

Interviewed by Janine Mitchell at CCAP Likhubula House, Malawi on Saturday 10.06.2023

Interviewee: Charles Chiromo

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I'm Charles Chiromo. As of now I am the primary education advisor for Chitakale in Mulanje District. I was once here at Likhubula as the head teacher at Nansato Primary school. At the same time, I was also working as the Session Clerk for Likhubula CCAP.

Let me first start from the way how it got started. I remember it was something around 2004 when we were told to say that you are expecting to receive visitors from Scotland - Dunblane in particular. We would rather like to establish a partnership with Likhubula community. But before I come to that one, I still can remember when I first had the chance to talk to the first team which came from Scotland. They said while they were in Scotland, they decided to form partnership with another community but not in Europe, but in a somewhere in another continent that is Africa. Then in particular they said it should be Malawi. Now, which part in Malawi? Then it came to be Likhubula. So for them to link with Likhubula, now they came through Blantyre Synod, because Blantyre Synod, as you know, has got a place here at the Likhubula Conference centre. Now, that is how it got started.

Then we received the visitors from Scotland. And the main purpose was the because it's a globe to bring these two communities together. That I can still remember at that particular time that we were trying to say that if we are looking at Dunblane as a community, and Likhubula as a community, they're just very far from one another. But if there's going to be partnership, it means we are bringing them together. And I still remember when we had the first visitors in 2004. We had one of our oldest members in Likhubula CCAP, we used to call him Mr. Namboya. And this one had to shake hands with Jenni Barr. And they used to say, UMODZI, that is in Chichewa meaning to say, UNITY. Scotland and Malawi in Africa together, now they have united, now it's no longer distance, but now together, and so on. So as one people as one globe. And then I still remember, we were in the church at that particular time when this partnership was being introduced. And then we had a song, but it was sung in English, we said, 'Bind us together' or something like that. Coming up together now as just one bond like that.

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So the main reason why they decided to open this partnership was for the two communities to be able to share experiences. Because Malawi, as Likhubula, we have our own culture, then Dunblane they have got also their own culture. But by coming together, we will be able to learn from one another what do we do here at Likhubula as a community and what happens even in Dunblane. Now, when they came to the first meeting, when this was being introduced, it was in Likhubula CCAP Church. As I already said, by then I was also the Session Clerk. So I was also in control at the church and see then there is also Nansato Primary School. So Okay, even Dunblane, apart from the church, you've got also some other schools. When it happened that we were establishing this partnership, at the same time, also, they will say, again, partnership together in the schools within the two communities. It was at that particular time, I still can remember that we agreed to say, well, the idea is for us to learn from one another like that, as I've already said. And again, I can remember that at that particular time, we also walked around in the community, because the main purpose was not just to have this community with Likhubula only. But Likhubula was just a starting point. Just like if we can put water in the basin that is just stagnant and then you take a small coin or maybe a stone and you throw it in the middle, there are waves like that, which will go outside like that. The main purpose was for Likhubula just to be a starting point.

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But this was supposed to continue growing now into various places. That's why the church has been involved. And apart from being involved in the church, the schools, but even the colleges around. And I remember we also walked around into the community, and even we could chat with the people who were not even going to the churches. We combined everybody in the church and I can still remember at that particular time there was famine in Malawi. We walked with people like Iain Smith and Jenni Barr and the like, at that particular time, and they were very much concerned to find the people who were really not in good condition because they were even staying in poor houses. But also they couldn't even have a better, you know, food to eat because they were starving, I still remember at that particular time when they were leaving, they also came to the school, to talk to the school, talk to my teachers, and also even the learners like that. They were

surprised to find that in one class, they could find over 200 learners against a teacher, which is not common in Scotland. But teachers were able to teach them.

And then they were saying maybe Scotland should come in with the introduction of volunteers. The volunteers were now coming also in to work in the primary school, but also they found that, that we had a shortage of notebooks, I mean, textbooks, learner's books and things like that. And they gave money to purchase those. I remember when they were leaving, they said, okay, fine, we are going to give you some money. And then we will ask you to open, you know, the accounts, one for the church and then one for the for the school. We went to do that. When they also visited the primary school, they asked the teachers how they do it. And then they say, well, we sometimes feel tired, because you travel a long distance. Then they asked what else do you want? They said maybe if we had something like a, there may be the bicycles, so that maybe we can travel using the bicycle so that we can arrive at the school while strong and then work better. I tell you, when they were leaving, they left some cash to open the accounts and then say, okay, this sum of money we are giving you again, you should buy bicycles. And I remember, we bought five of them, two female bicycles and then three male bicycles, which we were using at the school. But they said, this is for the community, not necessarily Nansato Primary school. So if a child feels sick, then they should take him to the hospital, or even anybody from the community, they can even use the bicycle to go to the hospital, and so on. Because not just for one person, but for a community, we were following everything like that.

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We used to have some patients in the community, people want to come and get the bicycle and take them to the hospital and then bring them back like that. And then they came, they brought the bike and so on. It was just very interesting. And also the children were writing some letters to their friends, in a small town in schools that we will exchanging letters just like that. So it started that way. And then it continued.

We sat in the church and then came up with also with the Memorandum of Understanding to say, what actually is the main purpose of this partnership, because we had to send for it and everybody was happy, so that now Malawi and Scotland are just too close. And like how it was previously but then now, they're together as one bond. So that is how we got started. And then we were even sharing, you know, here, visits, people would come from Scotland and also from here to go to Scotland like that. And I'm glad that because of the support, which they were doing going to the school, also the learners who are doing well, some began to do well, and then went to better Secondary schools, they were also being supported, especially for those who have a need. There'll be some of them who were orphans, others may be staying with their grandparents because their parents suffered maybe died because of HIV, AIDS or things like that. So then Dunblane Likhubula Partnership came in and then began to support these children.

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I'm glad today that this is continuing. Those who were learners in my time, today they are here in secondary schools. Others have completed. And when I meet with them, they say that their study was supported by Likhubula Dunblane, something which I was getting delighted. That is what has been happening.

And because Likhubula was just a starting point that was supposed to be extended, I'm glad to hear today that even at some schools there is a nursery, and some schools have been expanded just like that, which means that the Memorandum of Understanding that we established and signed for at that time is now working and the partnership is still growing and growing as I have really seen today. And it's my humble prayer that God should continue leading them. In fact, the partnership which was established within Dunblane and Likhubula should continue because others have already started benefiting, they are now under training, and when they finish, they will be working, they will be continuing to support the community, which means that it's really something very interesting and very good.