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Evangelism Is Alive in Malawi

Service and Justice

In spite of COVID-19, ministry continues.

Those are words from Evance Mphalasa, a pastor and acting general secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi (ELCM), words that have energized him and a team of evangelists as they spread the gospel despite the setbacks of the pandemic.

Strict government measures issued in early 2020 closed some of the churches in Malawi and restricted gatherings to 100 people, said Feston Phiri, pastor, ELCM director for training and secretary for mission and evangelism. Churches that remained open had to provide congregants with masks, sanitizer and water buckets, unbudgeted expenses that proved financially devastating.

Additionally, the printing of Sunday school and evangelism materials — particularly those in the Tumbuka language — stopped completely because most offices were closed, Phiri said. Malawian evangelists were not deterred.

2020 was “a very hard time indeed in regard with evangelism in Malawi, but I think the whole world [was challenged],” he said. “Despite this COVID-19, as a problem, Malawi has not stopped evangelizing. [We simply used] a different approach.”

Pastors hosted two, three, even four services each Sunday to accommodate the small-gathering restrictions. To further share the gospel, Phiri said, evangelists organized a van equipped with loudspeakers so they could preach and sing to people in their homes.

“We used this van and this singing group, which is a praise team, evangelizing, going

around to different areas, reaching out to different people with this kind of way,” he said. “This exercise was done during [the evenings] ... when people are in their houses, so it was very easy to reach them.”

Many first-world countries turned to social media to continue faith conversations and stay connected to parishioners, but Malawians lacked that luxury.

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ELCM Bishop Joseph Bvumbwe created a virtual forum for Malawi pastors, providing daily updates so the pastors could stay at the forefront of helping their parishes.

“Bishop never slept; he was always helping to get us the latest information about COVID-19, always sending messages through the forums for pastors,” said Mphalasa. “Then, the pastors disseminated the information.”

This outreach — part of which was funded through ELCA Mission Support — has encouraged and increased the growth of the church, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Without your help, we wouldn’t be talking about expanding the church,” Phiri said. “The church is growing so fast and so rapidly. This is very important.”

