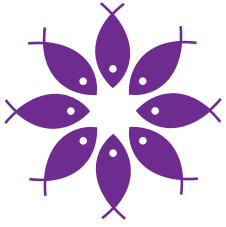


# Stories of Mission

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## LIVING FAITH





# A Ray of Hope

Presbyterians Sharing supports Blantyre Synod's prison ministry in many ways. It is one of the programs supported by the Rev. Joel Sherbino in his role as the PCC's mission liaison to Malawi. In late 2019 Steve McInnis and Nora Martin were appointed to teach English, chemistry and mathematics at Chichiri Prison. As the first international volunteers to teach in the prison, they provided encouragement to the prisoners, ministry staff and volunteers, before returning to Canada at the start of the pandemic.



Samuel is an elderly man, perhaps seventy years old. He is an inmate in Chichiri Prison in Blantyre, a southern city of Malawi, and a Form 1 (roughly equivalent to Grade 9) student of English, mathematics and chemistry. We don't know what Samuel's offense was, but it could have been something as minor as stealing a bicycle or a \$25 cell phone—both crimes that can result in two years in prison.

Samuel typically sits at the back of the classroom, listening attentively, taking notes and doing the exercises we assign him. He seldom says anything, but it is clear that he is engaged. One day at the end of a math class he said in tones of wonder, "I have never seen that before!" Another time, after struggling with several examples in English class, he said, with great satisfaction, "I get it now!" His delight in learning something new is one of the reasons we found teaching at Chichiri prison so rewarding.

We are retired. Steve is a chemical engineer by training, and I am a professional high school English teacher of thirty years. Together we decided that we wanted to volunteer overseas. So, when an opportunity to teach at Chichiri prison in Malawi became available through International Ministries, we jumped at the chance.

Like many prisons in Malawi, Chichiri is overcrowded and unsanitary. Inmates suffer from a poor diet. Prisoners are generally shunned by society, families and friends, both while in prison and once released. However, there are glimmers of hope in this dark and hopeless place.

The prison's reformatory school, which offers both primary and secondary classes to the inmates, is a ray of hope. Most of the 30 teachers, approximately a third of whom are qualified, are inmates. We, the only foreign teachers, taught math, science and English in the high school section. Every day, during our three hours at the prison, we were each given at least one class to teach. The classes were pretty informal, and attendance was spotty, but we were told that the students enjoyed our classes, and that they were happy we had come all the way from Canada to teach them.

Weekly visits from "Friends of Prison" volunteers, Rammy Zuwayo, Lyca Mhone and Hastings Phale, offered additional hope. Through weekly Bible studies, they brought the good news of God's unconditional love and forgiveness. They would also bring Bibles, soap, medicine, soya pieces for extra protein, mats, clothes and shoes purchased with donations from





Canadian Presbyterians. These dedicated volunteers regularly visit 13 prisons, travelling many hours on crowded minibuses, motorbikes, bike taxis, or on foot to stay connected and encourage the prisoners. To us, they embodied the concept of prison ministry.

When we had to return to Canada suddenly because of COVID-19, the students asked us to pray for them. This request reminds us how deep their faith is, even while in prison. We will surely pray for them. Prayer will keep us connected spiritually.

— Nora Martin

## Read: Matthew 25:31–46

### Reflect

Matthew writes about caring for one another, especially those who are vulnerable, poor or disadvantaged. We demonstrate the love of Christ by ministering to people who may have no one to care for them.

Jesus specifically mentions visiting people who are in prison. In his time, it was often the responsibility of loved ones to provide basic provisions to those who were imprisoned. The Friends of Prisons in Malawi is a ministry set up for exactly that. In addition to bringing soap, medicine and sleeping mats, when Rammy, Lyca and Hastings visit inmates and lead Bible studies, they are living out Jesus' words in Matthew 25:36.

The fact that many prisoners have not finished high school may have contributed to the circumstances that led to them being in prison in the first place. Giving them the opportunity to finish their studies is part of the effort to prevent them from ending up in prison again. We are glad that we could participate in this life-giving ministry, and that we had a chance to help the prisoners improve their lives. It is humbling to think that, when we were teaching those eager students, we were ministering to Christ.

### Discuss

- 1) Have you ever visited a prison? If not, what do you think it would be like? How important might a visiting ministry be in such a setting?
- 2) What is your faith community currently doing to feed and clothe the hungry and visit the sick and imprisoned? Is there more you could be doing?
- 3) Think about the situation of prisoners around the world. Some have done wrong, some are innocent. What do you think this scripture says about the way that prisoners should be treated?

### Sing

**635** – Brother, sister, let me serve you

**587** – Called as partners in Christ's service

**474** – The Love of God comes close

### Prayer Focus

Please pray for Rammy, Lyca and Hastings as they continue to visit the inmates in the prisons. Pray for Chichiri's chaplain, Samson Makoro, and other prison chaplains as they provide spiritual support to prisoners. Pray for the inmates as they try to better their lives against all odds. Pray for Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world.

### Pray

O God, you who have all power in heaven and earth, come and let the light of your divine presence illuminate the shadows of the prison-house, and fill the hearts of our brothers and sisters in bonds with hope and courage to endure patiently their individual burdens and trials. Support and comfort any who are cast down, forsaken by earthly friends, or who suffer physical or mental pain or sickness. Preserve us in our pilgrimage through this life, from hurt and danger, and grant that we may end our lives well-pleasing to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

(Modified from prayers for May 2 and May 3 in *A Diary of Prayer*, compiled by Elizabeth Goudge, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1991.)

Read about Steve and Nora's experiences in Malawi: [presbyterian.ca/steve-and-nora-blog](http://presbyterian.ca/steve-and-nora-blog)

Find photos, videos and links to articles on Friends of Prison's Facebook page: [facebook.com/Malawi-Friends-of-Prison-105378921246807](https://facebook.com/Malawi-Friends-of-Prison-105378921246807)

Support prison ministry in Malawi through Gifts of Change: [presbyterian.ca/prison-ministry](http://presbyterian.ca/prison-ministry)



# Mission Around the World

Through Presbyterians Sharing and Presbyterian World Service & Development, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is sharing Christ's love in 25 countries.

Gifts to Presbyterians Sharing provide grants and mission staff to encourage, equip and accompany our mission partners in areas such as Bible translation, leadership development, evangelism, outreach and Christian service.

PWS&D supports development work and provides relief in times of emergency. Inspired by God's promise of abundant life, PWS&D envisions a sustainable, compassionate and just world.

