

The Very Rev Baird Mponda, Dean of Nkhotakota Cathedral, Diocese of Lake Malawi: Reflections on his visit to the UK

This was my first visit to the UK. I have visited churches and church historical places such as cathedrals. I have attended church meetings, visited church institutions such as Anglican Communion Office, Us office, World Mission office, MU Mary Sumner House and Birmingham Diocesan offices. I had also the privilege to visit church primary schools, Christ Church Sparkhill in Birmingham and St Andrew and St Mark School in Surbiton.

I am so much moved with the treasure the church has in terms of the history and how that history is preserved, inspired with the Christian life, the profound faith, not just numerical following but spiritual. Church buildings are not full on Sunday as is the case in Africa but there is a great deal of spiritual commitment, you would easily see that in the faces of Christians. They are also serious about the Malawi Birmingham Link which gives so much for the church in Malawi. I was privileged to attend the link prayers. I was moved with the generosity of material support from St John the Divine Sisters - linen, towels too numerous to mention ready to be packed in the Malawi container.

In schools you would see that children here have all the reasons to do better than their counterparts in Malawi, they have access to every school need, learning materials at their disposal. I was shocked to see they have computer lessons as well, while in my case I first knew a computer after being a priest and I rarely have access to it. Our teachers do their work manually, while in the UK every teacher has access to a computer, it's one of their basic tools. Some of the children in our primary schools in Malawi learn under the trees and sit right on the ground because of lack of space, but here the class rooms are spacious creating a convenient environment for learning. In the UK the teacher pupil ratio is quite reasonable but in Malawi it's quite unreasonable and unhealthy, about one to one hundred. In the UK the school children sit on desks right from the most junior class but most Malawian school children sit on dusty floors, pathetic.

Clergy in Birmingham have all the reasons to minister to God in the most effective way because of their working conditions, good transport, good shelter - they sleep in houses befitting Government ministers in Malawi - good food, while some of clergy in Malawi starve, poor diet, nutritionally not well supported, their stipend doesn't catch up with the standards of the day. I ask you clergy here in Birmingham, have you ever asked yourself why you are so privileged this way? How much do you think of your counterparts and their conditions in Africa?

You miss what you know and not what you don't know. My coming to the UK has opened my eyes and so I can see how deprived I am and the rest of my fellow clergy are as to conditions of life and ministry.

Amazed by the generosity of Anne, Janice, Richard and Laetitia, Sister Christine and fellow sisters, Liz and humorous Jimmy, Peter and Sian and everywhere I visited. I have a subscription of prayers to you always. Thanks for every support and for cherishing the link.

Your servant in the Lord, Baird