



STUDY 3

Women's Missionary Society Women Continue to Serve

Reflection by Cathy Reid

*Then the angels said, 'Well, God, it's neater now, but is it finished'
And God answered, 'Nope.'*

Does God have a Big Toe? By Marc Gellman

Opening Prayer:

One: For those who serve in our churches,

All: We give you thanks.

One: For those who serve in our WMS groups,

All: We give you thanks.

One: For those who serve in the national church,

All: We give you thanks.

One: For those who serve in mission in Canada and around the world,

All: We give you thanks.

One: And for our ability to serve,

All: We give you thanks.

Hymn: # 587 – Called as partners in Christ’s service

Reflection: Partners

by Cathy Reid

In the book, *Does God have a Big Toe?*, Marc Gellman writes:

Before there was anything, there was God, a few angels, and a huge swirling glob of rocks and water with no place to go. The angels asked God, ‘Why don't you clean up this mess?’

So God collected rocks from the huge swirling glob and put them together in clumps and said, ‘Some of these clumps of rocks will be planets and some will be stars, and some of these rocks will be ... just rocks.’

Then God collected water from the huge swirling glob and put it together in pools of water and said, ‘Some of these pools of water will be oceans, and some will become clouds, and some of this water will be ... just water’

Then the angels said, ‘Well, God, it’s neater now, but is it finished’ And God answered, ‘Nope.’

The story goes on with God creating growing and creeping things, then man and woman, and finally God asking the man and woman to, “finish up the world for me.” They complain they do not have the plans nor the strength, to which God replies, “You are big enough...I will be your partner.” God continues that a partner can never give up because a partner depends on you.

In 2009, I realized a lifelong dream and joined eleven WMS women from across Canada to visit Malawi on a mission exposure tour. Little did I know that this would be the starting point for building a partnership with a small village called Chipagala in the southern part of Malawi.

On our second day we visited this poor and remote village. We discovered a pile of bricks which had been made several years before to build a children's centre. Unfortunately, there was no money to buy the rest of the needed materials. So, our church raised the money needed, and the local committee bought the material and arranged for contractors to complete the building.

In 2018, the building was expanded to include a cooking shelter which is now used as an outside classroom. The centre is run by the Timvane Organization, a registered charity in Malawi. The Board meets regularly to discuss ongoing successes and struggles. They rent the centre out when it is not used for the children so that they can generate some income to help cover expenses. Timvane now has 200 children from age 2–10 who meet Monday–Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Every child receives a hot meal of maize porridge, made by women in Timvane, once a day.

Let me tell you about some of the partners who have joined us in this work.

A young girl in my congregation was about to celebrate her eighth birthday. When she heard that we were going back for the dedication of the children's centre, she asked that instead of giving her gifts, people give money to buy supplies for us to take. The children in Chipagala especially loved the parachute we took!

An optician heard of our plans for an upcoming visit and asked whether there might be a need for eye assessments. We consulted with people in the village and learned that there was a great need. Our optician approached the Ontario College of Opticians as well as a number of local opticians, who really got behind the project and supplied 2,000 pairs of brand new glasses. She was able to recruit a colleague to go with us to provide basic eye assessments and fit people with the glasses they needed. When we arrived for the first day of assessments, more than 100 people were waiting for us. They had started to gather before 6 a.m.! In the end, we were able to help almost 1,000 people before we ran out of time.

Children in Malawi may only attend school if they have the required uniform to wear. The poorer families cannot afford the uniforms, so many of the children simply miss out on even a basic education. One of our members, a talented seamstress, suggested that we buy sewing machines—foot-operated treadle machines as there is no hydro supply in the village. She came with us to teach a number of the ladies how to use the machines. They can now produce school uniforms and other items which they can sell at very reasonable cost. The result in both the immediate short-term and the long-term is that children can attend school, thus improving their future prospects, and the women have a marketable skill that they can use to support their families.

A lack of effective feminine hygiene products meant that many of the older girls would miss days of school every month. A number of ladies in a couple of churches in Canada made reusable hygiene kits. We gave these to a high school in a neighbouring community, enough for all the girls, and now the girls attend school full-time.



Finally, we bought the Blessings Group (a group of women in Mount Moria Church who meet to provide micro loans) a piece of land to feed their families and also to provide income from the sale of excess produce. Members of our congregation donated enough money to purchase another piece of land that the Timvane Children's Centre committee will use to grow maize for the daily meal that the Centre provides—the only meal that many of the children receive. A professor at Western University who is active in the area of sustainable food production and agricultural improvement offered to

contribute his knowledge and skills. He made contact with an agency in Malawi whose focus is on water conservation and irrigation, thus helping improve soil quality. He will join us on our next trip to work with the agency to set up a program to help villagers learn how to produce the best and most nutritious crops.

The Rev. Dr. Silas Ncozana has acted as our host for the past eleven years and has made our trips flow easier by helping find accommodation, transportation, food, and visas. Silas and his wife Margaret have welcomed us with open arms and have introduced us to many people in Malawi who have helped us. His local knowledge and contacts have been crucial in just about everything we have sought to do together.

The Chief of Chipagala village is a woman—in the village, the headship passes through the matrilineal line. Madam Chief cannot speak any English and I must admit my Chichewa is not good, but we communicate through hugs and a translator. She is a powerful leader who is deeply committed to her village. She encourages and supports projects which will benefit everyone in the community.

On our second visit Madam Chief came to see us off at the airport. It was her first time at the airport—she had never even seen an airplane! Through a translator, she said something which has stayed with me ever since. Her words made me realize that God places us in situations for a reason. She said “We were a forgotten village until your church helped us to build our children's centre. We take great pride in this centre which is used for a variety of purposes and we thank God that you are our partners in this building.”

God has a plan but we don't always know when we embark on something how it is going to turn out. Eleven years have passed and our partnership has developed through five mission trips and a growing awareness of the needs of our partners in Chipagala. Who would have thought that a pile of bricks would have enabled us to make such good friends in Timvane Children's Centre, Mount Moria School, and Mount Moria Church in Chipagala.

Prayer:

God whose life is lived in the community of the Trinity; God who calls us to be sisters and brothers together; God who calls us to work as partners: strengthen and empower all your people around the world as we work to build your kingdom on earth.

Open our eyes to see the glory of your kingdom around and within your people, our imaginations to dream dreams of all that could possibly be, and our minds to find ways to turn those dreams into reality. In the name of our Friend and Saviour Christ, Amen.

Questions to consider:

1. What partnerships are you, and/or your group, and/or your church involved in? Are there any projects presently under way that have resulted in informal partnerships developing without anyone realizing it?
2. How might you go about developing a partnership in Canada or abroad? What opportunities exist for forming partnerships in your community?
3. What is the advantage of working together on projects?
4. Is there a negative effect to working together?

Hymn: #229 – Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love

Bible Study:

1. Read Mark 8:22–26, Mark 2:1–12 and Matthew 14:13–21 (Choose one or all three, if time permits.)
Who partnered with whom in these stories?
2. Read Ephesians 4:1–16 and 1 Corinthians 12:4–11
How do we as people of faith and as communities of faith embody the principles talked about in these passages?
3. Read Matthew 4:18–22, Luke 5:11–20 and Matthew 14:22–33 (Choose one or all three, if time permits.)
What would they have learned if they had not been open to something they had never done before?

Hymn: # 590 – We have this ministry

Works Cited:

Gellman, Marc. Does God Have A Big Toe? Harper Collins, 1998