



## CENTRAL AFRICA MEDICAL MISSION – MALAWI

May 2020



Last month's newsletter ended with the Psalm 121:8, *"The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore."* That verse is a relevant promise for the Lutheran Mobile Clinic. The last Friday in March was the final clinic visit before our work in villages outside Lilongwe was put on hold. As was mentioned, the inevitability of the COVID-19 pandemic reaching Malawi was upon us. Our clinic staff had worked for 2 weeks to enforce handwashing, spacing between patients, limiting patients in the buildings, and teaching the measures needed to protect against the virus, while carrying out our usual busy days in malaria season with hundreds of patients gathered to be cared for. It was agreed by them and the CAMM committee that our mobile work could pose a risk of spreading the coronavirus. We needed to wait to see what would happen and to think and pray about how and when to continue our work safely. Gary and I had been advised to try to get a flight out of Malawi, but it was canceled when the government stopped all air travel in and out as of April 1. We had thought we'd be staying, and began preparing to spend many weeks in isolation. As it turned out, God opened the door to us being on the last flight out of the country on March 31 and we safely arrived in Wisconsin April 1<sup>st</sup>. The next day, the first cases of COVID-19 started to officially appear in Malawi. As of this writing, there have been 39 patients with positive tests and three deaths reported. However, testing is limited, and it appears to be spreading within the urban communities.

The "going" was difficult. Having to stop our operations, communicate with everyone involved, make sure all government reports were finished, and ensure all of our staff would still continue to be paid—those physical tasks had to be done in a very short space of time. But it was the emotion of leaving many dear people who were experiencing the same fears we were, and not knowing when we could return that was hardest. Our staff had told us that they were concerned about our safety with the virus so widespread in the US. They were more worried for us than themselves, and promised to pray for us. God did watch over us on the journey and we are healthy, keeping isolated, yet with projects to keep us busy, and much communication and decision-making to do. We regularly check in with our staff and they keep us updated on how the government and their communities are handling the crisis. So far, they are keeping well and some are busy harvesting their maize.

Gary and I are so thankful for our supportive mission family in Malawi. Pastor Mark Panning and Mrs. Mindy Holtz agreed to help out with the financial oversight and banking that had to take place to be sure our house, clinic and village staff continued to be paid. Miss Jere, our head nurse, and our driver, Mr. Supu, took the monthly reports to the District Health Office and saved copies for our files. We had wanted to find a way for some of our epilepsy patients to receive the monthly medicine they needed, as the local government health centers often don't often have it. We asked our new clinician, Alfred Nkhoma, to go with Mr. Supu to two government health centers closest to our villages, and give them some of the needed medicines from our pharmacy supply, which were gratefully received. Pastor Beza at Mwalaulomwe had reported that albino patients were coming to look for sunscreen which we normally supply. Mr. Supu and Alfred also dropped off bottles of sunscreen with Pastor Beza, who agreed to distribute them. We heard from Lozias Sinoya, our registrar, that one of our Health Surveillance Assistants, a government employee, is continuing weekly under-fives vaccinations and assisting family planning clients at Msambo. We pray that the Lord protects and provides for our patients and staff during this time.

One of the blessings of being isolated is having time for on-line church services and Bible studies. During a recent Bible study, I was reminded of a verse in Isaiah, chapter 43. The Lord is speaking to his redeemed people in this chapter and reminding them not to be afraid. Verse 4 states, "Since you are precious and honored in my sight and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and other people in exchange for your life." It was a reminder of God's love for us regardless of what we accomplish, and that running the Lutheran Mobile Clinic successfully is not dependent on Gary, me or any individual. It is God's grace that allows us to continue this mission and provides the means to do it. Meanwhile in Zambia, the Lutheran Rural Health Center staff are continuing their daily clinic work and are busy preparing for COVID-19. We pray God spares Mwembezhi from this virus, while we ask for guidance for our "coming" back to Malawi in His timing. Thank you for your continued support and prayers. God bless and keep you.

Yours in Christ, Beth and Gary Evans