



MALAWI MISSION PARTNER COMMUNIQUE

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In His Hands

The office is small.

I've seen closets much larger. Even water closets (WC). The office was a stuffy square cubicle crammed with two desks, two chairs and a filing cabinet. No window. The desks were almost touching each other. Both were an eyelash's width from the cabinet. A room clearly built for one but forced to accommodate two.

The problem? There were four of us. Oops, sorry. Five.

Two more chairs were wedged in and two more people squeezed in. We couldn't really walk in the room, we had to shuffle. There's more space between a couple slow dancing than there was between us. The fifth person had to stand in the doorway and lean in because the door wouldn't open all the way because one of us had to sit or stand behind it.

Sardines in a tin can.



We were in the Ministry of Religious Affairs

Office in Lichinga, Mozambique. I'll tell you why in a minute. But for now, imagine this. (Sorry, it sounds like a brain teaser). Of the five of us:

- One person spoke ONLY Portuguese, NO Chichewa and NO English.
- One person spoke NO English, very little Chichewa and Portuguese.
- One person spoke Portuguese, Chichewa and NO English.
- Two people spoke Chichewa, English and NO Portuguese.

What do you get when you bring five such people together?

A challenge! Here's what it was:

We all had to understand the two sets of documents in front of us. One set was written ONLY in English, the other ONLY in Portuguese. These weren't simple stories with pictures for children. They were official documents outlining procedures for a Foreign Religious Confession Registration. Technical lingo. Government garble. Procedures and Requirements.

That's why we were there. The Lutheran Church in Central Africa Malawi Synod (LCCA-MS) would like to register as a Foreign Religious Confession in Mozambique. Reason? It would like to bring the Gospel of Jesus to people across the border.

In the past, the LCCA-MS did.

The government allowed both the LCCA National Pastors and the Lutheran Mission missionaries to cross the border without many hassles or questions. In fact, they welcomed us when we told them we were planting churches. They stamped our passports and wished us the best. We didn't have government permission on paper to work with the church in Mozambique but we had their word that "all good" and to us their word was good enough.

Consequently, over the years, various Lutheran pastors and missionaries repeatedly crossed the border. They preached the Word and formed congregations. Spiritual farming in action: plowing the soil, planting the seed, watering the sprouts and tending the trees. Enjoying the fruit. The church was growing. The Harvest plentiful.

But then things changed. That is, on the side of the Mozambiquan government. After years passed and there was a changing of the guard so to speak, the border officers started to ask questions that were laced with suspicion:

- *Why do you keep entering Mozambique?*
- *What are you really doing?*
- *With what organization are you working?*
- *Lutheran Church, hey? Then where's your official registration?*

Uh...uhmmm...well... so....you see....ahhhh....we

don't have one!

Oops!

The Mozambiquan government doesn't accept *oops!* As a Lutheran Synod in Malawi we realized it was time to get registered! That was years ago and we've been working on it since. The registration road is long and bumpy.

So is the road to get to the Religious Affairs office in Lichinga. 160 kilometers of dirt detours, mud runs, water filled ruts and jarring potholes.



Mud flies when you're having fun!

But it was the only way to get to Lichinga.

After a grueling 6 hours to travel 100 miles we ended up Ministry of Religious Affairs huddled over the two documents.

Combined, those two documents ultimately meant that we needed to submit ELEVEN documents to make an acceptable application. Some still needed to be written, others rewritten. Two needed official notarization. All of them had to be translated into Portuguese.

A despairing thought: could this even be done? We wondered, what was the biggest barrier that was going to be against us?

Language? Time? The wheels of government machinery turning ever so slowly?

“Your mission, should you choose to accept it is to complete these eleven documents before you can submit your application...”

The Ministry of Religious Affairs officials didn't actually speak those words but we knew that's really what was being said. Whether in English, Portuguese or Chichewa, it meant the same thing. Then, as it does every time at the beginning of Mission Impossible, the tape recorder self-destructed and went up in smoke.

Not really, but our hopes did.

In order for us to accomplish the mission it meant numerous trips to the translators, police, internet café, print shop, office supply, Ministry of Religious Affairs...then back again and again and again to each of them. We were the ball in the Pin Ball machine. Bounced from one place to another.

Submit an application? It didn't seem possible. With many some things are just plain impossible.

But with God? ALL things are possible! If He can raise the dead and Himself, can't He raise our hopes?

He did.

And four days later, squeezed back in the two-man cubby hole, we put the documents into the hands of the Religious Affairs Officials. They analyzed and scrutinized. They looked for any mistake and searched for anything missing. When they turned the last page of the last document, something broke: a smile on their faces! Mine, too.

They said our documents were all in order! They accepted them. It doesn't mean they *approved* the application, but it means the documents are worthy to send on to the head office in Maputo, Mozambique for approval. Or not.

What it does mean is that our work is done: The forms are filled, Letters of Honor are written, Criminal report acquired, ID notarized, Religious Biography composed, Constitution translated, First-born sacrificed.

Well, we didn't sacrifice anyone when doing our work, but God did when he was doing His...and He accomplished the impossible: He opened the border to heaven!

One road only: Jesus!

It's an honor to be traveling that road with you, Mission Partners! While we travel that road together, I have a humble request. May I ask you to



pray about this issue?

Mr. Cuinja (right) with an Official from Religious Affairs Office

Pray that the government approves our application and grants us the registration so we can continue the Kingdom work we left across the border in Mozambique some years ago.

Pray with confidence. Pray with persistence. Pray boldly & daily. Pray in Jesus name and to His glory.

Rejoice with us! The amazing has happened already: the documents are in the hands of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Mozambique. Rejoice with us! The comforting thing is already known: the final outcome is up to God. Everything is – and has been all along...

In His hands.

Your Malawi Mission Partner,
John Holtz