

# STORIES FROM MALAWI

## Teaming for Transformation

by Molly Woodford and Karen Berns

Our Malawi GO Team began to realize our diversity of gifts when we first met for a time team-building; as we made collages and shared our strengths and passions. Throughout our journey, we deeply respected our diversity and differences, for the gifts each person brought to our team. Thomas, our youngest at 15, a school athlete and scholar, garnered our appreciation as he shared his artistic gifts. The care by our five young adults for the orphans we held at the orphanage warmed our hearts. The rest of the Team was inspired as we witnessed their stamina and resilience. And one of our “more mature” team members enriched our worship and time with the children at the Mponela Community Based Orphan Center through playing her guitar.

In addition to the gifts shared by our team members, we depended on and experienced the Holy Spirit’s fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control – and many others. We found the need for additional spiritual “fruit” such as humor and laughter, creativity, and deep respect for each other and our Malawian hosts. These were incarnated by Katie’s infectious laughter, “classic” Molly’s willingness to be teased, Scott’s passion to labor hands-on with young and older men from Malawi and San Marino, and Cindy, Courtney and Lindsay’s willingness to serve in any way. We so appreciated the financial and business leadership of Lisa, Scott, Janet, and Laurie, as well as Pete’s keeping us in touch with home. Penny’s wisdom drew the younger adults to invite her to dine with them, especially one evening. We all marveled at Andy’s early call and commitment to serve in Malawi and how this journey was an important first step in fulfilling that call – even when the orphan he was feeding at the crisis nursery kept spitting up on him – he was undaunted.

One of Karen’s contributions was preparing the daily Word-Share-Prayer times on Jesus’ “I AM” statements in John’s Gospel. We were all amazed that when we needed the protection of a strong gate during civil unrest that the lesson for that night was on *Jesus The Gate*. This reminded us strongly



that the Holy Spirit was with us in preparing for and throughout our Transformational Journey that transformed us and others.

Remembering our excitement to report to the folks back at SMCC via phone call on Sunday, July 24, we have vivid images of how we all were busy preparing our information – we wanted to give

you an hour’s worth of information, but we had to condense it to three minutes. We were all helping each other and encouraging one another. After our report, we dined in candlelight as the electricity went out, as it so often did, immediately after hung up.

It was always gratifying, with so many people on a trip together, that God blessed us with the flexibility to adapt to all of the situations confronting us. We acknowledged the respect we had for one another to honor each person’s presence and opinions. While we knew we had a schedule, when the events in Lilongwe and in Mzuzu changed our plans we were all comfortable with one another to give honest feedback regarding next steps. From the students to the mature adults, the contributions of each individual were valued by all.

If it weren’t for the wise counsel and guidance of our Malawian friends, Phoebe Chifungo, Daniel Moyo, and Sydney Kornegay, our trip would not have produced such good fruit. They provided ideas for the journey, ways to make those ideas become events, and guidance while in Malawi.



Lastly, the efforts of the HOME team and the whole congregation inspired the GO Team prior to and throughout the journey as we were fortified each day with words and scriptures you included in your letters.

Working together as a team under God’s leadership – GO Team, Home Team, Malawi friends – the 2011 Malawi Transformation Trip become just that – a time of transformation for all.

*Molly Woodford is an ordained elder who has served with SMCC GO Teams twice in Malawi. Her faith came alive through a “Great Banquet” Presbyterian renewal weekend. She has served in our choir and as an usher for the Gathering. Molly administers medical clinical trials as her career, and loves her dog, Max.*

*The Rev. Karen Berns celebrated 25 years of ordained ministry in 2010, and describes her call as a “career” Associate Pastor. She enjoys her responsibilities in Outreach, Spiritual Formation, and Pastoral Care. 2011 was Karen’s first time in Malawi, though previously, she led a team for women’s conferences in Ethiopia, as well as helping with children’s sanctuaries for AIDs orphans in Kenya. Karen and her husband, Rev. Dr. Don Berns, have two adult children and three grands.*

**San Marino Community Church**

1750 Virginia Road, San Marino, CA 91108

(626) 282-4181 • Fax: (626) 282-4185 [www.smccpby.com](http://www.smccpby.com) • [smcc@smccpby.com](mailto:smcc@smccpby.com)