

PARTNER PLAN

Ken Ross - Malawi September 2024

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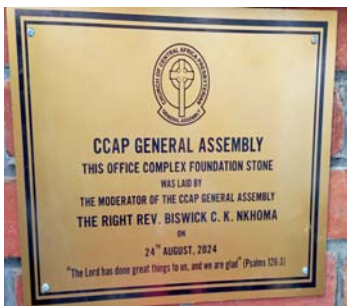
Dear friends,



The past weekend has been birthday time for the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian as it has marked 100 years since its formation in 1924. The venue for the party was a football stadium in Lilongwe and the guests came in their thousands, including Malawi's President Lazarus Chakwera and Vice-President Michael Usi. A specially honoured guest was the Moderator of the Church of Scotland General Assembly Rt Rev Dr Shaw Paterson, whose presence represented the beginnings of the CCAP in the work of the Scottish missionaries who came to Malawi from 1875.

Malawians love a party and certainly threw themselves into this one. Party dresses were made from the special centenary cloth – which could also be adapted to equivalent male costume. A sea of blue and gold filled the stadium, which was soon rocking

as everyone got to their feet to dance, led by no less than nineteen choirs from all the different areas where the CCAP is active, including Zimbabwe and Zambia.



For me, it was moving to reflect on a history in which I have been much involved, either writing about it or being a small part of it myself over the past thirty-six years. On any assessment, it has been an extraordinarily productive movement, creating a spiritual home for millions of Malawians and making a difference to the whole society, especially through its work in education and healthcare. The centenary was also an amazing opportunity to reconnect with many good friends with whom I have collaborated at one point or another. Since the CCAP is quite

dispersed geographically it is not often that its leaders are all together on one spot – so this was quite a moment.

I wrote in my last Partner Plan letter about the book that we prepared to present to the centenary – *The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian 1924-2024: A Centenary Assessment* (<https://globethics.net/publications/church-central-africa-presbyterian-1924-2024>). Now I am glad to report that it was very well received. I have been involved in many book launches but never before in such a grand one. The Centenary Committee hired the International Conference Centre in Lilongwe and held a black-tie dinner and book launch as the opening event of the celebrations. I was pleased with the provision for a serious

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appraisal of the book, but the real action came with the auction that followed. Guests vied with each other to see who could bid highest to secure their copy of the book – all of this a fundraiser for the CCAP General Assembly.

The real test for the book, however, is how far it is read and considered. It strikes several critical notes and makes a number of constructive proposals. It remains to be seen how far these will be acted upon. When we launched the book (in more humble circumstances) in Zomba we invited Francis Bonongwe, Dean of Studies at our neighbouring Catholic Seminary, to give a review. He started with the Latin phrase, *verba volant, scripta manent* – “spoken words go away, written words remain.” He explained that much as Malawians love celebrations, the words spoken can be rather ephemeral. By contrast, a book has a certain permanence and enduring influence. We hope this might prove true in our case.

A central thrust of the book is the need for the CCAP to strengthen its unity so I was encouraged by an event that started the second day of the celebrations. This was the laying of a foundation stone for the projected new HQ building for the CCAP General Assembly. The fact that it has lacked such a facility until now speaks volumes about the priorities of the CCAP. The new direction signalled by the foundation stone is a hopeful one so far as the unity of the CCAP is concerned.

Meanwhile the second semester is in full swing at Zomba Theological University. My own contribution is much focussed on the three cohorts of Masters students that are currently active. A red-letter day coming up is 12 September when we will have the first oral defence of a Masters dissertation in ZTU history. We hope it will be the first of many.

Meanwhile the rapidly growing numbers of postgraduate students present us with a challenge in terms of accommodation. The facilities we have on campus were well designed to support the undergraduate programme that still continues, but these did not anticipate the development of postgraduate studies. There are, however, some older buildings that are currently underused. Now we have begun a project to redevelop these as a Postgraduate Studies Centre. Building work is underway, as is the fundraising to support it.

Another new development is an initiative to work towards becoming a “green campus.” This is at an early stage, but already Faculty and students are working together to figure out how we can eliminate wasteful practices, increase the use of clean energy, and exemplify sound environmental stewardship. We hope this can equip our students to champion ecological awareness in their future work and be a beneficial influence in our immediate community.

This comes with all my good wishes as the “church year” gets underway.

In friendship,

Ken

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Please pray for:

- The CCAP at a time of celebration and thanksgiving as it marks 100 years of its witness in Malawi and beyond.
- The CCAP as it looks to capitalise on the energy of the centenary to strengthen its unity and develop a meaningful role for the General Assembly as its supreme court.
- The construction of the new Postgraduate Studies Centre at Zomba Theological University.
- The efforts of Zomba Theological University to become a model of environmental responsibility, developing a “green campus.”
- Students of ZTU as they meet the challenges of their programmes.