

Muli Bwanji, friends.

Warm greetings on behalf of our partners and friends in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi. Here are a few updates for you.

## HEALTH

In 2023, USAID granted UNICEF \$2.1 million to strengthen the cholera Response in Malawi. This aid was important to expedite the resources needed to eliminate the epidemic worsened by cyclones and flooding.

In September of 2024, USAID (US Agency for International Development) announced new commitments to strengthen several health and wellness programs in Malawi. The \$8.725 million commitment included: collaborative problem-solving for health, education, natural resource and agriculture management, gender equity programs to help alleviate gender-based violence, and maternal health programs. [1]

In November 2024, USAID also promised \$17 million to boost STEM education in Malawi. [2] For more than 20 years, the US has also invested \$136 million in reading programs and secondary education, \$1.7 million for medical supply management, \$2.1 billion to fight HIV/Aids, Malaria, and Tuberculosis, and assisted with flood and drought resistance and disaster response. [3]

In February 2025, the US government shut down USAID, and recipients of these commitments received notice that all funding would be terminated.

This freeze has now caused a health care crisis in Malawi. Although HIV/Aids testing and treatment needs resources, the immediate withdrawal of funding has also eliminated food supplies for malnourished children in the hospital, treatment for tuberculosis, funding for doctors and surgeons who are sent to train others, and protective equipment for medical staff to prevent the spread of disease. [4]

Additionally, Malawi faced one of the most difficult droughts that southern Africa has experienced in nearly 100 years. Combined with a nearly 30% inflation rate in the past two years, fuel shortages, increased food and fuel costs, and an annual income average of \$481 per person, there is concern about food insecurity, especially in the central and southern regions of the country. [5]

[1] <https://mw.usembassy.gov/usa-id-announces-new-commitments-to-bolster-progress-in-malawi-at-unga79/>

[2] <https://education.msu.edu/new-educator/2024/msu-receives-17m-from-usaid-to-improve-stem-education-in-malawi/>

[3] USAID website - no longer active.

[4] <https://thehill.com/opinion/5154669-usaid-aid-withdrawal-malawi/>

[5] <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/16f15a81-6eb8-4397-b3cc-409559ec0482/content>



## BISHOP ELECTION

In the summer of 2024, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi took the next step in their structural change and move toward the establishment of 3 dioceses, and elect leadership for each region. In 2023 the Karonga Diocese was established, electing Rev. Alick Msuku as the bishop. Last year, after a second election, Rev. Feston Phiri was elected as the bishop for the Blantyre Diocese. In October 2024, Bishop Martin Halom and Deacon Laura Ramlow had the privilege of accepting the invitation to attend Bishop Phiri's installation, as well as the celebration of the consecration of the new diocese and the 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the ELCM. Representatives from several countries were in attendance, representing the depth of relationships that have been built in the 4+ decades of ministry as we walk together in the hope and grace of the gospel. The ELCM will be electing a third bishop this June, with a formal installation expected in late October, 2025.



## WATER IS LIFE (MADZI NDI MOYO)

In 2024, our synod engaged in a campaign to help build new solar powered wells in Malawi through the ELCM. Due to the higher cost of their construction, we had a goal of \$40,000 to assist with building two of them. I am so thrilled to share that, because of your incredible generosity and warm hearts for Malawi, we raised nearly \$120,000! Thank you for your gifts to this campaign. Because the ELCM is a permanent partner with us, there are ongoing needs and initiatives that we can support. If you feel called to share ongoing gifts for wells, feeding stations, the pastors academy, or motorbikes for pastors, please visit the synod website or contact the synod office.

## ECONOMY

Malawi continues to experience severe economic strain – the reduction of exports, especially tobacco, the largest of their agricultural exports, drought, and consistent struggles with import has caused shortages in both goods and fuel. And with the abrupt loss of funding, there will likely be a “reversal in the aid-funded progress” that has happened in Malawi. [6] With a high inflation rate and a devaluation of currency that has no immediate signs of recovery has the population feeling frustrated and angry with government leadership. Protests have significantly increased, especially in large cities, as people continue to lose jobs and feel powerless to change things. [7]

[6] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/09/malawi-left-in-dire-straits-by-trump-decision-to-freeze-aid#:~:text=The%20US%20government%20was%20giving,Malawi%20comes%20from%20foreign%20donors>

[7] <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/malawi-cuts-2025-growth-forecast-inflation-spurs-street-protests-2025-02-28/>



## POLITICS

Many are looking forward to the Presidential election in September of this year, hoping new leadership will bring the reform so many people would like to see. The three current candidates are presidential experience: Lazarus Chakwera (current sitting president), as well as former president Joyce Banda, and former president Peter Mutharika. If a candidate does not receive more than 50% of votes during the first round, a second round of voting will be required. Much like here in the US, Malawian citizens, particularly young voters, are insisting on a representative that will create and uphold policies that address the many needs of Malawians and the difficulties they face, create jobs, and establish trust in government leaders. [8]

## CLIMATE CHANGE

When funding and program contracts were broken earlier this year, a number of environmental policies and initiatives were also blocked from taking any necessary action. Certain programs in place were working to assist communities with the creation of non-charcoal stoves (in an effort to reduce the deforestation that happens when people cut trees to create charcoal for heat and cooking throughout Malawi). There were also efforts to learn how to grow and harvest things like fruit trees and honey as a means of income and food security for households. Sustainability projects like these are introduced all over Malawi and often rely on foreign aid for assistance.

Additionally, Malawi experiences climate related weather patterns that compound already difficult circumstances. During one of the worst droughts that the country has seen in nearly 100 years, thousands of cattle died in 2024 due to lack of water and grass around the country. And, they regularly experience cyclones and floods at a scale that hasn't existed in this landlocked country before. [9,10]

## 2024 VISITS

Later this year, Immanuel Lutheran in Eau Claire is planning to host some friends from Zomba, their companion congregation in the ELCM. While much of their time here will include direct activities with their friends in Eau Claire, I encourage you to watch for details about some of the meet-and-greet opportunities that will be open to the entire synod. It will be a chance to get updates from our friends in ministry, worship together, and enjoy fellowship together.

And, later in October, we plan to send a small delegation to attend the installation of their bishop-elect as well as celebrate the 43th anniversary of the ELCM and consecrate the new Lilongwe Diocese. Our time will include some ministry and cultural visits as well. We will be excited to share more blogging during those weeks!

## ANNUAL DAYLILY DIG

Please save the dates for the annual Daylily Dig for Malawi!

**July 18th - 19th and August 1st - 2nd.**

9:00-1:00 each day at the Kaufmann Farm.

[8] <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/2025-elections/malawi/>

[9] <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2025/03/07/trumps-aid-cuts-make-malawians-more-vulnerable-to-climate-change/>

[10] <https://www.nyasatimes.com/malawis-hunger-crisis-a-nation-betrayed-by-policy-failures-and-climate-shocks/>



## MINISTRY in the ELCM

Although the country continues to experience difficulty and hardship, the ELCM is still hopeful and committed to the important work of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, lifting up leaders in the church, and being a voice for justice and peace. The church is experiencing a growing number of members, and the new leadership via the creation of dioceses is creating a revived sense of regional collaboration and opportunity.

Feeding stations will likely continue to be utilized at full capacity throughout 2025 and many of these sites have introduced new community initiatives such as animal breeding and agricultural programs. (For more information about our most recent visit to such a site, you can check out the [blog from 2024](#).) There is a growing number of rural communities with capable (sometimes trained) leadership and a strong connection with their village chief and the ELCM, that are having much success when trying innovative programs that impact the overall wellbeing of their community. The foundation of a feeding station as a starting point by the ELCM creates empowerment and is important and faithful work.

The development of wells continues to be a truly impactful partnership. Because the ELCM does not restrict the use of the well to only ELCM congregation members, they are often recognized by the government for their generosity and assistance in a broader region. They have been able to provide clean, accessible water in over 15 regions throughout the country, often near an established feeding station, but always where water was once several kilometers away. Households who benefit from easier water access can now invest time in more robust jobs, can grow their own gardens, and can attend school, maintain greater safety, and enhance opportunity for community collaborative projects.

## USAID & ELCM

While the ELCM does/did not directly receive monetary support or have contracts with USAID, these resources were intended to positively impact the people who live in the same communities where ELCM congregations are established. The hasty termination of aid for health care testing, treatment and supplies, hospital food programs, and even the the provision and training of medical staff who have had to stop working due to funding cuts, will likely have life-threatening results.

Although the reach of the ELCM is somewhat limited, there are still ways we can support the health and wellness of the vulnerable there. Ongoing support of feeding stations and wells is one of the ways we can walk alongside with compassion. And, education, training, and activism that strives to prevent gender-based violence against women and girls is a major initiative of the ELCM. It will be important to keep learning from our siblings there as we find more ways to support these programs.

Thank you, friends, for all the ways you continue to support and participate in our partnership with Malawi! I am thankful for your prayerful and generous hearts! More to come....

Mulungu akhale nanu,  
(May God be with you)

*Deacon Laura Ramlow*

