

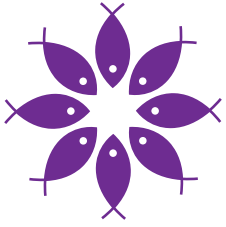
# Stories of Mission

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## LIVING FAITH







# Taking Risks

With support from Presbyterians Sharing, the Rev. Dr. Blair and Ms. Vivian Bertrand served in Malawi with the Blantyre Synod from 2017-2020. Vivian worked with Churches Action in Relief and Development (CARD), which also received support from PWS&D after floods destroyed crops in 2019. Blair supported theological education and development through Zomba Theological College and Theological Education by Extension in Malawi, which he continues to do from Canada.



Malawians are willing to take risks. A frequent sight in Malawi—on highways, city streets and back roads—is a large open truck filled with people standing or sitting, squished as tightly as possible in the back. This is a common method of transportation for adults and children alike, and is often the only affordable way, besides walking, to go to large events such as weddings or funerals. It's a risk people take when they have limited means.

When my husband Blair and I accepted a mission appointment in Malawi, we sold our car, our house and most of our possessions, then moved to Africa with our three children. Friends and family in Canada felt that we were taking a huge risk. We agreed, but felt it was worth it to serve God. After moving to Malawi and seeing the risks Malawians take every day, we saw our own risk-taking in a new light.

Malawians are quick to take risks for family—loaning money when they have very little themselves or caring for orphaned family members even as they struggle to care for their own children. And they take risks for God—dedicating their lives to ministry or tithing when they have nothing to spare.

There are several examples of risk-takers in the Bible. Noah built an ark when everyone else thought he was crazy. Mary bore the Son of God. Peter walked on water. What is risk but the willingness to take a chance on losing?

Magret Tambala stands out in my memory as a risk-taker. Like millions of Malawians, Magret is a subsistence farmer who lost most of what she owned in 2019 during Cyclone Idai. I met Magret in February of 2020 when I visited her village in Mulanje District. She was given food and seeds by Churches Action in Relief and Development, the PCC Malawian mission partner I was working for at the time. Funded by Canadian Foodgrains Bank and Presbyterian World Service & Development, the project was designed to help people rebuild after the cyclone.

During our visit, Magret showed me the most beautiful crop of maize, and told me that she had saved her seeds for almost six months so that she could plant them during the rainy season. By doing this, she avoided the erratic climatic conditions that gave so many other farmers in the area a very poor



harvest during that growing season. Magret took a risk and it paid off.

When we returned to Canada at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, we were so aware that our Malawian friends faced much greater risks than us if they contracted COVID-19. And yet they prayed for our safe journey and our peace of mind.

In this time of fear, it has been humbling to learn from my Malawian friends. I have experienced their incredible faith in the goodness of God's provision. I have seen that they truly believe that knowing Christ and sharing in the power of Christ's suffering and resurrection are worth any risk.

— Vivian Bertrand

## Read: Philippians 3:7–10

### Reflect

We know that following Christ can be risky, and that it might include loss. By following Christ, we might risk stability or comfort in our lives. We might risk financial gain. Sometimes the risk is about becoming vulnerable enough to forgive or love someone. When we risk for Christ, we recognize that there is something to lose. But we also know that there is much to gain.

When we left Malawi very suddenly to return to Canada at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, we had no place to call home. We could not stay with family because of the risk of spreading COVID-19. We were not returning to the community we had left. In some ways, we felt like we weren't returning to the same country we had left.

But God provided.

We were given accommodation at Crieff Hills Retreat Centre during our quarantine. We received support and encouragement from friends, family and the PCC. And then finally, we found a new home in Ontario to call our own. I am so keenly aware that these were all gifts from God.

When we risk losing something or give something up without knowing what will come, we are more aware that everything we have is God's and all good things are a gift from God.

### Discuss

1. What risks has God asked you to take in your life? How did you feel afterwards? What did you gain?
2. What are you most afraid of losing? What is the worst that would happen if you lost it? Would you be willing to risk it for God? Why?
3. Do you ever struggle to trust God? How do you deal with these struggles?

### Sing

**634** – Will you come and follow me

**777** – Send me, Lord/Thuma Mina

**675** – Precious Lord, take my hand

## Prayer Focus

Pray for the people of Malawi who take daily risks because they live in one of the poorest countries in the world. Pray for Churches Action in Relief and Development, one of the PCC's implementing partners in Malawi, that they will be able to continue their important work in helping the poorest of the poor. CARD is a small local organization (not a large international organization like many other relief and development organizations in Malawi) and therefore struggles financially. Pray that despite the economic impacts of the coronavirus in Malawi and around the world, CARD will have sufficient financial resources to continue its work.

### Pray

God, giver of good gifts, we know that the risks we take for you are worth the cost, so help us to live a life of daring faith:

Help us to reflect your risk-taking love for us;

Help us to trust that you will provide;

Help us to recognize that all good gifts come from you.

Through living a life of taking risks for you, may we share in Christ's suffering and know the power of his resurrection. And in our risk-taking, may we become more like Christ as we give your risk-taking love to the world.

Amen.

Read about Vivian and Blair's experiences in Malawi: [presbyterian.ca/bertrand-blog](https://presbyterian.ca/bertrand-blog)

Learn about PWS&D's response to Cyclone Idai: [presbyterian.ca/idai](https://presbyterian.ca/idai)





# 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.

