

## PARTNERPLAN

# Ken Ross - Malawi October 2021

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Dear friends,

Greetings from Zomba where we are breathing a little easier, at least for now, in relation to the pandemic. July and August were not easy months as a “wave” of Covid swept the country. This time it was not only urban areas that were affected but all parts of the country, including my own rural congregation at Bemvu. Of course, the time you feel it is when it comes close, as it did for us at the College when our hard-working, ever-resourceful Administrator Alex Mkuwu was one of those who lost their lives.

For the past month or so, the rate of new infections has fallen to a low level, averaging less than 10 per day. By now, people are realistic and many remark that this is probably a temporary reprieve before the next wave arrives. But meanwhile life is a little less tense, and we learn to be thankful for small mercies. One of these is greater possibilities for travel, with Malawi’s borders reopened and a number of countries, including the UK, relaxing their restrictions on travel to and from Malawi. It is cheering to see visitors once again.

Last week Zomba Theological College held its graduation ceremony, having completed the academic year. As usual, this was a joyous occasion but, in these uncertain times, there was an added sense of gratitude, and relief (!), that we had made it to the end. It included a first for me since I was able to guide my final-year class through the year on the basis of being present for part of the time but also running the class online during the weeks I was in Scotland. In Malawi we are still playing catch-up with online education, but it looks like the shape of things to come.



teaching theology in Malawi.

Another development that has been very rewarding was the national conference held by the Malawi Theological Society last month. The original idea of my assignment is that I would be travelling a lot, both within and beyond Malawi, to work on the development of theological education with a variety of partner institutions. The reality has been very different since, for much of the time, travel has been inadvisable because of the pandemic. However, in the limited amount of travel that I have been able to do, I found a strong appetite for greater collaboration among those

The result is the Society, which got off the ground last year and really showed its mettle this year when the national conference was hosted by the University of Livingstonia at Ekwendeni. In some respects, the event exceeded our expectations. It brought together almost 100 faculty members from some twenty institutions from all different parts of the country. These Universities and Colleges come from across the ecclesiastical spectrum, from Roman Catholic to Pentecostal, as well as from state Universities. The most impressive thing is the level of enthusiasm – clearly many

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faculty members have been longing to have a forum where they can increase their skills and advance their research.



I had the job of chairing the interim committee that was tasked to get the Society organised and legally registered. This has been successfully accomplished so it was a happy moment for me when I could work myself out of a job by presiding over the election of a permanent Executive Committee. It was a highly contested election with very successful results so there is a strong team in place to take the Society forward. All the indications are that it can go from strength to strength.

Another new initiative is an 8-part Webinar series, hosted by the Scotland Malawi Partnership, on Governance Strengthening. It is based on a book that I have been editing, together with my colleagues Asiyati Lorraine Chiweza and Wapulumuka Mulwafu, and aims to stimulate mutual learning between Malawi and Scotland.

The book was prompted by the dramatic political events that unfolded in Malawi last year when the Constitutional Court nullified the Presidential election and ordered the fresh election which led to the opposition coming to power. These stirring times called for an academic response. For me, this was something of a *déjà vu* since I was working on democratization in Malawi, from an academic and theological perspective, in the 1990s. This had not been forgotten so I found myself being pushed into coordinating the new effort. Now the results are ready to publish, and the book will get an advance airing in the Webinar series. In case you are interested you can connect with the Webinar at <https://www.scotland-malawipartnership.org/our-work/malawi-scotland-governance-webinar-series>

Meanwhile, back at base, Zomba Theological College has announced plans to launch a Master of Theology programme next year. This is a first step into postgraduate studies, which is crucial to achieving the aim of becoming a Theological University. The academic structure and content of the programme is already well prepared. But there are many formal, logistical and financial hurdles to surmount, particularly with the National Council for Higher Education, Malawi's accrediting body. My incredibly hard-working colleagues are battling with a range of issues that need to be resolved before the starting gun can fire. They will be grateful for your prayers.

Much as I love being in Malawi, I do have a tinge of envy for my friends in Scotland enjoying the autumn colours. I hope this finds you well and ready for a fruitful winter season amidst the challenging times.

Warmly yours,

**Ken**

Give thanks for:

- the relatively low incidence of covid-19 in Malawi at present.
- Zomba Theological College successfully completing its 2021 academic year.
- The vitality of the newly founded Malawi Theological Society.

Pray for:

- Communities and congregations grieving for those lost to covid-19.
- The Malawi Theological Society finding its feet.
- Zomba Theological College and the launch of its MTh programme.
- The Scotland Malawi Webinars on Governance – for positive impact.