

Moving into Malawi:

A History of the Wisconsin Synod's First Years in Malawi
with Personal Perspective from Missionary Raymond Cox

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Church History 331
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*1. We are the workers of the Lord
Let us not be weak with this work
When fighting with Satan the Lord will help*

Chorus:

*The Lord Jesus said to us
Why are we waiting
To continue the work of the Lord
Which is the ladder to heaven*

*2. Through the love of God
His Son was offered as a sacrifice
To save us
He is the ladder*

*3. At first he made his Son a Chief
A leader to hold up a light
He is the ladder*

*4. Through the works of believing
When learning with the Lord
We shall be in that shiny and lovely home*

- An African song written by Deverson Ntambo

Malawi 1960-1970

1

Blantyre - Early on served as the base for our mission work.

2

Chiradzulu District - One of the first areas the WELS began mission work. Congregation established at Kanyepa Village in 1964.

3

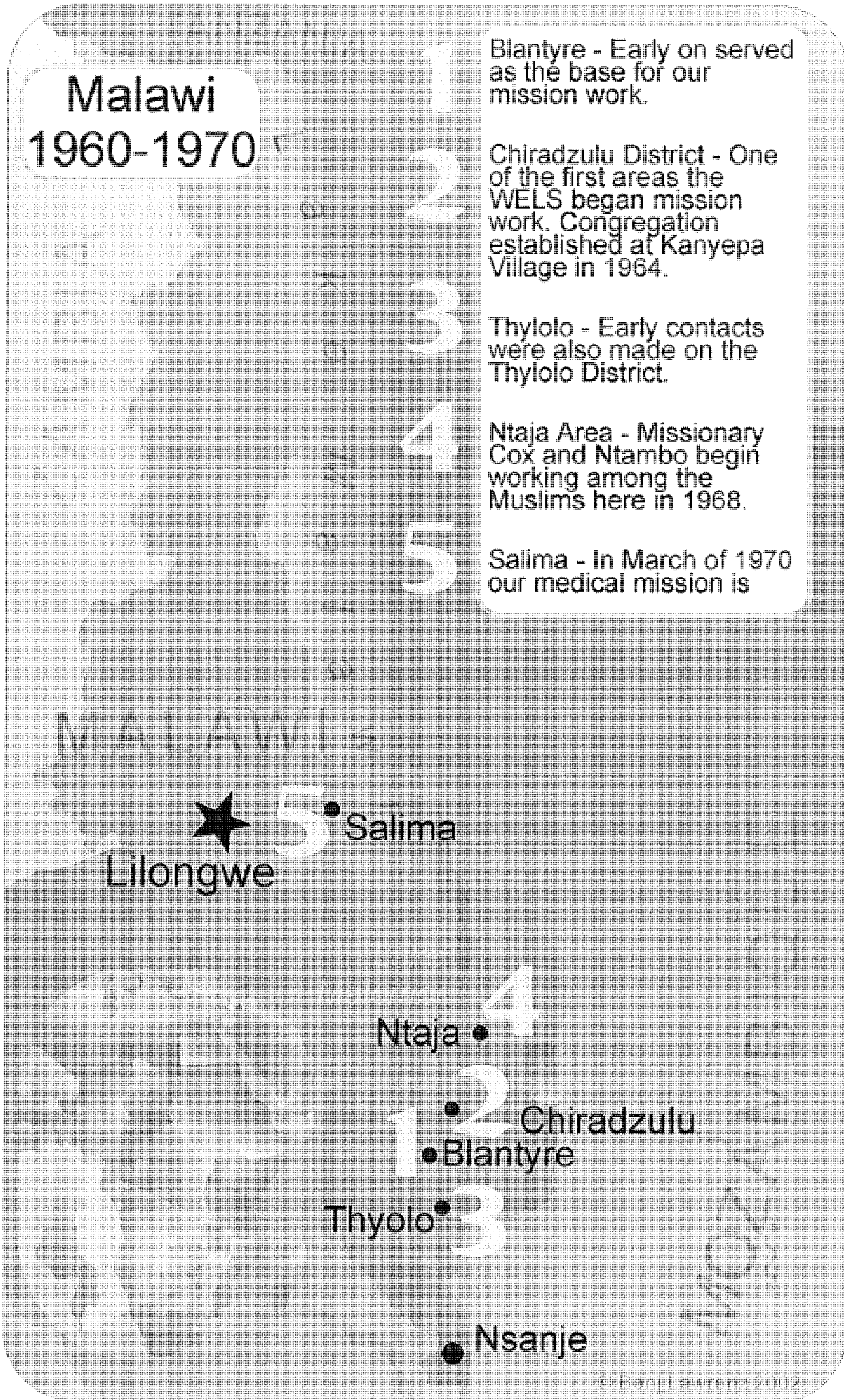
Thyolo - Early contacts were also made on the Thyolo District.

4

Ntaja Area - Missionary Cox and Ntambo begin working among the Muslims here in 1968.

5

Salima - In March of 1970 our medical mission is



★ 5 • Salima
Lilongwe

4 • Ntaja

2 • Chiradzulu
1 • Blantyre

3 • Thyolo

• Nsanje

Introduction

The story of our synod's mission work in Malawi, Africa, is a story of God's marvelous grace. It is a story of how the Lord of the church leads his Gospel ministers to the ends of the earth, and how he controls all of history to carry out his plan of reaching the lost with his message of salvation. Today more than 31,000 souls have been baptized. There are 116 congregations, 24 national pastors, and 9 missionaries. Over 20,000 people have been confirmed in their faith and been given the opportunity to partake of the Lord's Supper.¹ Most importantly, God's Word is being preached to thousands every week. Despairing sinners are being comforted with the message of Christ crucified and pointed to their eternal home in heaven.

This paper will go back to the year 1961 and document the first seven years of our synod's work in Malawi². At that time the future did not always look bright. The first missionaries into that field saw the potential, but weren't always sure exactly how or when the Lord would grow his church. They simply relied on God's promises to bless the ministry of his Word and carried out their work faithfully. The history presented in this paper is supplemented by the shared memories, letters, and documents of one of the first missionaries to enter Malawi – Missionary Raymond Cox.

¹ Numbers taken from a statistical pamphlet given out by the Board for World Missions in 2000.

² For the sake of clarity the present day name of the country will be used in most instances. Prior to becoming an independent state on July 6, 1964, Malawi was the British protectorate, Nyasaland.

Part I – Setting the Stage

The Political Scene in Central Africa

In order to better understand the concerns and challenges that faced our missionaries in Central Africa, we must look at the political setting of the 1960's. In 1953 Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia³, and Southern Rhodesia had been joined in a Federation as British protectorates. However, in the early sixties the winds of change swept across Africa in the form of nationalism. In 1961 an important election took place in Nyasaland that swept an African majority into the legislature. Hastings Kamuzu Banda (1906? – 1997) led this majority which took over 99 percent of the vote. In Rhodesia, strikes, riots, and death threatened the stability of society. Our missionaries, who were centered in and around Lusaka, Northern Rhodesia at this time, experienced the instability first hand. Minutes from a Mission Council⁴ meeting state: "The Mission Council wishes to point out that conditions within the Federation seem very instable [sic]. One begins to sinse [sic] a "feeling of unrest" with the nearing of the territorial elections in October. Because of this fact the mission wants to keep the cost of all construction to a minimum."⁵ It would be unwise to invest any additional money into the mission at this time. If the situation got worse, an evacuation might become necessary.

The ten-year old Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was dissolved on December 31, 1963. Nyasaland became the independent state of Malawi on July 6, 1964, and Hastings Banda, assumed leadership. He made Malawi a republic with himself as its first President. Zambia followed suit by declaring independence at midnight on October 24, 1964. Kenneth David Kaunda became its first president.

³ Northern Rhodesian became Zambia in 1964.

⁴ Mission Council was a self-given name to the body of expatriate missionaries when officially meeting.

New Men for a New Phase of Work

Winds of change also swept through our synod's mission that was centered in Lusaka, Zambia. In the years 1961 and 1962 there was a complete change of personnel in the field, with the exception of Missionary Richard Mueller. Pastor Theodore Sauer was called in 1961 to be the superintendent of the field. The following year Ernst H. Wendland accepted the call to organize and head the worker-training program. This change in personnel also brought Dr. William Schweppe, who had been serving in Nigeria since 1937, to Zambia. Schweppe's love for mission work and his ability to solve problems based on a wealth of experience in the field served as incredible assets for our church. Robert Sawall and Raymond Cox arrived to complete the team of missionaries. When asked to comment on the men, with whom he served, Missionary Cox summarized: "I greatly appreciated Dick [Richard Mueller] and he had marvelous gifts. His gift in language...just what a blessing that God provided a man who had that special gift to learn *Chichewa*. And I think of Ernie Wendland – the gift of the pen – to write so many materials, and Tate Sauer the administrator."⁶ Cox himself proved to have incredible gifts for mission work. His desire to get out and visit the people can be seen in a letter written on December 6, 1965. He writes,

I feel I must get out into the bush, the highways and byways or Satan will continue to whisper in my ear 'You're too busy to do that!' And then a fellow almost becomes convinced that this is true. I don't want it to happen. The Lord has put me here, and by His grace I shall endeavor to carry out his call."⁷

The Lord had placed the gifts that he needed in Central Africa. Through the gifts of these men he would carry out great things.

⁵ Mission Council Minutes, 13 August 1962.

⁶ Raymond Cox, Personal interview, Apr. 5, 2002.

⁷ Raymond Cox, Personal letter written to Gordon Nelson family, Dec. 6, 1965.

Growth in Zambia

During the early 1960's the Lord continued to grant growth to the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA)⁸, despite political unrest. Congregations were being established in the Sala area and also to the north of Lusaka. Several African workers had dedicated themselves to learning the truths of God's Word, and two, Mr. A.S. Muyangana and Mr. Lawrence Chipoya finished their training at the seminary in Nigeria in 1962. Mr. Muyangana immediately began working in the Northwest Province. The established congregation at Matero called a man by the name of Mr. Kawiliza, who had spent many years in the work of the church, to be their pastor. The Lumano Lutheran Dispensary was formally dedicated on Sunday, November 26, 1961, and in 1962 Pastor E.H. Wendland began planning for a seminary to train nationals. The Lord was blessing the work of his church already in 1962, however soon new opportunities for expansion would present themselves.

The Mailing Program

It is interesting to see how many of these opportunities arose from what seemed to be problems. One of the first problems that arose for the missionaries was this: Many of the Africans who heard the Gospel were migratory workers. They learned about Christ in and around Lusaka, but then had to move back to their homes in the villages. The Holy Spirit had lit the flame of faith in their hearts, but now the missionaries needed to keep it fueled with the Word. But how could they continue to reach those who had moved hundreds of miles away?

The answer came in the form of a mailing program that was initiated by Missionary Mueller in 1960. Mueller began sending out sermons, Sunday school lessons and prayers to those who had been ministered to by the Lutheran church. Soon others, who had heard about

⁷ Actually the mission was called the Rhodesian Lutheran Church at this time. To avoid confusion, I am using the name of the church body as we know it.

these mailings from their friends, wanted to be placed on the mailing list. The word was getting out, and the mailing list began to grow.

When Mueller left for a nine-month furlough in 1961, Missionary Cox and his wife Lois took over the mailing, as the list continued to grow. The light of God's Word was penetrating the darkness in the form of the written Word, and soon people even began sending letters requesting a missionary visit or support from the Lutheran church. Here is an example of one of these letters:

Chikomwe Estate
Village Danga
N.A. Nkanda
P.O. Magomero
Nyasaland
18/11/62

Dear Sirs:

I am happy to write asking you to come here. There is a congregation of about 900 people who say you should come in December and have a meeting. Please send a letter without delay and also help us by sending us scripture lessons.

We sing that we are needy and tell Him please we want the Lutheran Church here. Please answer us quickly.

Perhaps if you want us we know the way to your home. We want the mission to be with us here at Chikomwe.

Now greetings to you.

(signed)

Pastor G. Monjeza⁹

Even though some of these requests were nothing more than requests for financial help, others proved to be genuine requests for the Gospel. The Spirit was working. Soon it became clear that a good number of these requests were coming from the east – from Malawi. Doors were opening and the missionaries began to think about expanding into new areas.

⁹ Taken from the personal files of Raymond Cox.

Part II - Moving into Malawi

“God moves in mysterious ways”¹⁰

However, in 1961 the prospect of moving into Malawi was still dim. It seemed wise to first investigate areas that were much closer to Zambia. The missionaries first looked to the south into Southern Rhodesia, but the natural barriers: the Zambezi River, and a large desolate area on each side of it, prevented them from moving in that direction. In addition to this, since there was also another Confessional Lutheran church body carrying out work in that area, the men turned to the west. However, the Lord turned them from that direction, because even though there was much land, there were very few people per square mile. Mueller writes, “Then we looked to the north – and saw what we, with human reasoning, thought was the direction in which the Lord was leading us to spread his vital message of salvation.”¹¹ The Copperbelt of Zambia, which lay to the north of Lusaka, looked promising.

When the missionaries met to discuss possible areas of expansion in June of 1962, they gave four reasons as to why it seemed more advantageous to move into the Copperbelt instead of Malawi. They were: 1) The Copperbelt is densely populated. 2) Work in the Copperbelt would afford the missionaries with an opportunity for more frequent visits to the field (It is 275 miles from Lusaka to the Copperbelt and 700 miles to Blantyre, Malawi). 3) While working in the Copperbelt, it would be easier to supervise work in the Balovale area. 4) The unsettled political conditions in Nyasaland (proposed withdrawal from the Federation) seemed to make it less advantageous to mission work at that time. After stating these reasons the Mission Council resolved to begin work in the Copperbelt.

However, the time was not yet ripe to begin expansion. Mueller writes, “neither the funds nor the manpower was available for such an expansion of our work at that time.”

¹⁰ Taken from the first sentence of an article written by Richard Mueller for the *Northwestern Lutheran*. Richard Mueller, “Mysterious are the Ways of God,” The Northwestern Lutheran 1 June 1988: 208.

Expansion needed to be put on the back burner. In the meantime, the missionaries continued to follow up on and visit contacts in the Copperbelt.

Five months later the Mission Council decided that more information was needed.

Things had changed; another survey was needed. On October 1, 1962 the missionaries resolved:

That as soon as possible Missionaries Mueller and Cox make a trip to survey the Copperbelt and Nyasaland areas, in order that more concrete information might be obtained as to the opportunities which these areas present for possible mission expansion work, and that the Mission Council receive reports of this survey activity.¹²

Even though five months earlier we resolved to begin work in the Copperbelt, the Lord was

leading his church into a different field. "God moves in mysterious ways."



A van stuck in the mud during rainy season.

The Exploratory Trip to Malawi

The missionaries needed to move quickly in order to make a survey of Malawi in that same year. It was October, and the rainy season usually began in November. The road that ran between Lusaka,

Zambia and Blantyre, Malawi was only paved for 20

miles. Once the rains began the 700-mile trip to Malawi would become nearly impossible.

Another pressing issue caused the missionaries to move quickly. Since Malawi was still part of the Federation at this time, there were no border posts, customs, or immigration laws. The missionaries could move freely in and out of Malawi. It was uncertain as to whether or not they would be allowed to do so once Malawi became an independent state under Banda.

Cox remembers that first trip quite well:

The roads were just abominable. But we did it in a little VW Beetle... That's where I learned the first major Chichewa sentence that I could repeat mseu uwu upita kuti, which

¹¹ Ibid, 209.

¹² Mission Council Minutes, 1 October 1962.

means, 'Where does this road go?' Because we simply did not know where we were at times. We knew that we were going around the lake [Lake Malawi], but we had no idea of how far it was and we just kept on going until we got to the Grand Beach Hotel near Salima.¹³

While carrying out their survey, Cox and Mueller could hardly believe their eyes. Cox comments:

This is different than Zambia. Here in Malawi we are never out of sight of people. People are always walking from somewhere, and we are never out of sight of a village. In Zambia there are areas where one can drive for miles and miles and miles and not see anybody. So here we cross a border and go into another country, and there are people everywhere!¹⁴

When missionaries see people, they don't just see "people," they see lost souls - souls that need to hear about their Savior from sin - souls that need to be won for the Kingdom of Christ. If there was any doubt about moving into Malawi, it was removed from the minds of Mueller and Cox.

When the missionaries returned home they could hardly contain their joy. In a letter to his parents Cox writes,

We are so happy to be moving into this area, I think we will live in the Blantyre-Limbe area. So many people have "called" us to come and preach and teach the Gospel to them. In some areas there are over 800 people per sq. mile. Ny. is the most densely populated area of the Federation. With the Lord's blessing we hope that our labors in his name will bring forth a rich harvest of blood bought souls.¹⁵

Besides the dense population and the direct invitations, the report that was presented to the Mission Council on November 12, 1962 also pointed out that: 1) The language (Chinyanja) was one ^{w;th} in which our missionaries were at least partly acquainted with, and 2) The building codes in Nyasaland were less stringent than those in the Copperbelt. Even though the report was a favorable one, many of the missionaries still had reservations. Some thought that the time was not right; there was still too much political turmoil in the air. Others believed that if the mission

¹³ Raymond Cox, Personal interview, 17 March 2002.

¹⁴ Raymond Cox, Personal interview, 5 April 2002.

¹⁵ Raymond Cox, Personal letter to his family, 11 November 1962.

expanded, the men would be too spread out. However, when veteran missionary, William Schweppe, said, "The Lord is calling us into Malawi," he cemented the Mission Council's decision. At that same meeting it was resolved: "That our Rhodesian Lutheran Church expand its Mission operation into Nyasaland."¹⁶ The men in the field were ready to move. All that they needed now was the approval of the Executive Committee¹⁷ in the States.

Lack of Communication and a Delay

One can expect that when men are trying to communicate across two continents, which are 10,000 miles apart, there will be miscommunication at times. One can also expect that a synod that is still very new to overseas mission work will have to learn by experience. So it was with our synod's mission work in Central Africa. It seems as though the Mission Council had almost anticipated a breakdown in communication at a meeting in October of 1962. They were concerned because the relationship between the Executive Committee and the Mission Council had not been clearly defined. They expressed their concerns in the minutes of October 8th, 1962:

B. Whereas, The Mission Council is an organization which came into being without specific directive from the Executive Committee, and

Whereas, It is an organization of definite value both to the Mission field and to the Executive Committee, and

Whereas, The personnel of the Mission feel the need to channel their reports to the Executive Committee through the Mission Council, be it

RESOLVED: That the Status of the Mission Council be clarified by the Executive Committee, particularly as it relates to communications and reports directed to or received from the Executive Committee.

Unfortunately, before the lines of communication and authority between the two organizations were clarified, a misunderstanding took place.

¹⁶ Mission Council minutes, 12 November 1962.

¹⁷ The Executive Committee was the body assigned to oversee work in the field.

A month later when the Executive Committee heard that the Mission Council had already explored Malawi, they felt as though the Mission Council had acted out of order. A letter from A.L Mennicke, the chair of the Executive Committee, expressed these concerns about expansion into Malawi:

The report reached us too late for our meeting, but we knew it was on the way. The above decision was reached in view of the resolution of the World Board, October 9, 1962 which reads: "WE RESOLVE to explore Nyasaland field through Rhodesian Missionaries on the field plus members of the Executive Committee should they visit the field before 1963 Synod Convention. The expansion of this work will be under the authority of the World Board." I could not convey this resolution to you when I advised not to explore Nyasaland at this time since I did not have a copy of the minutes. The executive committee cannot approve the "Resolve" of II of the MC minutes of November 12. The world board considers Nyasaland a new field which would come under its jurisdiction and which should have Synod approval. What about a concerted effort in Northern Rhodesia to seek and to save that which is lost? Can't we make a thrust into some of the cities of Northern Rhodesia or into areas west of the Copperbelt? We share your concern about committing a field to two untried native men without some close supervision of one of our seasoned missionaries. Is it fair to these young men to give them practically unsupervised responsibility so early in their careers as missionaries? Are we possibly thereby taking a chance with the precious gifts of the Holy Spirit?¹⁸

The Executive Committee seemed to believe that the Mission Council had overstepped their authority by exploring a new area. However, the Mission Council seemed to think that they had been given the go ahead. They defend their action in a letter to the Executive Committee in December of 1962:

It is apparent that a misunderstanding must have existed concerning the Mission Council's decision to explore the Nyasaland field. The Executive Committee indicates in its letter of Nov. 30th that we were "advised not to explore Nyasaland at this time." However, in Chairman Mennicke's letter of Oct. 23rd [of 1962] it was stated, (?wording) "If you have reasons which indicate that we begin immediate work in Nyasaland we will be eager to hear them." We interpreted these latter words to mean that some type of exploration, at least, should be undertaken.¹⁹

¹⁸ A.L. Mennicke, Letter addressed to the Mission Council, 20 November 1962.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Therefore, the Mission Council's action in sending Mueller and Cox to explore Nyasaland was made in good faith, without the intent of acting contrary to the wishes or directives of the Executive Committee.²⁰

When men can not meet to discuss matters face to face, it is not uncommon for misunderstandings to take place. That seems to be exactly what happened. The Mission Council had not intentionally acted out of line.

The misunderstanding was cleared up in an Evangelical fashion by directly addressing the problem at hand. When the Executive Committee met on January 15, 1963, they resolved to place the expansion into Malawi under the supervision of the Mission Council.

Furthermore, the members of the Executive Committee traveled to Africa for a series of special meetings in April of 1963. For five days they met with the Mission Council and hammered out the relationship of the expatriate missionaries and the Executive Committee.

Missionary Cox comments on the success of these meeting in a letter to his family:

I feel that the couple of weeks that they spent with us in the field made everyone realize the difficulties and misunderstandings which can develop when an operation of a foreign mission has to be carried on thru letters over 10,000 miles. A result of the meetings is that much more of the actual day by day operations will rest with the men on the field. After a week and a half we were able to talk over the major items. Both of the men did have an opportunity to visit many of our preaching stations and see the work in progress. After this was all done we were able to arrange a trip to Nyasaland.²¹

By visiting the field the men of the Executive Committee got a more in depth perspective of the work that was going on in Central Africa. In a direct fashion they ironed out the difficulties and misunderstandings, so that the work of God could be carried on.

The Decision to Move into Malawi

As Cox pointed out in his letter, while the members of the Executive Committee, W.R. Hoyer and A.L. Mennicke, were in Central Africa, they also paid a visit to Malawi. They were

²⁰ Mission Council minutes, Letter from the Mission Council to the Executive Committee attached to the minutes, 17 December 1962.

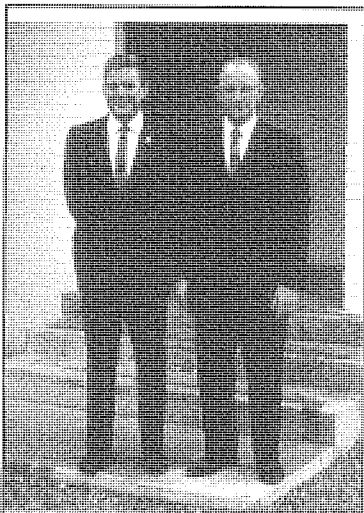
²¹ Raymond Cox, Personal letter to his family, 6 May 1963.

greatly impressed. Hoyer begins his report on the “Nyasaland Mission Exploration and Expansion” by writing:

It has been said that a Volkswagon owner must think small. Our Rhodesian Missionaries have not only taught us to think small, but highly of the capabilities of the Volkswagon, both on the highway and on the rough bush trail...But when out [sic] thoughts turn to missions and to the Great Commission of our Saviour, out [sic] thinking cannot be small, but global. Our recent 20,000 mile Rhodesian Mission visitation trip has given us an appreciation of the global dimension and scope of His Great Commission: “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations...”²²

Throughout this entire report one can sense Hoyer’s amazement at the opportunity that lay before the missionaries. His report concludes:

We were all convinced that we have here in Nyasaland an effective door to great mission opportunities – being the first Lutheran Church to enter Nyasaland with the Gospel of our Risen and Ascended Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are grateful for this rare privilege to visit our established Rhodesian Mission and this field of our proposed expansion. We herewith ask the World Board to approve the Executive Committee’s proposal to preach the Gospel in Nyasaland.²³



Missionaries Mueller and Cox were commissioned in 1963 to begin work in Malawi as soon as possible.

Missionaries Cox and Mueller were to begin work in Malawi as soon as possible. Cox expressed his feelings on the expansion in a letter to his family, saying, “Can the four men in N.R. [Northern Rhodesia] hold down the work when Dick and I leave? Dick and I feel that this can surely be done. We feel that the Lord is urgently calling us to go – and go soon, for the day is far spent.”²⁴ In May of 1963 Mueller and Cox began to make the necessary arrangements to procure housing in the Blantyre-Limbe area.

²² W.R. Hoyer, Nyasaland Mission Exploration and Expansion Report, 21 June 1963.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Raymond Cox, Personal letter to his family, 20 May, 1963.

Part III - The Move into Malawi

Early Obstacles

Besides the obvious obstacles of overcoming a foreign language, and establishing a mission base in a new country, the missionaries also experienced outright opposition. On their first night in Blantyre, while they lodged at Ryall's hotel, Missionary Mueller's vehicle was broken into. "The left front stationary window had been smashed and several items were stolen."²⁵ Only weeks later Mueller's house was broken into and several items were once again stolen. Satan was working hard to discourage the young missionaries.

A visit to the American Consulate²⁶ proved to be even less assuring. Cox still remembers the conversation that took place between the missionaries and the member of the American Council:

He [representative of the American Council] asked, 'Are you members of the Lutheran World Federation of Churches?', and we said, 'No.' We then explained briefly how we felt about fellowship. Then he asked, 'Are you members of the World Council of Churches?' And again we said, 'No.' He came right out and said, 'I don't think that you are going to make it as a church. You simply are not going to make it.'

It is a good thing that the growth of God's church does not rest on the prediction of unbelievers.

The First Service – June 23, 1963

Despite early setbacks, the Lord granted his missionaries great signs of encouragement. Only a week after the Coxes and Muellers arrived in Blantyre, Malawi, the first worship service was held in Mueller's home. The Lord led 26 people to that service. Of that number 10 were Africans, including Deverson Ntambo²⁷, who would later become a leader of the national church. The service came about partly because of a business card that had been left in the Coxes' rental home saying: "We are Lutherans and we want to come to your church service. Please contact us

²⁵ Mission Council minutes, 20 June 1963.

²⁶ This was the organization that was responsible for Americans in Africa prior to the creation of the Embassy.

²⁷ Ntambo wrote the song that prefaced this paper.

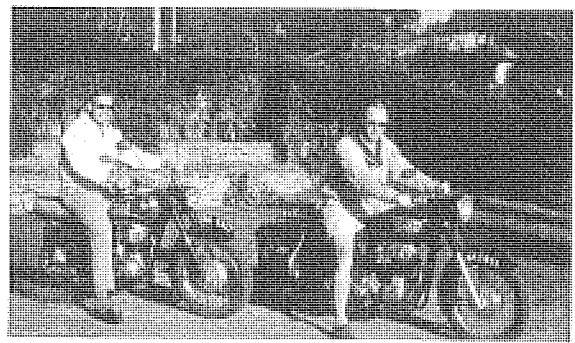
A.S.A.P.”²⁸ The card was left by the Nelson family. Gordon Nelson was a Lutheran who was working for the United States Peace Corps. During that first worship service the Nelson’s were almost in tears, because they were so hungry for the Word of God. They had gone to other churches, but they were not hearing the Word of God. That worship service not only filled the Nelson’s void, it also reinvigorated the missionaries for the great work which lay ahead.

Finding Contacts

The flood of requests through letters that came from Malawians had been one of the primary reasons the Mission Council decided to move into Malawi. Missionary Cox and Mueller made it their first task to travel into the villages to find those who had written them. In doing so they once again faced obstacles.

As was mentioned earlier, a spirit of nationalism and anti-colonialism dominated Malawi. Because the missionaries were white, they were often identified as colonialists and greeted with suspicion. When they went into the villages, they got very little cooperation. Cox comments: “If there was a hunger for the Gospel they were not showing it. There was animosity. They

would not identify who the people were [the people who had written the letters].” One such example of animosity came from a man named Mandulo. The missionaries had bought



Mueller and Cox on their motorcycles.

motorcycles because they found that they were conducive to traveling the narrow roads of Africa. When Cox asked Mandulo about the location of a prospect, Mandulo got very angry and yelled, “If you ever come here again, Ill stone you

²⁸ Raymond Cox, Personal interview, 17 March 2002.

and I'll burn your motorcycle!" That night Cox went home and told his wife Lois, "I've been threatened and I'm going back out there tomorrow because this bothers me!" The Lord used such resolve to spread his Word throughout Malawi.

The opposition would have to become much greater than this to prevent them from following up on letters like this one:

From N.F. Kaphesi
Mphandula Vge.
P.O. Box 13
Namitete, Malawi
2nth Sept. 65

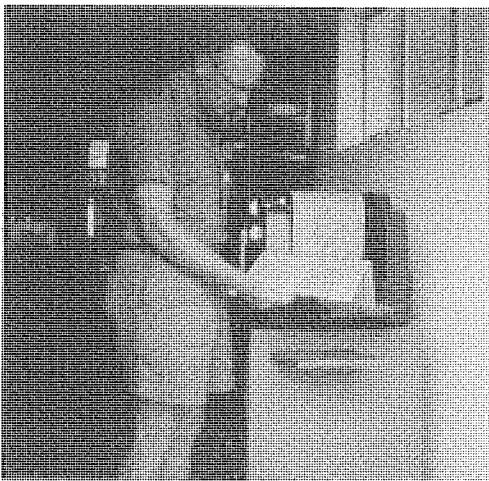
To Lutheran Church of Central Africa
P.O. Box 748
Blantyre, Malawi

Dear Sir,

I have been reading through your gospel news since last year. Now I beg to you if you can do something better through your faithful work of God.

Is it possible to baptise [sic] one of your part of the Church as I am? I am in need of your baptism through Jesus Christ from your church. Now how can I be baptized when you are far there [sic].

I remain yours,
(signed)
N.F. Kaphesi²⁹



Missionary Cox printing materials to send to the villages.

The Holy Spirit had begun to work in hearts. When the Cox found the man who wrote this letter, he had the privilege of baptizing him and his family. Cases like this one, made it ever the more clear, that it was imperative to find those who had written letters.

Throwing the Gospel out the Window

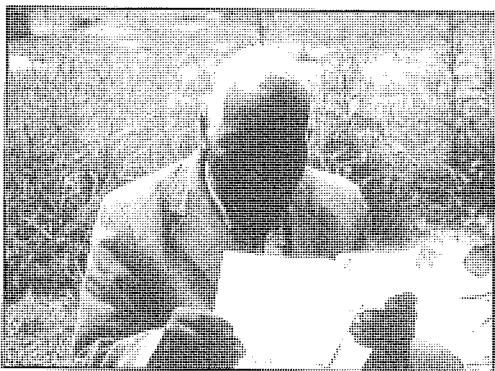
The mailing program that had played such a vital role in bringing the missionaries to Malawi, moved to

²⁹Taken from the personal files of Raymond Cox.

Malawi with the Coxes. There it continued to create more and more opportunities. In 1964 Cox writes: "Dick and I still go out to the bush at least once a week. I'm spending more and more time with publications since our mailing program is growing ever greater in number of members. Yesterday we sent out 314 packets of materials to readers."³⁰ By December of 1965 the mailing list was almost becoming too much for the Coxes to handle. In a letter to the Nelson family, Cox writes: "As in Calif. so in Malawi – the pace is maddening. Last week we posted 1180 packets. That's a lot of trips up and down that assembly line for two people."³¹ In a single month in 1965 over 16,000 pieces of mail were sent out. In 1966 a lay-missionary, Mr. Elmer Schneider, was called to be Publications' Director. Schneider had twenty years of experience, and shortly after he arrived took over the entire mailing program.



In addition to sending printed material out to the villages, the missionaries also began to take tracts on topics, such as, baptism or marriage, into the field with them. The tracts had a



cross on them and in the cross was the address of the mission along with the words "*If you want to know the truth please write to the Lutheran Church of Central Africa.*" Because the Malawians had little else to read, they craved these tracts. So much so, that Cox and Mueller would drive through villages and just toss them

³⁰ Raymond Cox, Personal letter to family, 2 June 1964.

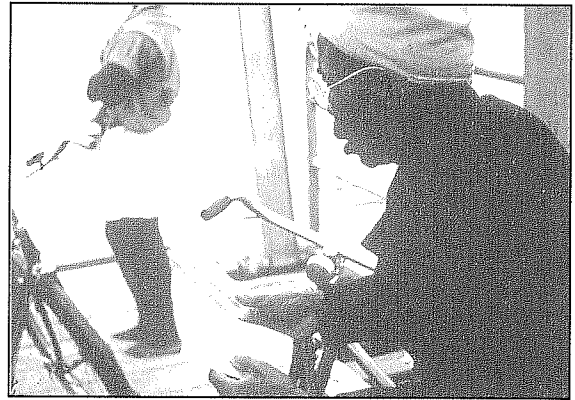
³¹ Raymond Cox, Personal letter to the Gordon Nelson family, 6 December 1965.

out the window, hence the name “Throwing the Gospel out the Window.”³² Cox recollects:

We would be driving along a bush road. There was a dirt road and a road grater. It almost got to be a contest. If one can call throwing the Gospel out the window a contest. We would see people walking, and they would stoop down and pick up a tract. Guys on bicycles would get off and pick up a tract. Then we saw a guy coming in a great big road grater and wondered, “Is he going to stop this great big piece of machinery – get down – go and grovel in the dust – to pick up a tract? And he did! We threw it out! Every thing stops. We were watching this in the rearview mirror and here he picks up a tract!”³³

Even though many only used these pieces of paper to start a fire, roll a cigarette, or insulate their homes, many read them and wrote to the mission.

In fact in one month in 1966 there were over 50 requests. The missionaries would keep track of these requests by placing pins on a map. When there was a cluster of pins in one area they would visit that area. Once again, the Lord used the



written word to plant a seed in the hearts of unbelievers.

The Firstfruits of the Field

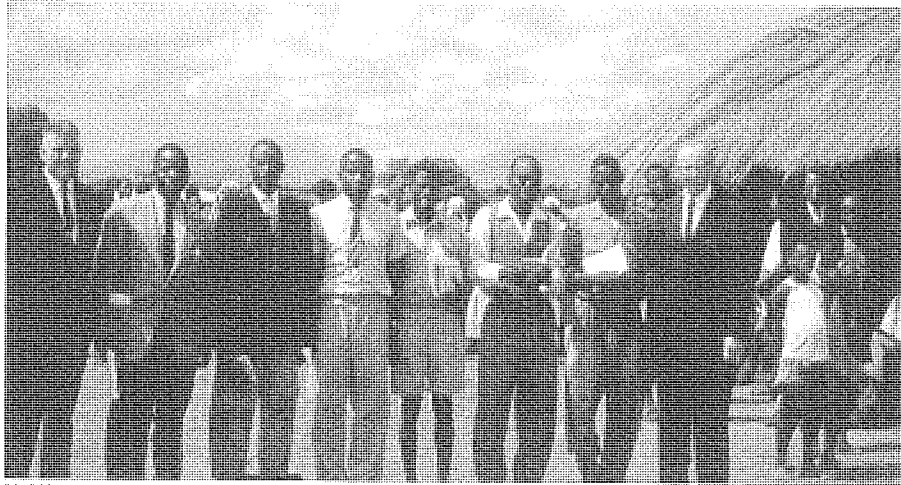
The first confirmation class in Malawi came about by following up on a written request from the field. Early in 1963 Cox followed up on a letter from Cylice Bowman in Kanyepa, which is in the Chiradzulu district.³⁴ Mr. Bowman had received a short course of instruction from missionaries who were affiliated with the Church of Christ. However, the Church of Christ had pulled out of the field, and left the people without a missionary. Bowman had become disenchanted with the Church of Christ because he felt that the care packages coming from them were not being equally divided. Bowman seemed to have the natural qualities of a leader. He

³² This name was first given to this aspect of their ministry in the July, 1964 edition of missionary’s paper called “Blacklight.”

³³ Raymond Cox, Personal interview, 17 March 2002.

³⁴ The Chiradzulu district is 25 miles south of Blantyre.

The missionaries with the six men whom they confirmed on May 6, 1964.



also had credibility with his people, and status in the village. It is interesting to see how the Lord used what seemed to be all of the wrong reasons, to lead him to our church.

Missionary Cox began instructing Bowman, along with three elders from his congregation. From the outset Cox realized that these men had a very limited knowledge of Scripture and did not understand the proper use of the Sacraments. He continued to work with them and on May 6, 1964, Bowman, along with five other men were confirmed. Soon after the congregation called Bowman to be their pastor.

On July 26, twenty-nine adults in Chiradzulu were ready to be received into communicant membership. Approximately 120 people gathered for this service.

Cox recalls:

The Nelsons, the Muellers, and the Coxes all went out, and Bowman had the whole service. He gave communion, and I can still see the Nelsons kneeling down and receiving the Lord's supper from Bowman. It was thrilling to see that here is an African. Here is the indigenous church and white people are kneeling and communing from one of our African pastors who was called by a group of his people to be their pastor.³⁵

Only one year after they began work in Malawi, the missionaries were allowed to witness such an incredible event. Cox writes:

³⁵ Raymond Cox, Personal Interview, 17 March 2002.

How truly wonderful that your missionaries who confirmed Cylice Bowman only a few months before were now privileged to receive Holy Communion from him, who had been called as a servant in the Lord's vineyard. Neither Pastor Bowman, nor we, can take any credit for this bountiful harvest. It was brought about only by the grace of God who through the working of the Holy Spirit richly blessed the almighty Word. The events of July 26, 1964 shall be cherished in our memory.³⁶

The missionaries were elated. They saw the numbers. They saw how God's word was working among the indigenous church of Africa. Things were moving quickly - perhaps too quickly.

The Policy of an Indigenous Church

From the very beginning the missionaries in Malawi had been trying to establish an indigenous church. Indigenous is defined by Webster as "produced, growing, or living naturally in a country or climate; native." Cox and Mueller were to play a much different role than a pastor or home missionary in America. A statement titled, "The Mission and the Indigenous Church," was adopted by both the Executive Committee and the LCCA during their meeting on April 29th, 1963. This statement describes the purpose of the mission thus:

The expatriate missionaries are to come into the field to establish the preaching of the Gospel, to guide, instruct, encourage, and as much seems to be wise and necessary, give financial support to the church which is gathered through the preaching of the Word. This work is to be done in such a way that the missionaries can withdraw more and more into the background as the indigenous church grows in strength and self-support." The goal was not to establish a "white" church, nor to take over the leadership of existing congregations in a paternalistic fashion, but rather to grow an indigenous church.³⁷

In carrying out indigenization Cox and Mueller began using a method of mission work that was very similar to the "Christian Missioners Corps"³⁸ that was being tried in Puerto Rico. The principles lying behind the "Christian Missioners Corps" were developed by Chairman Edgar Hoenecke, and put into practice by Missionary Roger Sprain. The idea was to start and

³⁶ Article from the personal file of Raymond Cox.

³⁷ Report attached to the Mission Council Minutes of 23-29 April 1963.

³⁸ Pastor Cox pointed out that the principles behind the "Missioners Corps" are almost identical to new "Hispanic Outreach Teams" (HOT) program that is being promoted in our synod today. It is interesting to note that E. Hoenecke had already thought through many of these ideas almost 40 years ago.

teach a cluster of nationals and then move on to a new area as soon as possible. It was thought that by following this practice, a missionary could extend his efforts, and in effect reach many more souls.

However this was not an easy task. The missionaries in the field had to constantly struggle with the principles that lay behind indigenization. A very practical example came when Pastor and Mrs. Cox had to decide whether or not to give Christmas presents to the national pastors. At times they just had to follow their heart, and do what seemed best to them. Cox also remembers a discussion that he had with a fellow missionary, who wanted to increase the salary of a native pastor that was under his supervision:

The missionary said, "I am going to increase their salary, even if it has to come from my own pocket." He saw their standard of living and compared it to his own. He felt so blessed in comparison to what they had, but I said, "No! Don't do it! You and I will come and go. But if there is going to be a time when they are self-supporting, then we have to back away. This is something that we have to be very careful about."³⁹

In order to make sure that they were not being overly paternalistic, the missionaries had to think through many of their day to day decisions. By doing so, they hoped to build the Kingdom of God in the long run.

Towards more Supervision

When Cox left for furlough in August of 1964, he believed that the creation of an indigenous church in Malawi was well on its way. The first native pastor, Cylice Bowman was leading a congregation of well over a hundred. Pastor Bowman had begun to instruct many in God's Word, and the church seemed to be growing beyond expectations. The statistics looked fantastic.

However, when Cox returned from furlough in 1965 and went out to visit the village he was unpleasantly surprised:

³⁹ Raymond Cox, Personal Interview, 5 April 2002.

We went out to visit the village, and they were going to celebrate the Lord's Supper, and what we wanted to do was talk to the people. We ended up having – oh, what pastors had years and years ago before Holy Communion – a type of announcement. And we thought, 'Well let's introduce that! And have a confessional service by way of preparation for the Lord's Supper.' And that's when we said, 'What do you receive in the Lord's Supper? Should you be baptized? Should little children be baptized?' What we found was terrible. You know Luther's preface to the Catechism - that they don't know the Apostle's Creed, they don't know the Lord's Prayer, they don't know why they are coming to the Lord's Supper, not in any depth at least. They were going through the motions, and yes they were hearing God's Word, but we felt, 'What have we done?' We had gone too fast too far and we are going to have to back up. And when you start to do that the pendulum swings in the opposite extreme.⁴⁰



An African Sinanga (witchdoctor) displays his various charms and potions.

hours. Nobody. I thought, 'This is Easter. We are celebrating the Resurrection of Christ. Where are you?' Finally a little boy came and I asked him, 'Where are all the people?' He said, 'Well there's a funeral!' Then I realized that when there is a funeral in the village, everyone goes to the funeral, even if the person who dies was not a Christian... Why? Because of superstition and witchcraft. Because people don't die because of natural causes. You die because of supernatural causes.⁴¹

If a member of the village did not go to the village they would be accused of playing a part in the person's death. Not necessarily



A young child wears a superstitious charm around her neck.

Besides a lack of knowledge, a spirit of syncretism dominated the hearts of many African converts. Superstition often dies hard. Cox gives an example:

I went out to have the Easter service at Kanyepa, which was one of the larger congregations. I got to the church and nobody was there. Not a soul! Well, that in itself was not all that unusual in Africa... I waited. Nobody came. Two

⁴⁰ Raymond Cox, Personal Interview, 17 March 2002.

⁴¹ Ibid.

a physical part in it, but a spiritual part. If a person was not present at a funeral then perhaps, he had placed a curse on the dead person. This person would be sought out by the witch doctor for trial. It is very difficult for Christian converts to escape the superstition of their culture.

After taking the problems listed above into consideration, Cox realized that the people were not ready to go on their own. For this reason it became a high priority to encourage men to enter the Lutheran Bible Institute (LBI). More training was needed. Following their encouragement Pastor Bowman went to the LBI and later returned to the field as a pastor under the supervision of the missionaries.

More Manpower is Added

When Missionary Mueller returned from his furlough in 1965, he was called back to Zambia. The Coxes were alone in Malawi for almost nine months until, John Janosek, was transferred to Malawi from Zambia in 1966.

Shortly after he arrived in the field, Cox and Janosek decided to implement a divide and conquer approach. The field was divided along Mdimba road, which runs at an angle from the Southwest to the Northeast cutting Southern Malawi in half. Cox took everything to the North of the road, while Janosek took everything to the South.

This gave Cox the opportunity to move into new areas. He slowly pushed north, moving into the Zomba district, and then into Salima, which is situated along the shore of Lake Malawi. The Gospel was slowly moving into new parts of the country, and in 1968 Cox began working in the Ntaja area among the Muslims living there. He hoped to begin working in the country's second largest city, Lilongwe. But once again opposition arose.

Part IV – A New Beginning in Malawi

Opposition creates a New Opportunity

When missionary Cox traveled to the Ntaja area, he took a man by the name of Deverson Ntambo with him. Ntambo was training to be a leader in the church. Unlike many Malawians at that time, Ntambo had a secure job, working for the veterinarian department of the government. When Ntambo accepted the call to serve as an evangelist, he took a major pay cut and sacrificed the security that he enjoyed. Cox praises him saying, “What a bold venture of confidence and faith!” Instead of focusing on things of this world, Ntambo set his eyes on things above. Deverson Ntambo often served as a great source of encouragement for Cox during their journeys together throughout Malawi.

Encouragement was something that they both definitely needed at this time, because in 1968 they began to experience opposition. Someone was actively working to put an end to our mission work in that area. He says,

I think that someone in that Ntaja area did not want us there. It was a Muslim area. But I'll never know...if the Muslims didn't want us in there, or the Roman Catholics, or the Baptists...I don't know. But I felt that even when we were called into the office of the President that someone wanted the Lutherans out of mission work in Malawi. They were trying to get rid of us. If they couldn't get rid of us altogether, they wanted build walls around us...Someone did an end run and tried to thwart our work...We had to stop at the Police Headquarters each time before we went into that area. And if we didn't they would know that we were there, because they had informants. Because how many people would go there with a fancy car. We were driving what we called the “golden holden.” It was a Chevy type vehicle out of Australia...and it was a golden type of color – yellowish color – you couldn't hide it and they knew we were the Lutheran missionaries.⁴²

Mission work was difficult in this area, and Cox even received a letter from the office of the President. The letter asked what the LCCA was doing in Malawi in addition to their ecclesiastical work. They wanted to know if the church was doing anything to spread the Gospel in addition to preaching it.

⁴² *ibid.*

*Ernie [Wendland] and I then responded with a letter explaining that we were not involved in any humanitarian aid project.. The bottom line was that we were doing nothing. Not in Malawi. But we were not opposed to it, and that is the point that we made in the letter. And to prove that we are not opposed to it, we wrote about the medical work in Zambia. I think that the inference was that we would not be opposed to doing medical work in Malawi.*⁴³

Another letter came from the office of the President that said: “We conclude that you are not involved in secular or humanitarian work, therefore you must not expand into any new area.”⁴⁴

This led the missionaries to ask, “What are we going to do about Lilongwe? What are we going to do about Ntaja? What are we going to do about reaching out into any new districts?”

Through these questions the Lord was once again leading his church into a new opportunity.

The Opportunity – Medical Work in Malawi

Missionary Cox had faced opposition before, and this letter was not enough to cause him to give up. Instead Cox began to investigate alternatives. That is when the Lord led a man by the name of Jack Leschaft⁴⁵ onto the scene. Leschaft was working under the Ministry of Health and had come to Malawi to help the Private Hospital Association of Malawi. If it weren't for his background and knowledge of Malawi's medical needs, and his connections with government officials, one has to wonder if our medical mission would have begun.

Leschaft assessed the opportunities that lay before our church, and suggested establishing a medical dispensary near Salima. He advised,

*Don't wave red flags in front of the government and build a chapel next to the dispensary. But the government is not telling you, 'You dare not preach the Gospel.' It is telling you, 'Do humanitarian work.'*⁴⁶

A medical dispensary could serve as a bridge to spreading the Gospel in Malawi. Cox made it his primary task to search for land to buy in this area.

⁴³ Raymond Cox, Personal Interview, 5 April 2002.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Leschaft was a member of the Missouri Synod.

⁴⁶ Raymond Cox, Personal Interview, 5 April 2002.

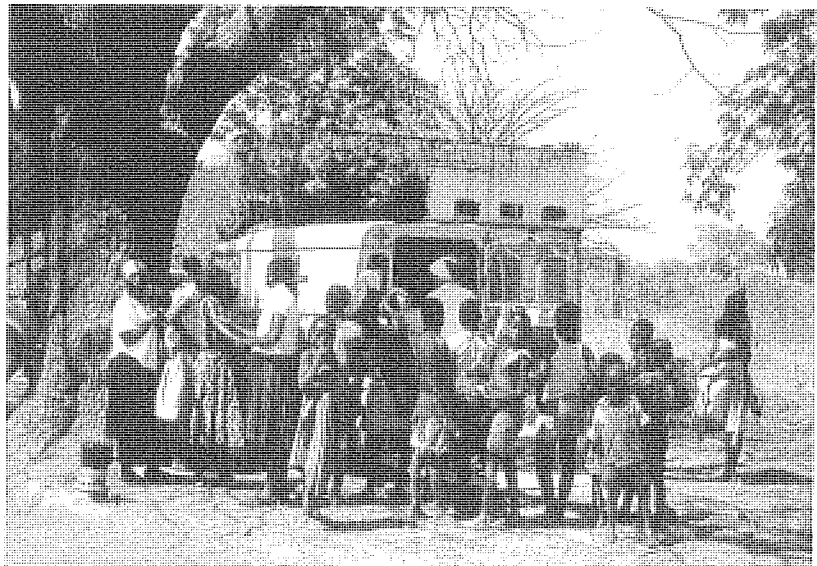
On his return trips from the bush, Cox would often stay at the Lilongwe hotel. A man whom Cox got to know quite well ran the hotel. The man's name was Dave Elder. One night as he was having a drink with a man named Barney Barns, he was discussing his frustrations over not being able to find any land for sale. Cox tells the story,

I said to Barney, 'I can't find a decent place. I find lots of run down places.' And Barney said, 'What are you looking for?' I said, 'We want to start medical work and we want to start down in Salima.' He said, 'Talk to Dave, the owner of the hotel. He's got a place and he wants to move.' It's amazing how the hand of God was in all of this when one looks back. The government says that we can't expand into a new area. We say, 'O.K. we'll do medical work.' Dave Elder wants to move out because of political pressure. He has property right on the Lake in Salima where we can modify it. We were ready to sell the property on Stores Rd. in Lusaka, Zambia that was no longer necessary, because the Sauer's had moved out. We sell that. It was enough money to reinvest and buy the property over in Salima. We bought it and the deal was closed. Then the whole medical work begins to develop.⁴⁷

The hand of the Lord had once again opened doors for his church. Through the agent of governmental opposition the church was led to begin medical work. In March of 1970 the

Theodore Kretzmans arrived and initiated the medical work. That medical work allowed the missionaries to stay in Malawi, and created more and more opportunities for outreach.

Several years later the medical mission was forced to relocate to Lilongwe, the very city that Cox had been banned from



The medical mission shows love for the African people by helping them with their medical needs.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

years earlier. Years later it became the headquarters for our medical work in the field, and then it became the headquarters for our Bible Institute in Malawi, and today it has become the center of our work in Malawi.

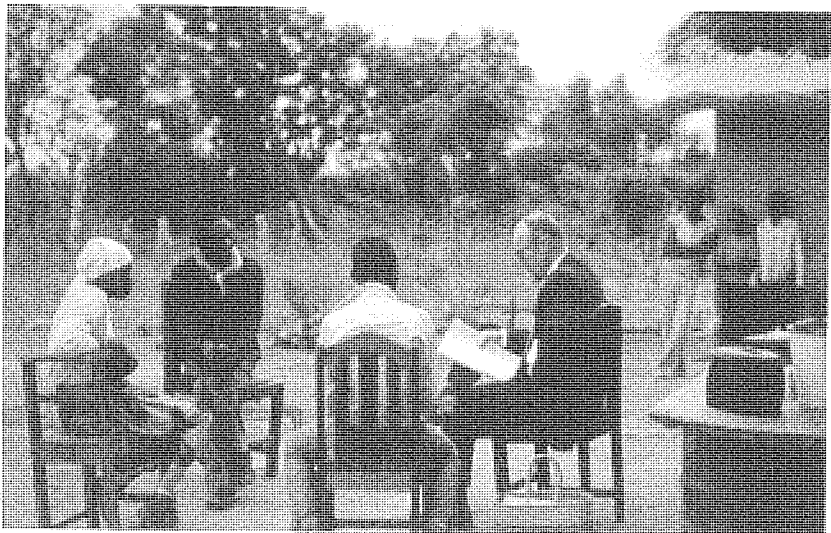
After 1970 the church in Malawi exploded and ^{the - (2019)} in since then it has consistently experienced a growth rate of over 10 percent. A church that began with one congregation in 1964, now boasts the tremendous growth that was presented at the beginning of this paper. With Missionary Cox⁴⁸ the words, “Not unto us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness,” come to mind. The tremendous growth in Malawi stems from our gracious Lord. It is he who has worked through the faithful efforts of many men to call people from all nations to believe in his precious Gospel. It gives us incredible joy to see the Lord keeping his promise in Isaiah:

In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea.⁴⁹

Conclusion – Missionary

Raymond Cox

The Lord has certainly guided and directed our mission work in Malawi. Looking back on the first years of our synod’s work, we can see how the Lord used



Missionary Cox teaching a group of people the truth of God’s Word in the bush.

⁴⁸ Cox began his essay entitled 25 Years of Grace: A History of the Lutheran Church Of Central Africa, which was presented to The Ninth Synod Convention of The Lutheran Church of Central Africa in Lusaka, Zambia on 19 August 1974, with these words from Psalm 115:1.

⁴⁹ Isaiah 11:11

problems, resistance, and even outward opposition to build his church. We also see how God called faithful missionaries to the ends of the earth to proclaim the message of Christ crucified. One of these men was Missionary Raymond Cox. When asked how he thought the Lord used him and his family in Malawi, Cox commented: "I was thrilled to be there, and to have the privilege to be in the vanguard – to keep on reaching out. God provided me with a wife who would keep on moving. We moved many times, and sometimes lived in isolation. Nine months in Malawi without another missionary...In a special way God has given me a special gift of a wife to be able to do this."

We join in thanking the Lord for men like Missionary Cox and his family who gave up many things to reach the lost. But the work is not over. It continues through the men and women who are serving in Africa today. It is our hope and prayer that the Lord continue to work through those who are yet to serve in Africa.

So this brief story comes to an end, as Africa continues to march on:

The Africa we visited is not sleeping in the sun. Africa is marching. As Africa marches industrially, commercially and socially, so too, must we march side by side with them as we offer the Gospel.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Mr. Froehlke, Essay presented at Northern Wisconsin Synod Meeting, 6 Aug 1968.

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