



MISSION CONNECTIONS

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Fall 2021



The Work Continues

Dustin and Sherri Ellington
Mission co-workers serving in Zambia

Dear friends,

Greetings from Zambia. I'd like to share a few glimpses of what it's been like to be back here for about a month after being granted an exception from our church headquarters' COVID-related ban on travel and in-person ministry. I very much miss Sherri, whose continuation in the U.S. under the ban allows her to have an in-person presence supporting a family member's journey toward health. Nonetheless, my level of happiness went up a sizable notch when I landed in Zambia and arrived back at Justo Mwale University.

I've so loved getting to be part of the Justo Mwale community again – being together with colleagues who've become good friends over the past ten or so years, living in our home on campus and enjoying our garden as a place of prayer, but especially teaching and relating with students. Since my arrival, I've been struck over and over with the reality that Justo Mwale is a community where important formation for ministry is happening. Playing a contributing role in that is precious to me.

There's a sense here that while physical distancing and masking up are important, the ministry that happens is so vital that it really must somehow go on. At first, I must say it was a bit shocking to teach cross-culturally to people wearing masks. I'd been accustomed, when teaching and facilitating discussion with people from a different culture, to make the most of any and every cue from their whole faces. Now I have had to learn to focus on their eyes. This has actually turned out to be an encouragement because our students' eyes are so intent. They tell me that our students care deeply about what's in Scripture and about interacting with it for the sake of their lives and ministries.

It's been gratifying to see that the work we are doing together feels so valuable to the students. One Thursday before class, I noticed that a young Zambian student named Rachael didn't look quite well. When I asked her if she was okay, she replied that she had a headache. I suggested, "Maybe you should go rest instead of being here. Feel free." She looked at me as though to say, "Are you kidding?" She replied, "Oh, I don't think I want to miss this!" as she looked at what I had just written on the board about how we'd focus our two hours of class that day: using literary skills to discover "Who is Jesus?" according to Mark's Gospel, and then reflecting on the question, "Who is Jesus to our community and us?"

Another day, a Malawian student named Khumbo approached me after class. I had made a mental note about his depth of questions and responses during class. He began saying, "Prof, I want my life to impact as many lives as possible. I want to have as much impact as possible, so I hope to be a theological lecturer one day. Think about our class today. If each student in the room becomes pastor of a thousand, and as a lecturer, you are touching their lives, imagine how many people you can touch in a lifetime. That's my heart's desire..." I could tell he was sincere. I was touched by his words and felt a sense of joy and privilege to get to do what I do. And may God make a way for Khumbo's continued training!



Dustin, John Mokothe, and Khumbo Mkandawire at graduation. Having just graduated, John is already pastor of several thousand church members in Malawi. Khumbo hopes to become a theology lecturer.



Rachael Tembo and other members of Dustin's New Testament Theology class. Thankfully, Zambia's high rate of COVID in June and July has subsided to a positivity rate of less than 1%. Justo Mwale classrooms are almost like teaching outdoors; they're breezeways with numerous open windows on two sides.

I realize that at most seminaries, the average student won't be a pastor of 1,000 all at once, but that statistic probably works for Justo Mwale. We had graduation (mostly virtual) a couple of weeks ago, and one of our graduates, Rev. John Mokothe from Malawi, came to visit and share about his first months as a pastor. He's now the solo pastor of a few rural congregations with, in all, several thousand active members. People are responding to his ministry in exciting ways. His sharing was full of joy, conviction, and expectation. He believes his time at Justo Mwale prepared him very well.

I hope these glimpses can give you a sense of the spiritual hunger and eagerness here. The mainline church in this part of Africa is full of vitality.

I hope you can also see that I've felt myself buoyed by being part of this community again. It does significant work for the gospel, and contributing to this community is a source of joy and fulfillment. Thank you so much to all of you

who pray for Sherri and me and enable us to do the work we do. To support us through Presbyterian World Mission, please see the box below.

We very much appreciate your prayers for Justo Mwale University, which, as I've mentioned in the past, faces sizable challenges. We'd also appreciate prayers for our family of four as we are in multiple locations and dealing with health issues, adjustments, and transitions. Amidst the challenges I feel especially thankful for Sherri and her role. So often, it's her commitment and practical help that keep the ship of our family and the ship of our ministry each sailing, and I certainly could not do what I do without her doing what she does. Thanks be to God.

Yours in Christ,

Dustin (and Sherri) Ellington

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Professors DT Banda, Lameck Banda, and Dustin before entering the graduation ceremony.

Thank you for reading our letter!

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