



Ohio church's message: Families matter to God

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

CINCINNATI — Look around you Sunday morning.

Is there a mom drowning in a sea of credit-card debt? A dad who can't seem to quit clicking Internet porn? A teen dealing with a hangover or worried about a potential pregnancy?

In the 21st century, the Christian family finds itself under constant siege: Sexual images. Financial debt. Addictions. Busyness. A digital culture that devotes more attention to texting than the sacred text.

What to do? With the theme "Families Matter," a recent area-wide

conference on marriage and family tackled modern America's uncomfortable realities. The Northeast Church of Christ, a 500-member congregation just off Interstate 275, about six miles south of Kings Island

theme park, hosted the event.

"If we're going to rescue our communities, stop the violence, stop the drug dealing, stop the porn, stop the marital infidelity ... you start in the home,"

Clyde Gray, longtime television news anchor and member of the Gray Road Church of Christ in Cincinnati, said in a Friday night keynote speech.

The newsman related lessons "ripped from the headlines" that he delivers each night on Cincinnati's ABC affiliate.

Lead by example, Gray urged parents: Don't honk and swear at other drivers. Study the Bible at home. Go to church often. Eat dinner

together as a family.

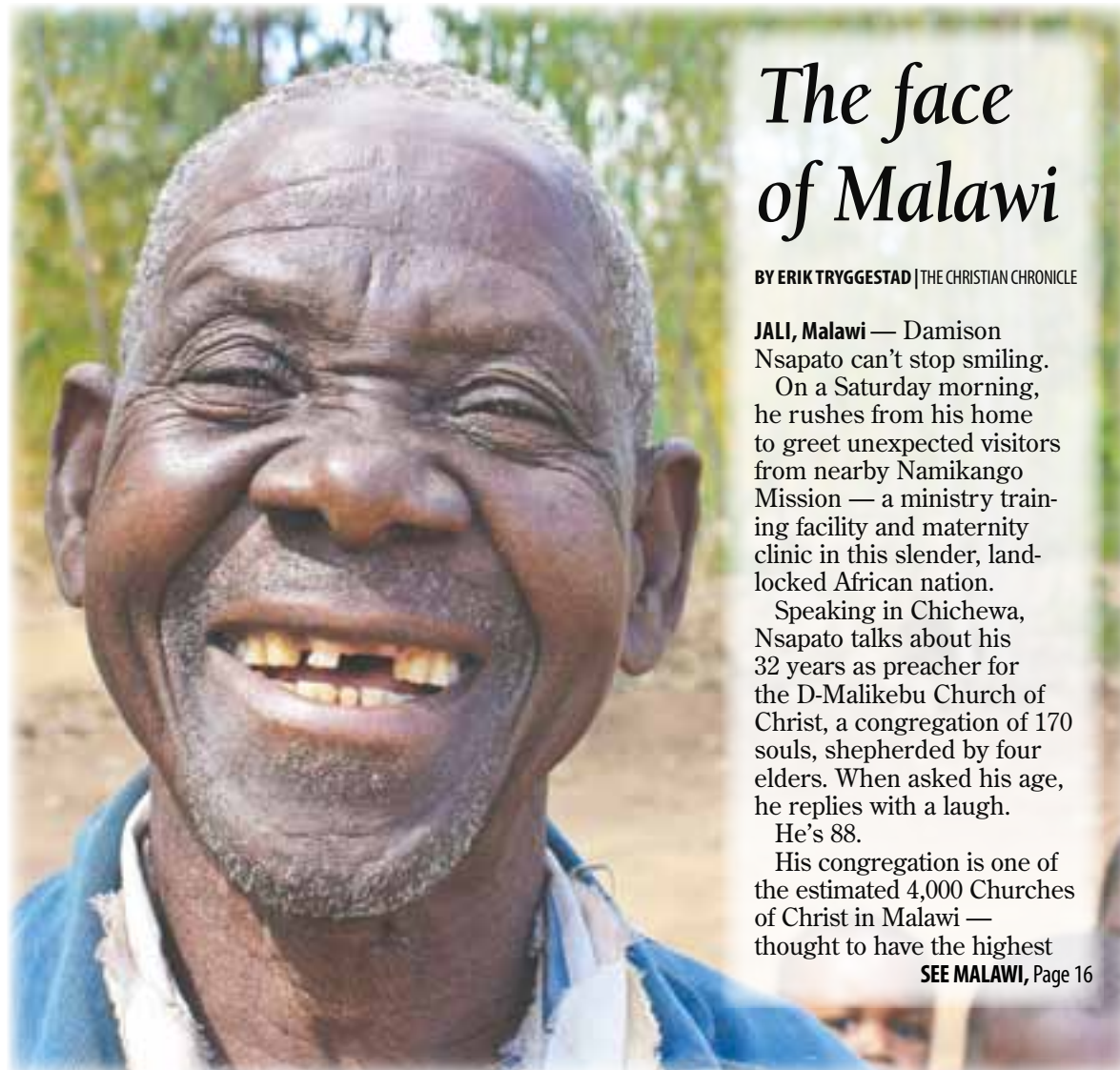
"Get your kids around the dinner table, and you'll make them less likely to use drugs," he said, citing research he did on the job. "Their grades will improve.

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BOBBY ROSS JR.

Caleb Thomas opens his Bible during class at the Northeast church in Cincinnati.



The face of Malawi

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

JALI, Malawi — Damison Nsapato can't stop smiling.

On a Saturday morning, he rushes from his home to greet unexpected visitors from nearby Namikango Mission — a ministry training facility and maternity clinic in this slender, landlocked African nation.

Speaking in Chichewa, Nsapato talks about his 32 years as preacher for the D-Malikebu Church of Christ, a congregation of 170 souls, shepherded by four elders. When asked his age, he replies with a laugh.

He's 88.

His congregation is one of the estimated 4,000 Churches of Christ in Malawi — thought to have the highest

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ERIK TRYGGESTAD

Damison Nsapato smiles outside the meeting place of the D-Malikebu Church of Christ in Jali, Malawi. The church was established in 1964. Nsapato, 88, has seven children and 18 grandchildren. As part of the ongoing *Global South* series, *The Christian Chronicle* presents a firsthand report from Churches of Christ in Malawi on Page 17.



An earthquake, a flood and God's love

The *Chronicle* reviews the stories of 2010.

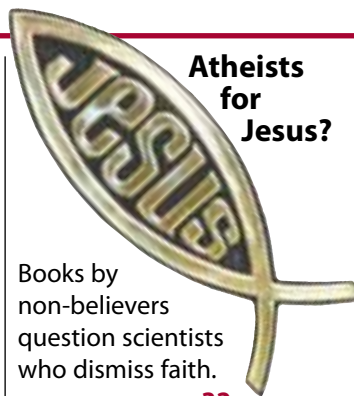
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Outdoors with Oprah

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MALAWI: Nation is 'the Israel of Africa'

FROM PAGE 1

number of church members per capita in the world. In 2000, church researchers Mark Berryman and Wendell Broom estimated that one out of every 50 Malawians was a member of a Church of Christ.

"Malawi is the Israel of Africa," said Priestly Nkhonjera, a longtime minister in Malawi. Gospel seed fell on fertile soil here more than a century ago, he said.

Congregations developed strong roots throughout the narrow country's three regions — Northern, Central and Southern. Here, unlike many African nations, gray hair is common in Churches of Christ, as are second- and third-generation members.

In the Central Region, it's hard to go more than 10 miles in any direction without finding a congregation, said Evance Mwapasa, an elder of the Area 47 Church of Christ in Malawi's capital, Lilongwe.

Mwapasa grew up in a Church of Christ in Zomba — Malawi's first capital when the country gained independence from Britain in 1964. Mwapasa's father also served as an elder.

"I have never tasted any other church," Mwapasa said.



Mwapasa

NEW SOULS IN NYASALAND

Churches of Christ came here through a native Malawian.

Elaton Kundago traveled to South Africa for work and was baptized there in 1906. He returned to Malawi, then called Nyasaland, and began to preach.

Eventually, Kundago fell away from his new faith, but three men he converted in Zomba — George Masangano, Frederick Khonde and Ronald Kaundo — carried on his work.

In 1915, Baptist missionary John Chilembwe led an armed revolt against British rule in Nyasaland, and the government banned several religious groups, including Churches of Christ.

Church members were forced to baptize at night. Masagano, Khonde and Kaundo were jailed for seven years but led church work from prison.

In 1957, Andrew Connally, Doyle Gilliam and James Judd arrived in the Northern Region and built Lubagha Mission in the

village of Rumphu.

Judd's son, Randy, celebrated his 10th birthday in Rome, en route to Malawi. He remembers the family's old mimeograph machine, churning out gospel tracts.

"We would get letters saying, 'My brother picked this up and handed it to me. But I want to do what it says,'" Randy Judd said.

A lot of Malawians did what the tracts said. The Judds helped launch a Bible college in Mzuzu and traveled the region, teaching, preaching and planting. Hundreds of churches sprang to life.

To the south, U.S. Christians settled in the Zomba area and established Namikango Mission. Mark Thiesen, a second-generation missionary, now serves as director of the mission.

From humble beginnings, Churches of Christ have prospered. The president of the country himself, Bingu wa Mutharika, attended a worship service in the city of Zomba in 2006, recognizing the centennial of Churches of Christ in his nation.

Thiesen called the celebration "a watershed event" that reminded the church of its purpose and energized it to continue serving the Lord.

LABOR FOR LOVE — NOT MONEY

Today there are at least 12 Churches of Christ in the city of Zomba — and many second- and third-generation church members.

Laitoni Misomali grew up in the church and now serves as one of three ministers for the Zomba Central Church of Christ. The church has eight elders, 10 deacons and more than 300 members. Nearly 100 more meet in a prison where the church works.

Few ministers in Malawi are paid for their labor. In the village of Jali, Nsapato works as a farmer, growing enough food to feed his family.

Misomali, 80, gets a little financial support from the church in Zomba, but not enough to live on. But, like his smiling counterpart in the village, Misomali has no plans to stop preaching the Gospel, he said in Chichewa.

"He will minister until he is called up," an interpreter translated.

13th in a series
Global SOUTH



The changing face of the church

The miracle of MALAWI

AFTER A CENTURY of dramatic growth, Churches of Christ focus on unity and the need for urban ministry.

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

THONDWE, Malawi

Huddled in a tiny dormitory room at Namikango Mission, seven young preachers talk about their favorite hymns.

One of them, Innocent Nyasulu, flips through the well-worn pages of a paperback hymnal until he finds No. 234, “*Mundimvere Mbuye*

Wanga.” In Chichewa, it means “Hear me for my praise,” he says.

Nyasulu and his fellow preachers take those words literally. In boisterous harmony, they belt out the lyrics, their voices echoing across the mission’s campus — and clear up to heaven.

The preachers come from across this nation in southern Africa to study in Namikango’s ministry training program. Twice each day — 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. —

they gather on woven floor mats for a time of devotion and prayer.

Another student, Gift Kapitawo, flips to his favorite song, “Come with a happy heart.”

“We should be happy in our hearts, because of the son of God,” Kapitawo says. “We should be singing.”

Malawians have reason to rejoice. Their nation, known as “the warm heart of Africa,” has enjoyed peace unknown

by its war-ravaged neighbors.

Though poverty, famine and AIDS take countless lives here, the country remains among the most densely populated in Africa.

Malawi has a significant Islamic population — and once had a Muslim president — but religious conflicts are rare.

No less miraculous is the growth of Churches of Christ among the gentle

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PHOTOS BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD

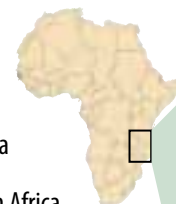
Though Malawi is increasingly urban, the majority of its 15.4 million people live in villages like this one in the country’s Central Region, near the Mozambique border.

The miracle of MALAWI



Children play near Dedza, Malawi, where church members plan to build a Christian school, hospital and orphanage.

Republic of Malawi



LOCATION: Southern Africa, bordering Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia

CAPITAL: Lilongwe (pronounced "lil-ONG-way")

POPULATION: 15.4 million, one of the most densely populated nations in Africa.

RELIGION: Christian: 79.9 percent; Muslim: 12.8 percent; other/none: 7.3 percent

HISTORY: In 1859, explorer and missionary David Livingstone encountered Lake Malawi. Livingstone adopted the motto "Christianity, Commerce and Civilization." Missionaries brought education and medicine, and Malawians began to associate Christianity with a better life, said Bisani Mphongolo, assistant director of Namikango Mission. Formerly the Nyasaland Protectorate, Malawi became

independent of Britain in 1964 and adopted its current flag July 29, 2010.

CHURCHES OF CHRIST: Malawian Elaton Kundago planted the first congregation in 1906. U.S. missionaries arrived in the 1950s. Today the country, about the size of Pennsylvania, has 4,000-plus congregations. Churches of Christ that have supported work in Malawi include the Pleasant Valley church in Mobile, Ala.; the Thomaston Road church in Macon, Ga.; the St. Augustine Road church in Valdosta, Ga.; the Mill Street church in Cassville, Mo.; the Elm and Hudson church in Altus, Okla.; and the College Hill church in Fort Worth, Texas.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: missionmalawi.org, ccbcmzuzu.org, malawiproject.org

SOURCES: interviews, "Churches of Christ Around the World" by Mac Lynn, cia.gov, news.bbc.co.uk



CONTINUED

people of Malawi, church members say. Researchers estimate that the country has more than 4,000 congregations — accounting for more than a quarter of known Churches of Christ on the African continent.

When the first missionaries from Churches of Christ arrived, they concentrated their efforts where most of Malawi's people lived — rural villages.

It was an effective strategy, said Roderick Maluwa, an administrator for Namikango Mission.

"I just want to thank our fathers who came here years back," he said, because they "chose to prioritize those who were then in the majority — out in the village. They went again and again, and the Gospel spread.

"The poverty of the Malawians helped them to cling to Jesus, who enriched them with the Gospel," he added.

Churches of Christ also offered a faith of simplicity, said Wilson Tembo, Namikango's warehouse and distribution officer. No buildings were required. Congregations could meet under a tree.

"Most of the churches in Malawi don't allow members to join without a monthly or annual contribution fee of some sort — and long-term lessons before one is actually baptized," Tembo said. "This is not the case with the Church of Christ," which offered free membership to anyone "heeding to the Word."

Though training is available for preachers, it is not a strict requirement, Tembo added. Anyone who wants to preach may do so.

"There is no compromise with the Gospel," said Moses K. Banda, a Malawian minister studying at African Christian College in Swaziland. "We tell people plainly, 'No Christ, no salvation.'"

Churches of Christ also are known for their generosity and kindness, especially during times of need, Banda said.

"The help we give people during funerals and sickness outbreaks makes

them believe what we tell them about Gospel," he said. "It's love in action."

DIVISION AND UNITY

Despite acts of benevolence, "One sad note is that many of the Malawian congregations do not fellowship with each other," missionaries Wimon Walker and Robert Reese wrote in the book "100 Years of African Missions."

Some African leaders have broken away from the church and formed their own religious groups, the authors wrote. Missionaries from Churches of Christ that believe using one cup in communion is the only

scriptural model have planted numerous congregations, as have churches that oppose support of church institutions.

In recent years churches have split over the issue of singing during communion. Malawian Christians note that many of the divisions have roots in missionaries from the West.

The lack of unity frustrates young preachers, including Nyasulu, who came to Namikango Mission from the northern city of Rumphi, where he works with a Bible institute.

"There is lots of division here — one cup, choir or no choir. *Ay-yi-yi-yi!*" he said, using a Malawian expression of

Global SOUTH

The changing face of the church



Kaliso

dismay. "I think the main problem is pride and leadership issues."

Recently, about 250 elders, deacons, ministers and their wives — representing Churches of Christ across southern Malawi — gathered at a police barracks in the city of Blantyre for in-depth discussions of the challenges they face in the 21st century.

The meeting was part of an ongoing dialogue among the churches, said Arthur Msowoya, an elder of the Red Cross Church of Christ in Blantyre. "There was a time when we were leading at bringing people to the Lord," Msowoya said. "Over time, it has sort of gone down."

"We have the right message," he said, "but ... we are not good at shepherding. We have overemphasized things that we shouldn't have been emphasizing."

In the past, evangelists have been divisive and territorial, said Rabson Kaliso, minister for the 70-member Soche Church of Christ in Limbe, Malawi, who attended the meeting.

This behavior has contributed to a decline in church growth, he said.

"Little by little, leaders are going here and there, saying, 'Let's work together,'" Kaliso said. "We are contributing equally. ... This meeting was very, very successful."

A NEED TO REACH GROWING CITIES

Christians in suits and ties worship at the Red Cross church — one of the oldest and largest congregations in Malawi. About 400 people attend the English-language service, and another 400 attend the Chichewa service that follows. A new auditorium, complete with balcony, is under construction next door.

Many of the church's seven elders are second- and third-generation members. Among them are business owners, lawyers and government officials.

After the English service, Dorothy Chiwaya and Rita Chiphaliwali watch their grandchildren scamper across the church's courtyard, playing tag. Both ladies came into the church through their husbands, and have worshipped here for 20 and 30 years, respectively.

Their children grew up in the church, but not all of them stayed. Two of Chiphaliwali's sons live in Lilongwe and worship with fast-growing charismatic churches.

"What they want (is that) the church should be more alive," Chiphaliwali said. Young people want to know more about what they read about in the Bible — including the Holy Spirit, she added. In Malawi's big cities, they find religious groups that promise them answers.

Malawi is increasingly urban. In the past decade, the population of Lilongwe has nearly doubled, according to census figures. Though Churches of Christ have excelled at rural evangelism, they



Malawians fish on the shores of Lake Malawi. Often called "the calendar lake," Lake Malawi is about 365 miles long, 52 miles wide and is fed by 12 rivers.

are not well equipped to reach educated people in big cities, Maluwa said.

"I have seen some evangelists who, when sent to go work in towns, they shiver," he said. "Something has got to be done."

Church leaders believe education is the key to reaching souls in big cities.

Outside the town of Dedza, workers are setting the foundations for a new Christian school, hospital and orphanage. The project is a partnership between the Red Cross church, the Area 47 Church of Christ in Lilongwe and the Green Valley Church of Christ in Noblesville, Ind. The Malawi Project, an Indiana-based nonprofit overseen by church members, is partnering in the work, along with Sunset International Bible Institute in Lubbock, Texas.

Though Malawi has many ministry training programs, "we realize that we've lost a lot of time in this country"

when it comes to Christian education, said Evance Mwapasa, an elder of the Area 47 church. Today, many longtime church members send their children to Catholic schools, he said.

Randy Judd, a second-generation missionary in Malawi's north, hopes to use the country's increasing access to the Internet to help Christians train for urban ministry. In addition to a Bible college in Mzuzu, Judd and Malawian Christians have established ministry training centers in Blantyre, Salima and Zobje, Mozambique, using the church-supported Internet training ministry Nations University.

Though he sees the need for urban church growth, Judd hopes that Christians in Malawi — and U.S. supporters — will resist the urge to build American-style urban congregations.

"When we try to make the church anything instead of letting the Malawians make a Malawian church, we're going to have problems," Judd said. "Besides, it's Jesus' church. And Jesus was not an American."



A sign points to a Church of Christ in the Malawian city of Salima.



Malawian church leaders listen during a unity meeting of elders, deacons, ministers and their wives in the southern Malawian city of Blantyre. About 250 people attended.



Edward Mbeta teaches Fixon Mnanga and Robert Paul at a ministry school in Salima.



Stone pews line the walls of the D-Malikebu Church of Christ in the village of Jali, Malawi.