

Malawi Mission Report

2017

Molly Catharine Franklin

As an individual who had only left the USA once on a cruise to the Caribbean with my family, deciding to serve on a mission trip 8,215 miles away with eight other strangers was a very big deal. I was hesitant, nervous, and eager, but heard God's call and managed to trust it. Every hour was a new adventure, and we felt God's presence surrounding us from the start. I'd like to invite you to experience Malawi for the first time (or again) through my experiences over those special 18 days.

When we first arrived in Malawi, a rush of emotions consumed me and an uncontrollable smile appeared across my face. It was one of those moments where you know without a doubt that you are in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. We got our passports stamped, and waited to get our work visas. The team gathered some groceries for the trip's duration and made the long drive from Lilongwe to Nkhoma.

After a day's rest, our mission work began. We sent out a small team to one of the clinics affiliated and supported by Nkhoma Hospital. Those of us left in Nkhoma were taken on a tour of Nkhoma Hospital by Dr. David Morton. This tour gave me the opportunity to bear witness not only to some of the great things happening at Nkhoma Hospital, but also some of the greater things that need to, and hopefully will, happen in the future with God's help and the support of his people. We saw their pharmacy, one of the only pharmacies in the country with a certified and trained pharmacist. We saw the maternity ward, the largest and busiest, with women of all ages bringing new life into the world. We saw the family planning ward where women are given contraceptives, tested for HPV, and screened for cervical cancer. We saw the children's ward where children sick with GI related ailments, malaria, malnutrition, and any number of other illnesses are cared for. We saw the NICU where premature babies were monitored constantly.

For me, seeing the hospital was hard. I saw things that I had only read about, and suddenly they became all too real. For example, as we were walking around we saw a girl who could not have been more than 14 years old go into labor. We were told it isn't uncommon to see girls as young as 12 years old pregnant. We were told that Malawi has the highest cervical cancer incident and mortality rate **IN THE WORLD**. That is something preventable! The American Cancer Society says we have vaccines that prevent the types of HPV that cause up to 90% of cervical cancer and pre-cancers. Humans, God loving and fearing humans, are dying every day because of a cancer that is 90% **PREVENTABLE**. I have no doubt in my mind that God lead me all the way to Malawi and to Nkhoma Hospital just to give me some clarity on what he wants me to do with my life. Never have I felt more motivated and called to stay the path I have chosen in pursuing a career in healthcare.

Our Presbytery has provided a Mobile Health Unit for the hospital through our Building H.O.P.E. campaign. The Mobile Health Unit, staffed by a team of 8 nurses and nurse aids, goes out Monday through Thursday to one of 8 different locations that are between 10 and 30 kilometers walking distance from the hospital to provide basic healthcare needs to these rural communities. On the days the members of our PWNC team were able to go out with the unit, the Mobile Health Unit was providing services to mothers and children under the age of 3: children were being weighed and measured; mothers were given contraceptives; and everything was being documented. Another day, members of our PWNC team witnessed vaccines being administered to children and pregnant mothers. Esther, the chief nurse and facilitator of the Mobile Health Unit told us that the team goes out to each of these 8 locations every other week and provides a number of healthcare necessities like vaccines, contraceptives, malaria testing and treatments. The nurses of the Mobile Health Unit also use each visit to teach basic hygiene skills, often through song, and always opening their visits with prayer.

Later in our week, we visited Ebenezer Institute of Learning. While there, we saw the graduation ceremony where some of the children sponsored by congregations in our presbytery performed with their classmates to show the great education they are receiving at Ebenezer. Susan Rembert, a missionary at the school, welcomed us with open arms and provided gracious hospitality.

On a separate trip to Ebenezer school, Tom, Teresa, and Billy met with two of the women running the school, Heather and Christi. They got some valuable information while the rest of our team worked hard in the library to repair the school books the children use daily to enhance their reading skills. We were able to repair nearly hundred books. A few members of our team spent their mornings reading books and singing songs with the children at the school. "Head Shoulders, Knees and Toes" and "Itsy Bitsy Spider" could be heard throughout the courtyard.

Seeing Malawi, visiting Malawi, and living in Malawi (even for 18 short days) was all it took for me to be overcome with love towards the community. More so, seeing the great things our presbytery supports within the Nkhoma community, provided me with a new appreciation for our faith community here in western NC.

God spent all 18 days opening my heart and eyes to seeing true service, true mission, and true compassion. I had experiences and memories that will stay with me forever, including: seeing the hospital, affirming my career path, experiencing the culture, and serving the community. While in Malawi I was able to realize that, regardless of the miles, culture and languages that separate us, we are all a part of God's great creation. I am now counting down the days until our next opportunity to return to our Malawian brothers and sisters in Christ.