

Being a Presence

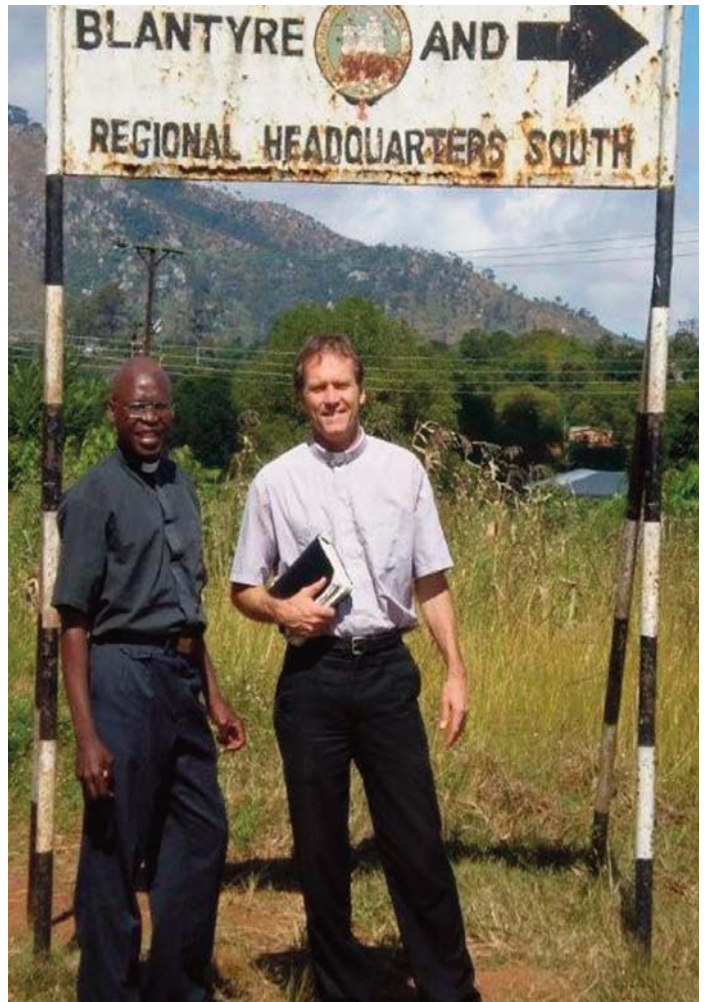
Your gifts to *Presbyterians Sharing* sent The Rev. Edward Hoekstra to serve the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian in Malawi (CCAP). For the past three years Ed has served the congregations of St. Colomba and St. Michael and All Angels and started a thriving ministry in Blantyre's prisons. Ed and his wife Jackie will be returning to Canada in June 2011 where they will begin a time of deputation before returning to ministry in Canada.

Between the ages of 12 and 16, I played soccer on a rep team for the City of Brampton. I loved soccer and played it with whoever wanted to play. The part I remember most however, was not how many goals or miraculous plays I executed, but the presence of my father at the games.

My dad was a quiet man, and did not shout on the sidelines. He would come to the game, constantly moving around the field as he watched. Every time I looked for him he would be in a different place. When our eyes met, he would look at me quietly with an approving smile. No matter how well or how poorly I played, he would be there quietly supporting me. My dad's quiet presence was so encouraging. His presence made it evident to me that I mattered and was loved.

In December I travelled to a number of prisons with a recently released inmate. He had been in prison for seven years for stealing money. He was the Clerk of Session for the Presbyterian inmates at Chichiri Prison. I knew Mr. Gulaya well through the Tuesday morning Bible Study I lead alongside the Blantyre Synod Prison Chaplain, Rev. Chimesya.

Mr. Gulaya and I visited the prisons to see how the recently established Bible Studies were progressing. We sang songs, listened to the scripture the inmates had memorized, heard their choirs sing, and shared our vision for the prison ministry. At the end of our program the prison officials and the inmates emphasized how thrilled they were that we had not forgotten them. Just our presence there was a great comfort and encouragement to them both. The response to our visit was beyond my expectations, reminding me that one's presence is huge for those who are in need, especially those who often are told they deserve to be forgotten.



Ed with Prison Chaplain Rev. Chimesya in Blantyre, Malawi.

As a Pastor, I have been taught a number of times that my work is often about being a presence, and that it is important to take the time to speak with others even if they do not have an appointment. The Malawian people are good at that. Jackie and I often comment that when someone comes to a gathering, they do their best to recognize everyone and if possible to greet each person. As westerners, we find it a bit excessive because it often takes a lot of time.

Christ was so present for us, coming to earth to be with us and to totally put himself out for us. This year, we can ask ourselves how we are practicing being a presence and putting ourselves out for others.

Presbyterians Sharing

Goal for 2011: \$ 8,515,000

Received by April 30, 2011: \$1,691,964

Received by April 30, 2010: \$1,726,209

Thank you for your faithful support of *Presbyterians Sharing*. Let us continue to work and pray together as we encourage congregations to reach and surpass their commitments in 2011.

Creating New Ministries



From providing grants that support a ministry team as they begin ministries in new areas, to giving funds so these growing congregations can build a church, your gifts to *Presbyterians Sharing* help create new ministries. Here are four of the new ministries being supported by *Presbyterians Sharing* in 2011.

Preparing to build: Starting as a Bible Study in the mid-1990's and officially becoming a congregation in 1997, Parkland Presbyterian Church in Spruce Grove Alberta was given a \$700,000 grant to purchase land and a building in a rapidly growing area. They took possession April 1, 2011 and hope to begin renovations soon!



Discerning God's plan: The young, growing congregation of Trinity Winnipeg has been blessed with some exceptional musicians, gifted worship leaders and even preachers! Now in a rented church facility that is allowing them to try new things, they are taking time to pray about the next steps in their building process as they seek God's leading and strive to work with the Lord's plans, rather than their own.

Building all over: Building continues at Keswick Presbyterian Church. In the past year a new platform and sound booth were added to the sanctuary. The congregation also continues to build relationships in its community by opening its hall to a variety of community events serving children and adults and reaching out to meet community needs. In many different ways Keswick Presbyterian Church is helping build God's Kingdom.

Reaching out in Arabic: Almanarah Presbyterian Church in London is an Arabic Christian community with members from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and other countries. These dedicated Christians are bringing Christ's message of love, hope and salvation to Arabic and non-Arabic speaking people in London, Ontario and beyond. Almanarah's 2010 summer camp is pictured below.



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