responsibilities as a charity
- Rose coloured Specs – easy not to see things as they are – particularly on first visits.
- UBUNTU – 'Old African word describing the way community works , translates as 'I am because we are'

How to ensure Good communication with link church?

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5. Discussion on SMP Services

Charlie, David and Kathryn from the SMP outlined services available to church members, including:

- Forums and networking events
- Resources on visiting Malawi on the SMP website
- Advice on shipping goods to Malawi
- Youth and school engagement
- Helping to tell your Malawi story to a wider audience
- Advocacy and lobbying to strengthen Scotland-Malawi links
- Engagement with the Malawi Scotland Partnership
- Support with visas

There was some discussion regarding shipping goods to Malawi.

The transport of material goods to Malawi is an area where we have offered support and advice for a number of years. It is a complex and at times contentious part of any development initiative. While we recognise that many projects and programme are dependent on physical hardware which cannot easily be sourced in Malawi, we always strongly encourage our members to consider the following questions **before** collecting goods to send to Malawi:

(1) Is it needed?

(2) Is it appropriate?

(3) Is it cost effective?

(4) Is it sustainable?

(5) Will it get there?

(6) Who 'owns' the donation?

(7) What is already in Malawi?

(8) Can the goods be sourced locally?

(9) How will the goods be distributed?

(10) How do you know if you've got it right?

If members are able to answer all of these questions and are still confident that sending goods is the best next step, we encourage them to read the ["Practical Guide to Sending Goods to Malawi"](#).

A number of attendees at the end outlined their concern regarding the ending of The Ravens Trust shipping of containers to Malawi, and asked if the SMP could help. Some members however suggested this could be a good opportunity to reflect on whether shipping goods to Malawi should even be a part of Scotland's links with Malawi, suggesting it can create unequitable partnerships.

The SMP has been liaising with a number of parties who are exploring what the next steps might be regarding the shipping of goods, and will keep our faith-based members updated through the bulletin and on the website.

6. Next steps

- SMP will produce a biannual faith-based newsletter that will be sent out in May and November each year. Please get in touch at info@scotland-malawipartnership.org to share ideas for the newsletter, stories and photos.
- The next annual faith networking event will take place in March 2018. Please get in touch if you would like to help host the event or have a suggestion for the location.
- SMP will continue to reach out to churches and encourage them to become individual members of the SMP. This is free for all Church of Scotland congregations, whose membership is covered by that of CoS. By having individual church partnerships signed up it will enable SMP to liaise directly with them and keep them informed of the free services and support available. In addition, each church partnership will receive their own profile page on the SMP website where they can share and promote their activities. A useful resource for mapping where members are working and what they do.
- SMP to encourage all members to keep their profile web-page up to date on current activities, so others can search the website using key-words.
- SMP will contact all attendees once next steps on shipping options have been clarified.