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RAFIKI FOUNDATION MISSIONARY NEWSLETTER



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Missionary #253

“For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:4-6).

Dear friends and family,

I have been thinking lately about ancient empires and their kings. As Rafiki Village Malawi is beginning a study in the Book of Ezra, we started with a historical look at the timeline of Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia. These empires were ruled by the likes of Tiglath-Pileser, Shalmaneser, Nebuchadnezzar, and Cyrus, whose names sound fantastical to most people today. In their time, however, they were mighty men—earth shakers who struck fear into the hearts of millions and were revered as gods or near-gods. You can read textbooks about them, and you will find that their actions and decrees shaped the course of history, setting the path of entire people groups and re-orienting civilizations. Only millennia from now will historians be able to judge whether the most famous and important figures of our news cycles today will even begin to approach the significance of such empire builders. And yet in Scripture, the Lord pulls back the curtain of history and gives us a glimpse of the bigger picture. The words quoted in Isaiah 45 were spoken of Cyrus, the greatest emperor of his era, and they show that he (unwittingly) served God’s purpose.

These grand empires, these great rulers (who were probably certain that the wave of their hand turned the earth), were all serving God’s sovereign purpose, and His purpose revolved around His chosen people. A small, insignificant, splintered people whose plight would never have made top headlines was, in fact, the centerpiece of history. This is how our God works—the breaking news stories that clamor for our attention are actually not the most important thing going on in the world. The most important thing going on in all the universe, according to Scripture, is God’s building of His eternal kingdom—His calling and sanctifying a holy people, the growth of His one true Church, for the sake of the glory of His name. The great ones of this world do not even know that they are instruments in His hand, but we are in on the secret. So I invite you to step back from the news cycle of elections and wars and the global economy and learn a little about what God is doing in this little corner of an “unimportant” third-world country. Embrace for a moment the biblical perspective that God’s work among His people of every tribe and tongue is the *real* story of the day!

New Team

Since my last letter, there has been another shift in the missionary team here. Jane Hoadley went back to the States in September after six months here, and the same day, Joshua Espinosa arrived. That means that May is taking over the supervision of the RICE Program as well as overseeing

ChildCare. Joshua is here as a jack of all trades, helping wherever we can use him. He is doing some P.E. teaching and coaching in the school, and I have also given him several facilities-oriented projects that have been neglected for some time. Between those things, he does everything from creating playlists for our dining hall speakers, to being my bodyguard on bank runs, to doing early morning runs with our resident kids on weekdays. He has been a great addition—his cheerful willingness to do anything and everything is a huge help, and I am enjoying having someone around from my Savannah world!

We continue to pray earnestly for our incoming missionaries, the McDaniels, to arrive post haste. They are still trying to reach 100% funding, and we are pushing on every connection we have in the government to get their work visas approved, but otherwise, they are ready to go. We hope very much to have them here well before the end of the year.

New School Year

The new year started mid-September. The kids and teachers were excited by all of the big new rooms and the dedicated library building that are the fruits of our renovations. We are still slowly but surely finishing up final touches on these projects that had to be completed with super speed during the school break, but things are looking more and more beautiful. One graduate spent a few weeks making all new curtains for a dozen rooms, another graduate painted quotes and small murals in several places around the new rooms, and the senior class and I are doing some beautification of the dining hall as well.

The student body sits at about 320 right now. We had originally thought it might be more because we had quite a few places in the upper school to fill, but after many rounds of entrance testing, we sadly could not find many students who could manage to enter those classes with the necessary academic aptitude to succeed. So we have a few very small logic and rhetoric school classes, but we are embracing the opportunity to pour lots of one-on-one attention into these students. This is especially important as we are in a multi-year process of re-grounding and strengthening our math program (math is a nearly universal struggle in Malawian schools).

The head teachers and the headmaster's assistant are working very hard in this new year as I, the Headmaster, am frequently called away as Village Administrator to attend to other Village tasks. We also continue to work together on various long-term organization and improvement projects, both curricular and logistical—from training teachers in the different types of writing required in the Rafiki curriculum, to cataloging the libraries, to implementing a carpool security system now that so many children and cars are coming in and out of the campus. As we tackle all these things, we have also set aside more deliberate time for prayer together as a leadership team. I could not run the school without them, and none of us can do it without supernatural help and wisdom from the Lord!

New Resources

After almost two months of delays (we are living with the real time consequences of the conflicts in the Suez Canal), we finally received our sea container from the Home Office at the end of September. The yearly arrival of



Joshua and I enjoying a safari picnic on his first trip to the wildlife reserve



Cheerful second graders in their big new classroom



School swinging back into gear all across campus, including the kitchen!

the container is basically Christmas Day for the Village. It contains curriculum for the new school year, Outreach materials for our partner churches and school, equipment for the plant, maintenance, and grounds crew, outfitting things for the kitchen, and a myriad of other things for ChildCare and the missionaries. Some of our big exciting items this year included an industrial dishwasher for the kitchen, some nice office chairs for the admin team, and about 3000 reformed study Bibles that we will have the privilege of gifting to several church partners. My personal favorite is a new full-sized keyboard and accompanying speakers—a gift to my church here, Christlike Reformed Baptist Church. Since I play the piano for the church every week, these will be wonderful for me as I lead congregational singing!

On the other hand, it is proving a challenge to get hold of many resources that we have been grateful to receive funding for, but which must be purchased here in country. We plan to upgrade the kitchen with several industrial pieces of equipment, update our borehole from which we pump all our Village water, build a new playground, and also replace some of our security lighting. The things necessary for these projects have been increasingly difficult to find because the economic situation in Malawi continues to be unstable. The country does not have enough forex (foreign exchange) to import many things that it needs, and prices continue to rise. *Please pray for the leaders of Malawi to be wise and for the average Malawian to have strength as inflation and shortages bear down harder each month.*

New RICE Program

At long last, after years of facility and curricular preparations, two expensive and exhausting visits from the National Council of Higher Education, and many rounds of discussions with our partner the University of Livingstonia, our latest big Village event is the arrival of our lecturers for our newly registered degree and diploma programs in classical Christian education! The lecturers need to undergo extensive orientation to train them on classical education philosophy and our teacher training curriculum, so they started with us at the beginning of November. We will use the next six to eight weeks to train them and go through the student intake process. This is very exciting for us, especially as Malawi will be the first of the Rafiki Villages to officially open an accredited degree program with a staff of national lecturers to facilitate it. We will be a real working university campus very shortly, Lord willing! We have enjoyed getting to know our new lecturers, but still have a lot to do to have everything ready for students to come in January. We are praying especially for this new piece of our campus life to mesh well with all of the other departments already operating here. It is so important to us that we all work together as one family of Christ in unity of passion for Rafiki's vision. *Please pray for each new lecturer and student to fully embrace our vision of classical Christian education and become a true part of our Rafiki family.*



School swinging back into gear all across campus (line of students from gate)



Everyone on campus pitches in to unload the 40-foot-long container



Pastor Brino Kumwenda and son examining the new keyboard

Same Me, Same Christ

With all of this going on, I continue to wear many hats—I am currently Village Administrator, Headmaster of the Rafiki School, Dean of the RICE campus (technically), and Outreach Coordinator all at once. I spend a lot of my day running back and forth between my two offices at opposite ends of the campus, and I keep 216 running notes and lists on my phone to remember all the various things I am trying not to drop. I am endlessly grateful for my missionary partners, May and Joshua, and for my national staff—Assistant Village Administrator, Assistant ChildCare Administrator, kitchen head, bookkeeper, head teachers, and facilities manager—who all do their own part and help keep us on track. And yet, there still must be one person at the top overseeing things—one person where “the buck stops.” I am that one person in multiple programs, and the hours in the day are still only twenty-four.

I am tempted to constantly think “well, when _____, then it will be better.” When the equipment we need can finally be found, when the container arrives, when the new teachers are recruited and trained, when the McDaniels arrive, when the kids commit to their study schedule... But isn't that what we all do? We are always tempted to think that if our logistical wish list was fulfilled, we would be comfortable and happy. And yet the Lord's answer is always the same, “I am the same yesterday, today, and forever.” As he said of Cyrus, “I call you...I name you...I equip you.” My Lord Jesus Christ knows the work that He plans to accomplish, and it will be done no matter my inadequacies. In fact, Paul says that when I am weak, His glory and supernatural work shines the brighter. And so we labor on here in Malawi, praying for the Lord to supply the ordinary means that we believe will strengthen our work, and yet trusting Him that His ways are higher than ours.

May you be strengthened and encouraged in your own work and walk with the Lord as you pray for your brothers and sisters across the world—we are one body. May we serve our one Lord well and faithfully!

Love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anna".

Anna Liebing