



MALAWI MISSION PARTNER COMMUNIQUE

By Missionary John Holtz

August 2017

*"This Little Light of Mine
I'm Gonna Let It Shine!"*

Ok, I admit it. It wasn't the smartest thing we ever did. No one will refer to us as "the sharpest knives in the drawer."

But hey, nobody stopped us from putting 419 kids in a 12m by 5m. single room church building and shutting the doors on both ends.

Talk about a captive audience!

And a glowing one! Well, *dripping with sweat* might be a little bit more accurate to say. Might the reason for the abundance of perspiration be the combination of the full sun at high noon, 80°F temps, metal roof and 419 children sitting shoulder to shoulder in a brick building with the doors shut? We'll have to put Detective Columbo on those clues.

What were the kids doing? A better question is, what were *we* doing?

At that point in time, we were doing our level best to give each kid a whopping 25gram bag of stale



corn chips for a snack at the end of a VBS program.

We wanted to know how many children were in attendance. Instead of trying to count the *kids*, we decided to count the *snack bags*. By keeping track of the number of snack bags we handed

out, we were able to keep the kid count each day.

So here was the plan: Put all the kids in the church and let them file out one by one. Some brave soul would hand each emerging child a snack on the way out. There were 50 individual bags of snacks in each big bundle so all we had to do was the math to figure out how many kids attended VBS each day.

That was the easy part. But how did we keep the kids from all trying to exit the building at the same time?

Three highly rated, popular and effective techniques that you should never try at home or in your own church:

- 1) local church members serving as chaperones brandishing bamboo sticks over the heads of the VBS students;
- 2) a strategically placed wooden bench in front of the door. It served somewhat like a shin-busting hurdle. I guess the thought was that by obstructing what would normally be a clear path through the doorway, it would force any child to give serious pause before trying to run out of the church just to be the first to get a snack.
- 3) courageous pastors standing at the doorway doing their best to usher kids out with some semblance of order while at the same time fighting off heat stroke, fatigue and dehydration.

It all worked out!

No riot

No panic.

No anarchy.

No stampede.

Ok, maybe a little pandemonium. A touch of chaos. A dab of bedlam. But hey, isn't every VBS a bit like that?

But there are more ways than those to describe the VBS program that was held in Usisya, Malawi from 3-7 August 2017. Yes, there was occasional mayhem, but there were also the moments of wonder:



Bible Story Time

- A child's rapt attention.
- A stunning answer to a Bible question.
- A little girl who knew the song for the day.
- A pastor's telling of the old old Story.



mud crafts after hearing the Creation Account in Genesis

- Young boys using their God-given gifts during arts and crafts...with mud!
- A chaperone lovingly working with a child who needs help.
- Kingdom Worker volunteers teaching English songs to Chitumbuka-speaking kids.

Ah, yes, the Kingdom Workers. Four volunteers who raised money to come to Malawi to observe the Jesus Care's Ministry (JCM) to the disabled and to participate in a Vacation Bible School (VBS) program for children.

Kingdom Worker Country Director, Mr. Dan Tyrrell, had advertised these short term mission opportunities and didn't have a hard time finding four willing volunteers to come to Malawi for a 2 ½ week life and faith adventure: Ashley, Gail, Tristan and Tim.¹

Though this fearsome foursome had to endure stretches of bad roads, crowded boats, chilly water, sleep deprived nights and one extremely annoying stray dog, they seemed to enjoy their unique and memorable experience.

- ✚ Ashley smiled with this highlight of hers: *"I was so happy because this little girl actually learned the VBS song we taught her: This Little Light of Mine!"*
- ✚ Gail had this prayer request for her KW team mates: *"Please pray that I follow through with my personal goals and that I let my light shine among the people God has placed in my life."*

✚ Tim shared this comment: “It was very humbling to see Christ’s light shine rightly through the JCM volunteers as they followed His example in helping the poor and disabled.”

✚ Tristan reflected on ways that he would continue the process of learning and engagement upon returning home to the States: “I would like to spread the news of the VBS and JCM going on in Malawi.”

Tristin also mentioned any number of times how stunningly beautiful God’s creation really is: from the stars to the fish to the waterfalls to the animals to the mountains to the sunrises and sunsets.



Lake Malawi Sunrise

No wonder he carried around his camera wherever he went! Even under water!

But no matter how beautiful Malawi is, we all got to see through our nightly Bible Studies how much more beautiful our Savior Jesus really is!

Just imagine...Jesus was willing to...

- leave a perfect heaven
- enter an imperfect world
- become one of us
- suffer horrible pain and rejection
- experience the punishment we deserved
- drink the bitter cup of suffering
- die an excruciating death
- forgive us our sins. All of them.
- prepare for us a home. An eternal one.

Talk about a shining Star and a bright Light!
Talk about the most beautiful SONrise of all!

Say, what’s that I see when I look at you, dear Christian? You have a certain glow about you. It doesn’t look like sweat (unless you’re in a locked church someplace waiting for your snack). But you do have a certain luster, a brilliance, a brightness. Reflected light. It’s not coming from the sun, it’s coming from the SON.

The Lord make His face shine upon you...

Just for the fun of it, do what the 4 KW volunteers did for 3 days straight in Usisya, Malawi: poke your index finger in the air and joyfully sing a song that’s not meant for VBS kids only:

*This little light of mine,
I’m gonna let it shine!*

Your Malawi Mission Partner,
John Holtz

1. Ashley Retberg, Gail Kelley, Tristan Pankow and Tim Wildauer arrived Malawi on 23rd July, departed 9th August. As a disclaimer, these four were not the ones who suggested or sanctioned the “corral the kids in the church” approach for effective snack distribution and head counting! In addition to the 419 kids, these 4 were in the church, too!



Red T-shirt: Tim W; Blue T-shirt: Gail K.
Purple T-shirt: Ashley R.; Light blue muscle shirt: Tristan P.; The other guy: Missionary Holtz