

Part 3: The Pilgrims in Malawi: 24 – 30 January 2020 (Part 1)

As we arrive at STEKA (Step Kids Awareness): Godknows and Helen Maseko, the 'parents' to 74 children, warmly welcome us at the gate to their home in Blantyre, Malawi.

We stay at a lodge a few miles away and visit to join in activities with the STEKA family. On the first afternoon, we celebrate Mass together in their garden with Gift translating Fr Jock's homily into **Chichewa** for the younger children who are learning English.



A vibrant choir (one of five in the local parish!) sing movingly (in every sense) - here during the offertory, having prepared many hymns in English for this opening Mass.



Daily life at STEKA involves everyone helping out with chores such as caring for the little ones, making and serving meals, and washing up the dishes, washing clothes and hanging them out to dry...but water must be carried from the well in the garden, while clothes for everyone are scrubbed manually with a bar of soap on a stone slab outside . . .



Edith fetching water from the well to take up to the house

Charles, Ruth and Sabrina on laundry duty down at the well in the garden



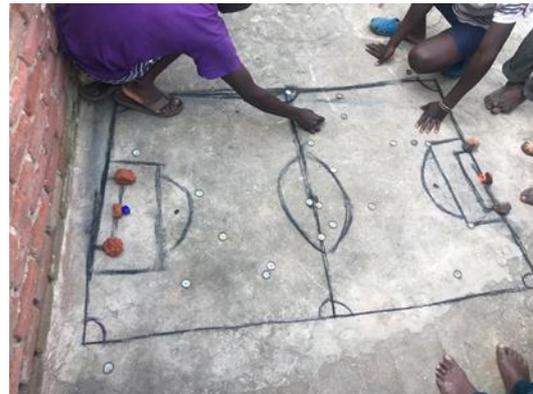


A water tank nearer the house provides water for cooking, drinking and the toilets. Clothes and dishes dry in the courtyard.

Food is cooked over a wood fire – big pots of **nsima** (from maize flour - their staple food) and soya mince.



But it's not all work and study when you have 73 brothers and sisters on hand. You can compete in the exciting finger ball, a kind of Malawian Subbuteo, played with bottle caps, marbles and a field drawn from charcoal



...or build models of Lego with pilgrim Michael as Nathan here has done



.... or create sticker pictures like these by Mphatso and Desire.



Sunday is a big day with Mass at their parish of the Holy Ghost: this week the usual 8am English Mass is celebrated by Fr Jock with Derek joining their team of altar servers.



We are introduced to the congregation at this Mass and afterwards meet some of the 30,000 parishioners, their parish priest Fr James, and another powerfully dynamic choir. Then we return to STEKA for **dialogues** in small rotating groups to listen, exchange and reflect on our understanding of each other's cultures.

Catherine has a fashion makeover with Mervis, one of 3 older girls who have trained to be beauticians. Here they model traditional head dresses and **chitenje** (wrap around skirts).



Derek is reunited with Sandra Ndale, Helen's youngest sister, who was in Portobello in 2017 studying film making at QMU and singing with the St John's music group, but now back home at STEKA helping with the family and continuing to make documentaries.

Then, we take the children for a cooling treat, travelling (and singing) in 2 mini buses all together, to an area (described by Gift as 'the Morningside of Blantyre'!) for a dip in a swimming pool, followed by chicken and chips.



Agogo (grandma) Phyllis and Theresa (one of the older girls), Tracy and Catherine assist the excited children to change clothes before enjoying a splashing time . . .



After **Monday** away exploring the Malawian countryside, on **Tuesday** we visit the building site of the **STEKA Skills Centre** at Lirangwe, several miles away from the children's home, where in the rain Godknows guides us around two buildings near completion - to be used for training in ICT and electronics, as well as tailoring, design, and knitting



and sewing on machines already acquired. The building behind Gift is one of two funded by our sister parishes. Godknows also describes longterm plans for a **Childcare and Development**

Institute onsite that will provide Parenting classes (accredited by Queen Margaret University) as well as courses in First Aid, Marriage Preparation, and basic Psycho-Social Counselling. There are also plans for a **Sports and Recreation Centre** in the surrounding fields and a 'safe space' purpose-built circular summer house-type structure where the all-important dialogues and reflection sessions can take place in the round. The guiding vision is to provide meaningful activity, skills and occupations for the youth of the area, as well as appropriate training for members of the STEKA family, and for those who can afford to pay helping to fund those who cannot.



Then in the evening, we celebrate a **truly joyful and memorable final Mass**, 80 of us in the living room at STEKA, with lively singing in Chichewa and the family's evening devotions intertwined, in which the 'bidding prayers' are spontaneously and confidently volunteered by the children of all ages, and the offertory procession is danced into the room by Helen and some of the older girls (and include a bottle of Malawi Gin – for us to take back with us!) The general attentiveness, and the reverence of the children receiving Holy Communion, is striking.

As in Legho and the Sacred Heart Centre in Tanzania the previous week, here in Malawi Jeremy engages everyone with our music and they share and teach us theirs. If pilgrimage is about meeting people and the journeys along the way as well as the final destination . . . we have so much to share with you (and will do so in the coming weeks.....)!

