



<i>When we lived in Malawi</i>	2
<i>Blessing the Beer</i>	9
<i>Greetings from Bolivia</i>	11
<i>Great Escapes!</i>	12
<i>Meeting the Teachers 2</i>	14
<i>Happy Anniversary, Fr Naz</i>	16
<i>Sky Dive</i>	18
<i>Memories of Malawi</i>	22
<i>The Climate and Us</i>	24
<i>Marriage Encounter</i>	27
<i>The Young Magazine</i>	31

Plus Other Features

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whose views are not necessarily the same as those expressed in the magazine.

When We Lived In Malawi

In early 1990, while we were living in Malvern, I took a call from the Malawian High Commissioner in London who told us that Paul had been successful in his job application and had been approved to work in the Lands and Valuation Department of the Malawian Government in Malawi. The post was being funded by the Overseas Development Agency (ODA), which was a British Government Department at the time.

Paul was to be part of a project that was designed to raise revenue in Malawi through rating property, so that the income could be used for development and infrastructure. He was also to be a mentor for local students who were studying to become Valuation Surveyors. Paul had worked at the Inland Revenue as a Chartered Surveyor in the days when properties in the UK were valued for rating purposes. Some ex-British colonial countries, including Malawi, still had this system of rating so Paul was an ideal candidate for the post.

There followed a few busy, exciting months as we arranged medicals and inoculations, the packing up of our house in Malvern and farewells among our family and friends. ODA arranged for us to have training in how to cope with living within a foreign culture and we were introduced to ex-pats who had lived in Malawi and who would explain some of the requirements for our move there. The staff at ODA was very supportive during our two year residence in Malawi.

In mid-May we flew out to Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi. The plane had a short stop at Harare and as we flew in we saw our first African mud houses. Paul wondered if he would be valuing those in Malawi and it turned out that he would be. We were met at the airport by an ex-colleague of Paul's who drove us into Lilongwe to Area 3 where we were to stay in the house of another colleague who was on leave and where we stayed until we found our own accommodation.

We both remember the sounds and sights of our first evening in Africa which was the chirping of crickets. Pale, delightful geckos ran vertically

across our bedroom walls, their toes sticking to the surface at will. The bungalow we were staying in was a colonial style single-storey building with a lovely garden full of flowering trees and shrubs and a lawn of tough kikuyu grass. Along with the house came a houseboy and a gardener and we had to become accustomed to having staff there to look after us.

The following day, Paul was picked up by his colleague and taken to his office in one of only a few tall buildings that stood in isolation and surrounded by undeveloped plots and scrub, to form the new central area of Lilongwe. The Lands and Valuation department was responsible for valuing properties and overseeing the installation of basic infrastructure. Over the next couple of years Paul would travel throughout the central and northern districts of Malawi accompanied by a team of Malawian colleagues and valuation students, both in our own Land Rover and various Government vehicles. Paul had to pinch himself to check it was really happening as he sat under a baobab tree on the first day, attempting to discuss compensation with a group of tribal chiefs and elders through the somewhat dubious interpretation provided by a colleague, of the local Chichewa language. Valuations required ranged from assessing a single banana plant with a local, through to attempting to come up with a capital value for Lilongwe International Airport that would be acceptable to The World Bank!

After a few weeks of looking for a home we found a brand new bungalow in a raw plot that was in the new Area 9. This area was full of new houses and was on the edge of Lilongwe. Fr Naz tells us that this area is now well built-up. The house was completely empty so we looked forward to the arrival of our container in which we had shipped not only our personal possessions but our new white goods and a second hand Land Rover. As part of Paul's contract we were also provided with some Malawi Government furniture, and one day he turned up in large government open lorry filled with his Malawian colleagues and regulation beds, tables and chairs which they had prised from a jealous guardian of the furniture warehouse.

The beds were metal with springs and excessively uncomfortable so we took ourselves off to the Wood Industries Company and bought ourselves a wooden bed (which we still sleep in today!). We furnished our house with some woven straw items such as hampers and chairs, most of which we put in the freezer first to kill off the wood-boring insects.

We had met a lovely gardener whose employers were leaving Malawi so Feston came to join us to work on our garden. Our bungalow plot included two sets of staff quarters at the bottom of the garden, one of which Feston and his family used. The other was used by our house-boy, Ali, and his family. Although newly built, these buildings were very basic and as all the locals and our staff used open fires to cook on, the buildings quickly became very smoky. Feston wore overalls and wellies for his work, and Ali chose to have a green cotton suit as his uniform, of which he was very proud. Having staff meant that we gave employment to and supported at least two local families, and as well as a wage we provided bags of nsima (white maize flour), sugar, and soap, as they requested. The local Malawians' staple diet was nsima – a form of thick maize 'porridge', eaten with relish, which may be any vegetable or meat if available and affordable. We can vouch for the fact that Fr Naz can cook up a mean dish of nsima and relish!!

Many of the items we had were new to Ali and Feston. We had to prevent Ali from immersing the electric kettle in water to clean it, and one day we looked out to see Feston, having asked if we would like the inside of the Land Rover cleaned, sitting in the back with a hose and scrubbing brush! At dusk each day there was a mass movement of security guards from the 'Securicor' company headquarters, to which they all had to report first, to their respective places of work. Often, these men would have walked miles in order to clock on at the central offices, then several more to their allocated place of work. And it all had to be reversed in the morning. So often we would return in the late evening to find our guard fast asleep.

Darkness falls about 6pm in Malawi and it was pleasant sitting on the khonde (veranda) watching lightning storms in the distance. One morning, after a night of heavy rain, we woke up to the sound of a sort of popping-noise. Wondering what it could be we looked out to see our security guard picking up dozens of dead termites that had gathered around our outside lamps overnight and died. He was dropping them into his plastic security helmet to take home to be roasted for a meal.

During our time in Malawi, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda was the Life President of Malawi and there were a few dress code rules which we had to follow: men were not allowed to have long hair, ladies could not wear trousers and had to have their knees covered in public so we ladies used to wrap a chitenje (a Malawian wrap-cloth) around our waists when going out in shorts to play tennis.

We found the majority of the Malawians we met to be very gentle people. At the time we were there, the country was the 6th poorest in the world and the scale of poverty was huge. People of Malawi were required to carry party cards to show they were members of the Malawi Congress Party and Members of the Malawi Young Pioneers would check people's cards at the market but ex-pats were permitted entry without cards. Malawi was pretty much a police state with permanent roadblocks on major routes. If the president came to the city, Malawian ladies were required to greet him at the airport by dancing, wearing chitenjes with the president's head printed on them. There were no TV broadcasts and all films and videos were censored by a film board. Our videos from UK were all censored before being returned to us. Most Malawians had no access to any films or videos.

We had brought a TV with us on which we could play videos. Fortunately, the wonderful British Council had offices in Lilongwe from which they provided a lovely library with books and videos that anyone could borrow. Email was only just in its infancy and not available at the time so communication home was by phone from the office

and by long letters and some photographic films, which we sent home for development! So for entertainment we went along to the Little Theatre in Lilongwe, which was run by ex-pats of all nationalities. We ended up working backstage for a production of *The Mousetrap*, and I had to make snow out of polystyrene. Paul became the leading set builder and I progressed from prompt, to acting in a farce, to producing a pantomime, a very British institution which confounded the American ex-pats.

Local work was impossible for ex-pats but I found some part-time work at the British High Commission for a few weeks, and was then taken on full time to support staff who worked there in the Foreign Office Development Division. This Division supported and monitored British Aid projects in six southern African countries, including Malawi. I learned a lot about the different aid projects in Southern Africa concerning Population, Education, Medicine, etc. In our second year I worked at the European Economic Community offices doing diplomatic and project administration, all of which seemed very onerous.

To get to know the country better we joined the Malawi Wildlife Trust and on some weekends went on their walks that took us to places we would not have ventured to on our own. They were led by individuals who had a deep knowledge of the local nature and wildlife and they gave us a better insight into the local small animals and birds. For larger animal safaris we had to travel to South Luangwa National Park in Zambia or to Zimbabwe.

One New Year we drove to the south of the country with our visitors from UK to climb the tallest mountain, Mount Mulanje, which is over 3000 metres high. We did, however, have help in the form of porters who carried our kit to the huts on the top where we stayed for the New Year. We even took a pressure cooker up to cook a Christmas pudding that had been brought over from England. It was lovely to see this tea and pineapple growing area in the lowlands and the beautiful scenery of the Mulanje massive once we had climbed up. That long-drop toilet

next to the huts has one of the best views of any loo I have ever been to. I recommend the climb.

Lilongwe is a pleasant city, temperature wise, as it sits high above the Rift Valley and temperatures were usually about 28 to 32 degrees. However, in our time off, it was good to go to the beaches on Lake Malawi where it is much hotter as it is about 1000m lower in altitude. This freshwater lake is about 52 miles wide and 365 miles long and so looks like a sea. There is a whole history of boats that were used as transport across the lake, all of which were built abroad and brought overland to the lake. Sometimes at the lake we hired a rondavel (an Afrikaans word for a round hut) in a hotel complex, and sometimes we hired a house or a room. We could sail, snorkel or just enjoy eating the local fish, chambo, which was a great favourite.

Zomba was the old capital of Malawi and had the parliament there until 1994. Above it sits Zomba Plateau, a wonderful area of wild vegetation and forests of cedar, pine and cypress. We occasionally camped here and walked or fished. On the plateau we would watch men carrying a single long, heavy timber on their heads, all the way to the bottom of the plateau, some four or five miles, and they would wear a small pad of grass on their heads on which to sit the logs.

Outside the supermarkets and at every stopping point for tourists there would be locals selling wood carvings ranging from figurines to furniture. We bought a Mulanje cedar chest back to England with us and after 30 years the scent of the cedar is still heavenly. We also brought back with us many wood-carvings of lamps, chairs and tables - the house is littered with them. One of my favourite chests has a beautiful pattern on it and all the carving was done by a young craftsman using a sharpened screwdriver as a chisel.

The end of the Cold War marked the beginning of the end for President Banda's autocracy as Western leaders and aid donors no longer had use for Third World anti-communist dictators. Much of the funding that had been given to Africa was being moved to Eastern Europe.

This also caused funding for Paul's project to be reduced so we only served one contract in Malawi and returned after two years.

In March 1992, a few months before we returned home, Catholic Bishops in Malawi issued a pastoral letter that criticised President Banda and his government. I remember this courageous letter being read at mass. It was influential in starting a call for a referendum for a multi-party democracy and a couple of years later Banda was ousted at the elections. Ask Fr Naz about this letter, as he knows much about the circumstances of its publication and how brave the bishops and others had been to issue and proclaim the letter. President Banda's public response was to threaten to feed the bishops to the crocodiles!

To say goodbye to his colleagues, Paul arranged a quiz, with trophies as prizes followed by chicken and chips, all at the Little Theatre. In turn they invited us to a formal farewell where we sat around the room on chairs and when they played music we had to start the dancing, as guests. Anything we did not need to take back to England with us we laid out and our staff chose what they wanted to keep, followed by Paul's colleagues. We also sold our camera (at a very good rate) and gave away our sewing machine, both to locals who used the acquisitions to start new businesses.

On leaving we funded bicycles for our houseboy, gardener, and much loved security guard, Danford. We also gave a video screening of a children's film to the now numerous families that seemed to live in our garden, and gave them all a farewell barbecue. Even at this stage we were confounded by the strict protocols and pecking order that seems to dominate the lives of ordinary Malawians and therefore we had little control over these leaving jollities.

Our time in Malawi was immensely rewarding, if a little frustrating at times, but looking back it was a period of great awakening and appreciation for us. We missed it badly on our return home. Fr Naz's arrival at St Joseph's has evoked many memories of our time in his

home country after 30 years away. We have yet to go back there but with Fr Naz's prompting, I don't think it will be long before we make a return visit.

Anne Lewis

Blessing the Beer

Llangollen in North Wales is a popular tourist destination well known for its annual International Musical Eisteddfod, a canal waterway which includes the famous Pontcysyllte aquaduct and a heritage steam train. Three times a year the Llangollen Real Ale steam train sets off on a jolly. This year in March it departed after being blessed with holy water by the Rev Lee Taylor, priest in charge of Llangollen group of churches, and a self confessed real ale fan. Not surprising as he grew up in a pub and was a former publican. Apparently the tradition of blessing beer can be traced back to the sixth century and we know that beer and wine was produced by the great religious houses back in the day. I wonder if any of you have a bottle of Buckfast tonic wine lurking at the back of a cupboard or enjoy the occasional tittle of Chartreuse? Last year Mount St Bernard Abbey in Leicestershire began making their own beer, Tynt Meadow, using traditional Trappist methods. Abbot Dom Erik Varden said, 'Beer is a good, honest, nurturing drink.'

Rev Taylor would no doubt agree wholeheartedly with him and hopes that the blessing of the beer will serve to raise the profile of Christianity in an increasingly secular age. He said, 'The church has always blessed things. It is central to the community and the way the church responded and celebrated the community was to bless things.' The short service consisted of a sing-song and the traditional Catholic prayer for the blessing of beer:

'Bless O Lord, this creature beer, that thou hast been pleased to bring forth from the sweetness of the grain: that it might be a salutary remedy for the human race: and grant by the invocation of Thy holy

name, that, whosoever drinks of it may obtain health of body and a sure safeguard for the soul. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.'

It's worth adding that the medieval roof of St Collen's church in Llangollen depicts a story about drinking beer with one man attempting to trundle two barrels of beer, another enjoying the content and a third determined not to let any go to waste!



I'm not sure what St Collen himself would think of this. In one of the many legends about this seventh century warrior monk he was offered a feast of food and strong drink by Gwyn ap Nydd, the king of the Otherworld, or King of the Faeries. Disgusted by such decadence Collen sprinkled the feast and the king with holy water and made it all disappear. I wonder what the Reverend Taylor thinks of that?

Angela Park

Thank You as always to all our contributors, not only for their contributions but also on this occasion for their patience. They would originally have expected to see their words in print before the summer holidays, but a super abundance of articles has led to the production of this special late summer edition of the magazine.

Please don't be discouraged by this from contributing in the future. Could be by Christmas we'll be scratching our heads as we search for copy. Watch the bulletin for the next copy day.

Apologies to anyone who might miss them for the absence of jokes in this edition. The odd - possibly very odd - one will return next time.

Loving Greetings from Bolivia

Dearest Rosemary, Tim and all friends at St Joseph's Parish and the One World Group

On behalf of the community of Chipaya and the house for the children a special THANKS to you all for your generous donation sent.

Amongst those who have benefited from your great support are –

Juan who is bedridden and has Aids and whose family is out of work so he is very grateful for all support, both moral, financial and most of all spiritual;

A young 12 year old girl who was violated by her father who is now in prison. Both her mother and the young girl gave birth to their babies and they are grateful for the generous support which helps in many ways to give hope for another tomorrow;

A young man who has a family of five, is out of work and recently broke his collarbone. Without financial support for his health care, he too is very grateful for the support which enabled him to have surgery and continued medical care;

Some students who have difficulty in continuing their studies because of lack of finance to cover fares, internet etc.

Your generous donation is always very useful for these and many other needy causes.

United in the one mission in a spirit of prayer and friendship

Love to all with deep thanks

Silvia

Sr Silvia's mission is one of the projects supported by the parish through the One World Group

Great Escapes!

On May 2nd, 14 members of St Joseph's Youth Group met at Clue HQ Malvern (<https://cluehq.co.uk/malvern/>) to take part in an escape room experience. Escape rooms is a live-action, team-based game where players cooperatively discover clues, solve puzzles, and accomplish tasks in one or more rooms in order to accomplish a specific goal in a limited amount of time.

Youth Group split into three teams and each team had one hour to escape a room. Each room had a different theme and my team's room was kitted out as an Egyptian tomb. We were told that the 3000-year-old tomb of Cluetankhamun had recently been discovered and that the first party of explorers who had gone down into the tomb in search of treasure had not been heard from for several days. We had an hour to retrieve Cluetankhamun's treasure.

I was impressed with the five members of my team. The tasks, riddles and environment brought out skills and talents in each team member. Chris was a very effective time keeper and kept the entire team on track with regular reminders that the clock was clicking down. Chris was also very good at assessing the space we were in and noticing objects and clues on the walls. Our youngest team member, Luke, noticed immediately that claps of thunder preceded messages on a monitor from our support person outside. This awareness of the room's soundscape saved us a lot of time as it would have been easy to miss these messages. All the kids relished the puzzles and riddles. Matti and Catherine figured out what to do with a handful of sticks which, when arranged in the right pattern, revealed the numbers for a combination lock. Matti also worked out a directional lock which required that he translate moves on a map into a code. Catherine bravely let us close her up in a cupboard to figure out a puzzle on her own which gave us a major clue for escaping Cluetankhamun's tomb. Everyone in our group quickly learned the value of thinking out loud

and listening carefully to other peoples' ideas and observations. We escaped with a whopping 11 minutes to spare!

St Joseph's young people worked together, recognised and valued the talents and skills of others and everyone escaped their rooms successfully. My husband's employer uses escape rooms to evaluate the teamwork and problem solving skills of recent graduates. When I told him how well our young people had done, he was ready to hire them all!

St Joseph's Youth Group would like to thank everyone who supported our bake sale back in February. We raised over £160 and this money was used to reduce the participation fee in our Escape Room evening from £17 to £5 for each Youth Group member. Without the generous support of the parish, we would not have been able to visit Malvern HQ.

Sam Douglas



A Profile of Ms Charlotte Kopsch

Deputy Head at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School



How long have you been teaching and what drew you to this profession?

I have been teaching for eleven years with a year out in the middle to travel. Even as a teenager I loved working with children. Helping a child to understand something for the first time is the most rewarding feeling you can have. I wanted to help to shape children's lives and help them realise their ambitions.

Have you worked in other schools?

I worked at Malvern St James prep department for three years where I was given so many opportunities I left having had more experiences than teachers who have been teaching a lot longer. Then I worked at Wolverley Primary in Kidderminster which was a totally different type of school. I loved both experiences.

What do you think distinguishes Catholic education?

The values that permeate everything we do. They enhance our pupils' education and own lives. Our focus is on the whole child not just their learning.

What have been the benefits of the Tanzania link for the pupils?

Tanzania has opened the children's eyes to another culture and made it a real experience for them. They feel awe and wonder about our visitors and long to see and hear from them.

Can you tell us about the schools links with the parish and the benefits of these?

The children love going over for class masses. They are looking forward to taking a more active role in these too. It is lovely to share this time with the parish and also to welcome the parish into school masses or to school events.

What makes you happiest at work? And what are the greatest challenges?

Seeing the children engaged in their learning and teachers engaged in teaching. It is such a good feeling to see the children taking part in something that we have introduced, enjoying themselves and benefiting from it. We have a wonderful staff so day to day it is a happy place to be. The biggest challenge is the one facing so many schools - continuing with such good provision/school development with budget cuts.

What do you like to do in any spare time?

When I am not working I am spending time with my husband or my niece and nephews. I like seeing live music and comedians. In fact I have just got home from watching Rhod Gilbert on tour!

Why should parents choose St Joseph's for their children?

I think the first line of our report says it all. We do everything that we do for the best interests of our children. We are passionate about what we do and never settle for less than the best. Children at our school are happy and caring. They enjoy learning and leave school ready for the next stage of their lives.

Pam Taylor

Happy Anniversary Fr Naz



On Sunday 21 July Fr Naz celebrated the 40th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood with a wonderfully joyful mass. On the altar he was joined by Fr Pius Duniya, the acting parish priest of Fr Naz's old parish; Fr Daniel Kamanga from Malawi who is currently studying in Rome; and the Rev Mr Chris Blackman, a permanent deacon from Worcester whom Fr Naz had known in Oxford. The ranks of the altar servers were swelled by servers from his old parish in Oxford. At the end of mass he was presented

with an Apostolic Blessing from Pope Francis by Edd Hogan, our master of ceremonies. He also found himself at the receiving end of an enthusiastic rendition of Happy Birthday - a case of the biter bit. Among the congregation were many members of his previous parishes, all uniting with St Joseph's parishioners in celebrating with Fr Naz.

The celebrations continued in the garden with a picnic and barbeque. The food (goat included) was delicious, the weather was clement and the company excellent. Some praiseworthy organisation had clearly been going on, and many thanks are due to those involved. Chris Burger, chair of the PAC, presented Fr Naz with a cheque, which he was told he'd have to sign himself. And of course there was cake. Or in



this case cakes, two big ones and many littles ones, all beautifully decorated and spelling out again the reason we were celebrating, the fact that forty years ago, as Fr Daniel had said in his homily, Fr Naz had said 'yes'.

Margaret Rank



Bibles for Malawi



Heather Williamson at St Joseph's with some of the Bible Society publications which were on display

On Sunday 30 June St Joseph's hosted a gathering of a group of Christians drawn from the various Malvern churches. They had come to take part in a service, led by Fr Naz, which included an entertaining and informative presentation by Heather Williamson, Chairwoman of the Malvern Action Group for the Bible Society, on providing bibles for the children of Malawi. In this she was aided and abetted by Fr Naz, who was able to add a personal slant to the proceedings. In Malawi, where the average age of the population is just 18, 'children are everywhere' according to Fr Naz, and Heather reported that they are very appreciative of the bibles they receive from the Bible Society. A collection was taken to aid this work, and the proceedings finished in customary fashion with tea and biscuits

Sky Dive



I should have done my Sky Dive in aid of St Richard's Hospice in Worcester on Saturday 8th June, the date of my 85th birthday, but the atrocious weather meant no flying and cancellation. A huge disappointment, but an understandable decision. I re-booked for following Sunday. Tim, my very kind son, was my 'team' for the day. We left Malvern at 7am to go to an airfield near Banbury, Oxfordshire. Signing-in time was 8am.

The weather was not encouraging; grey with heavy cloud but not raining. After signing in and weight recorded, we went to a hanger for briefing. We were told about equipment, parachutes and harness etc.

We were drilled in a few movements we would need to do. Most important point of all was the necessity before landing of lifting feet and lower legs up so that we would avoid breaking our ankles and those of our instructor. The possibility of feet hitting the ground too fast is the biggest danger in Sky Diving.

Briefing completed, we waited for the weather, which at times was a bit brighter. At around 11.30 we were called together to be given a decision; either we could wait around for a fifty/fifty chance of a flight later on or re-book for another day and go home. We chose to stay and were relieved to see that more than half decided to leave, which meant if flying did start later I was more likely to get a place.

About noon, the sky being more blue than grey, we were told that flying would commence. I was lucky because I was in the second flight and could watch the first and note roughly how long it took the plane to reach 13,000 feet and how long before the first divers appeared from out of the clouds. Having seen one or two people land, I had to go and get into my jump suit and be fitted for a helmet with goggles and harness. I also proudly wore under my harness a tee shirt showing that I was being sponsored in aid of St. Richard's Hospice. I met my instructor, Simon, to whom I would be attached later on. He was very friendly and relaxed and we shared a few jokes. We made our way out to the plane, which had just returned after the first flight, heart thumping more in excitement than fear. In the plane we sat astride long benches on each side.

I had Simon behind me and my video photographer Richard in front of me. He takes videos and photos in the sky and was an optional extra. Simon kept checking and tightening my harness, like the starter



checks girths of horses before a race! Richard reminded me to smile and relax and enjoy myself when out among the clouds! Taking about 15 minutes to reach 13,000 feet we had a good chance to see Banbury and the A40 on which from our height the cars appeared to be crawling. We were climbing at about 80 mph. It was a small plane carrying about a dozen people all told, including divers, photographers and instructors. Three of us were doing tandem dives. Some were old hands going up for a jolly, equipped with their own individual parachutes.

It was not long before the lights in the cabin started to come on. Red, goggles down, get ready, Amber, door opened, Green, first of independent jumpers was out, followed by two more and Richard. Then it was my turn!

I was sitting in the doorway before I knew it and Simon gave me an almighty shove. So with head up and back, feet bent back out of the way, which had been part of our training earlier, I was tumbling towards a lovely big white fluffy cloud and thinking a nice soft feather bed to fall into! Helpfully the cloud blocked out any sight of the land far below. Next thing as the wind roared around me I caught sight of Richard valiantly trying to get photos and remembered to produce some sort of smile. Sometimes he was above me and sometimes below.



We also got into some sort of twiddle and were belting round in small circles, however Simon soon had that sorted and then the big parachute took over. There was a reduction in pace. Calm and serenity was restored. I looked for Richard with my best smile for the photograph of the year! He had totally disappeared as he went down ahead of us to take pictures of the landing. Simon showed me where to hold the guide ropes and I was in charge, steering the 'chute slightly left and right. Needless to say control was handed back for landing. The ground still looked some way off, but we were going quite fast so had to hurry to get hands under knees and lift lower legs and feet up and out of the way. On just touching the ground a man on either side grabbed me and kept me upright in a very controlled manner. It took a few moments for me to regain balance on my feet. My harness was loosened and then it began to sink in what I had done - and what I had achieved.

I walked over to Tim and gave him a big hug and a kiss - no doubt he was feeling relieved that I was down in one piece! As we were having refreshments a bit later, the fourth and last flight took off, and although it was blustery the wind became stronger. We waited and waited to see parachutes in the sky but it was too rough to let them jump and so the poor things came back down in the plane. What a disappointment for them.

I really had no idea of the huge interest generated by an 85 year old doing a first Sky Dive, until so many people, complete strangers, came over to congratulate me and shake my hand! A challenge for me and a triumph for St Richard's Hospice, because my fund has raised £3,000, of which over £500 came from St Joseph's. My thanks to all who donated so generously to the Hospice. Thanks to Alison and Jodie, the Hospice Fund Raisers, who put up with endless phone calls and questions and encouraged and helped me all the way.

Again a very big thank you to all of you generous parishioners. I know I did thank you twice in the Church after Mass at the weekend following the Sky Dive, but for anyone who may have been away and not heard it **THANK YOU.**

Grania Joinson

Memories of Malawi

When I heard that our new parish priest was from Malawi, I had cause to revisit memories of over 40 years ago when I visited that country and to remind myself of some of the history.

The British Central Africa Protectorate was a protectorate proclaimed in 1889 and ratified in 1891, that occupied the same area as present day Malawi. It was renamed Nyasaland in 1907. British interest arose from expeditions made by David Livingstone from 1858 onwards during his exploration of the Zambezi area.

In 1953 the three territories of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland united to become The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and then in 1964 the Independent Republic of Malawi came into being under Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, first as Prime Minister and then President.

The name Malawi cannot be literally translated into English, but its meaning is close to “Land where the sun-haze is reflected”. The country is also nicknamed “The warm heart of Africa” because of the friendliness of its people.

In 1970, having trained as a nurse and a midwife, I decided to take a break from the NHS and, wishing to see more of the world, I went to work as a Nursing Sister in The Copperbelt in neighbouring Zambia (previously Northern Rhodesia). That country, like Malawi had gained its independence from Britain in 1964 and was ruled by Dr Kenneth Kaunda.

In 1972 my mother and brother came out for a holiday and we first travelled round Rhodesia (previously Southern Rhodesia - now Zimbabwe) visiting Salisbury (now Harare), Umtali, Melsetter, Fort Victoria, Bulawayo and the highlight - Victoria Falls, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, known locally as Mosi oa Tunya - the smoke that thunders, owing to the mist and spray that can be seen for miles.

We returned to the Zambian capital, Lusaka and from there flew to Blantyre, a city in the Shire Highlands in southern Malawi where we stayed for a few days.

It was here that my mother was born in 1916. Her father, Harry, was a colonial civil servant working in The Lands and Survey Department. I believe he met my Scottish grandmother, Nora, who was a nurse in Zomba Hospital, when he was suffering from malaria. They married in Blantyre in 1915 and continued living there for the next 23 years until retiring to England in 1938.

My mother was understandably excited to be back in Blantyre after so many years away. I remember her saying that apart from a few new buildings so little appeared to have changed and she was able to identify many locations that she had known 34 years earlier. We found her parents' old home which was now government offices; having introduced ourselves and related the story, the people were so lovely and friendly and took us on a tour of the rooms and mother could remember what they were used for years before.

We then travelled north to Zomba and on to Nkopola on Lake Malawi. My brother remembers visiting Cape Maclear, a promontory on the southern shore of the lake, to watch the spectacular sunset.

My second visit to Malawi was in early 1974 with my husband, David. We travelled by car, a distance of a few hundred miles. We stayed at Nkopola Lodge, a beachside resort on Lake Malawi for some R and R.

The main part of that holiday and the most memorable was a trip on the MV Ilala, a steamer that has plied Lake Malawi since 1951. She was built by Yarrow Shipbuilders at Scotstoun near Glasgow for Nyasaland Railways in 1949, was dismantled and transported in pieces by ship, rail and road to Chipoka, a main port on the lake, where she was reassembled and put into service. She transports freight and passengers up and down the lake calling into about a dozen places on a weekly basis. There is a picture of this sturdy vessel on the internet.

We boarded at Monkey Bay in the south and sailed north to Chilumba and back again. We briefly stopped at Likoma, one of two inhabited islands which, although just a few kilometres from Mozambique and entirely surrounded by Mozambican territorial waters, remains an enclave of Malawi.

On this island with an overall area of just 18 square kilometres, is situated the Anglican cathedral of St Peter, one of the largest churches in Africa. In 1880 missionaries from the Universities' Mission to Central Africa, founded in response to a plea by David Livingstone, established their headquarters here. The church was quite awesome for its sheer size. The whole trip was an adventure that we would not have missed for the world.

Sadly after 40 odd years many of the memories have faded but the abiding impression was of an exciting, beautiful and vibrant country, that I now regret not having travelled in more widely.

Mary Rose Hughes

The Climate and Us

I have been campaigning on environmental issues for around 20 years. It started when I joined Greenpeace as I wanted to save the whale from being hunted for food, but from there I noticed that many land animals were threatened with extinction through trophy hunting and then the bees and other insects were dying from insecticides and from there it was an easy step to see who was the culprit, Mankind.

We are the ones responsible for the damage to our planet and our creatures. A recent report from the United Nations says, "Human activity is having a devastating impact in all areas of the globe and on all types of habitat. Driven by a crushing combination of changes in land use, over fishing, deforestation, climate change, pollution and more, the

global rate of species extinction is already ten to hundreds of times higher than the average rate over the past 10 million years - and it is accelerating.” On a positive note, the report goes on to say, “Nature can be conserved, restored and used sustainably while simultaneously meeting other global societal goals through urgent and concerted efforts fostering transformative change.”

Many of us have witnessed the damage that is being done to our earth through the eyes of David Attenborough, with his programmes such as ‘Blue Planet II’ and ‘Climate Change: The Facts’. He has laid bare the plastics pollution in our seas, the bleaching of our coral reefs, the areas of drought and floods that destroy our animals and their habitats, the decimation of food crops and villages, towns and cities and the displaced populations seeking new homes and countries to live in. To quote Paul Allen, author of ‘Zero Carbon Britain 2030’, “If David Attenborough’s ‘Climate Change: The Facts’ film, can have the same effect on the public response to climate change that ‘Blue Planet II’ had on attitudes to plastics, then we might just turn the tide.”

Although the western world has been the greatest instigator of climate change, here in the UK we don’t experience the same extreme weather conditions as those who live on the other side of the world. As I write, Northern India is experiencing temperatures of over 50 degrees Celsius with the unrelenting heatwave triggering warnings of water shortages and heatstroke, (Unearthed). We are all responsible, knowingly or unknowingly, for creating this scenario, therefore, it is up to us all to take action.

So what can we do?

We do have the answers, we all live on one planet, we need to help one another out of this crisis whether it is on our doorstep or our neighbours’ on the other side of the world. We can move away from our throw away society. We must stop using fossil fuels that accelerate climate change and invest in more renewables; treat our food with respect (on average households throw away a third of the food they

purchase); turn our thermostats down; make space for the people we have displaced and respect our land and seas. We need to act now: our government, local authorities, small and large businesses, groups, churches and individuals should have Climate Change at the top of their agenda.

Over the last year we have seen more action being taken by individuals and groups throughout the world. We have witnessed a 16 year old Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg, taking Fridays from her studies to shake the world into action. Her plain talking hits hard, with her words to politicians, such as:

It is still not too late to act. It will take a far-reaching vision, it will take courage, it will take fierce, fierce determination to act now, to lay the foundations where we may not know all the details about how to shape the ceiling. In other words, it will take cathedral thinking. I ask you to please wake up and make changes required possible. *Greta Thunberg (2019)*

She has inspired young people throughout the world to urge adults and politicians to take action now. Our Earth has been a gift to mankind, it is time to repair the damage that has been done by making sacrifices that will in turn benefit all. A difficult challenge but it can be done.

Ginny Lee

Useful resources.

Transition Malvern Hills - <https://transitionmalvern hills.org.uk/>

Christian Climate Action - <https://christianclimateaction.wordpress.com>

Zero Carbon Britain - <https://www.cat.org.uk/events/zero-carbon-britain/>

Unearthed - <https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/>

Operation NOAH - <https://operationnoah.org/>

Extinction Rebellion - <https://rebellion.earth>

Marriage Encounter – Did You Know?

Some of you may have heard of Marriage Encounter, or its sister Engaged Encounter, which offers marriage preparation, indeed you may have experienced one of the weekend retreats, but did you know that we, Sue and Mark, are the current national leadership for England and Wales? Surprised? So are we!

Our official promotion goes like this...

Worldwide Marriage Encounter

For the past 50 years Worldwide Marriage Encounter has been offering marriage enrichment retreats all around the world. Focused on couples who want to enrich their relationship and gain a deeper understanding of the Sacrament of Marriage, the retreat offers a unique experience. It's a chance to explore your relationship at a deeper, more intimate level, regardless of how long you have been together. Thousands of couples in the UK have benefited from a Marriage Encounter weekend retreat, why not find out more at wwme.org.uk



For us though it has been so much more than just a retreat. Nearly twenty-five years ago, we completed a marriage preparation course with a lovely couple many of you will know, Liz and Chris Burger, who were already clued into Marriage Encounter. Their relationship made a deep impression on us, and still does today. When we had been married less than two years, Rob and Maria Hooper gave an inspiring talk after Mass about Marriage Encounter weekends. Mark asked, “*Shall we go?*” “*Why? What’s wrong with our Marriage?*” “*Nothing,*” came back a hasty reply.

So, a beautifully sunny June day in 1997 found us on a Marriage Encounter weekend, away from our young boys; not sure what to expect. However, as the weekend progressed, we were encouraged

and guided to deepen our relationship in a way that has stood us in good stead over the years.

Back in our parish we carried on as normal, but our weekend experience had changed us and our outlook on life. It was a few months later that a couple from the Marriage Encounter community came and spoke to us about getting together with two other couples in the parish to meet as a small group. They were similar to us with young families. We found this a great support, both in working through the difficult times and celebrating the joys. We continue to meet with couples in the parish to this day. We didn't think anyone else noticed the steady change in our relationship, but Deacon Louis used to tell us that if he saw one of us, he knew the other wasn't far behind, whatever we did, we did it together.

We have also been part of a larger Marriage Encounter family. We have joined them on community days dragging our three then young children; they will tell you though that they enjoyed their time as part of Marriage Encounter, they even remember couples, families and priests that have made a lasting impression on them.

The day we got married was one of the happiest of our relationship, we have always said that there were three people that day standing in front of the altar, us two and the Holy Spirit. Ever present, the Holy Spirit has helped and guided us through the ups and downs of our journey together.

However, the Holy Spirit also likes to challenge us. One of our early "pokes" to sharing God's Word with more people was when we were asked to present Marriage Encounter weekends. Neither of us were confident with public speaking at the time, but we were supported and encouraged by other couples in Marriage Encounter. The first weekend we presented was in 2001, to eight couples, all of whom had been married at least thirty-five years, longer than we had been alive! We wondered what we could share with them that they didn't already know, we were very nervous. However, the weekend went without a

hitch and a number of couples complimented us on our presentations and said they had gained a richer insight into their relationship after listening to us. This was a lovely surprise.

Over the years we have continued to give Marriage Encounter weekend retreats, but along side that we have been area coordinators, organising family events and meeting with other couples and priests across the West Midlands.

We've mentioned priests a couple of times now, and one of the things that is unique to Marriage Encounter is that priests experience the weekend retreat as well, deepening their relationship with their religious community or parish. Many priests have found this to be a deeply enriching experience, with some remaining closely involved for more than forty years.

Last year, one evening in spring, we had a phone call from the then national leadership, inviting us to be the next national leadership, our peers in Marriage Encounter had voted for us. We were stunned, the previous few years we had been on the periphery of activities, due to work and family needing to take priority.

At first, we were firmly thinking, NO, this isn't the right time. However, the Holy Spirit had other ideas and kept poking, aided by our friends and family! After much discussion and prayer, we accepted the call to leadership and in September 2018 our three-year term of office began.

The last ten months have been a whirlwind of activity. Part of our role is to meet with the national leadership teams from across Europe (contrary to Brexit!). We meet three times a year for a four-day council, and have travelled to Hungary, Belgium and Germany. Neither of us are experienced travellers, nor do we have any talent for languages, but we have been hosted by some wonderful couples, and been amazed that despite language barriers, we have made strong connections with couples and priests through the experience of the Marriage Encounter weekend retreat, but the language of love conquers all.

Often two to three weekends a month we can be found travelling around the country, meeting with other couples and priests, as well as performing our duties as leaders.

One of the wonderful aspects is that as a couple we join with a priest to make a leadership team. We have the privilege of working with Fr Tom. Based in Manchester, he is part of the Society of African Missions. We speak regularly over the phone or by Skype, developing ideas for the movement, as well as supporting each other with the day to day challenges of family, parish life, and leading a national charity.

Our first Marriage Encounter weekend has made a deep and lasting impression on our life. Having known each other for some years marriage was a natural progression. Our close relationship took a leap forward during that Encounter weekend. Despite knowing someone for many years, it can still be hard to share some things with them. Many of us have strong or deep feelings that we lock away, fearing the effect sharing would have. As the years progress that fear can grow. Trusting each other enough to share feelings with love and listen with love is freeing and enriching. It can be easy over the years to leave much unsaid, but for us that innocuous drift apart is a lonely place that we know we can avoid. The joy of our marriage has come from the intimacy we share, learning to understand each other and choosing to love each other, even when we might be struggling. Every day we make a conscious choice to be together, to share our feelings, to deepen our relationship. Our marriage brings joy, and we continue to be excited about our future together, we feel more in love now, than on our wedding day, but now it has a depth that we couldn't have dreamed of when we were married.

One of the most rewarding parts of Marriage Encounter for us is the ability to give back to a movement which has been such a support for us. Time and time again we have seen couples grow in their intimacy, developing confidence, strengthening trust in each other, and a depth to their love. They seem to ooze tangible sacrament that rubs off on those around them.

If you've already experienced a Marriage Encounter or Engaged Encounter weekend, then we'll be holding a community day on the 7th September in the parish, but perhaps you've been inspired to find out some more about deepening your relationship.

Whether you are thinking about getting married, been married for a few years, many years, or longer than you care to remember, an Engaged Encounter marriage preparation weekend, or a Marriage Encounter weekend, will offer you the choice to look at your relationship in a new and fresh way. It's open to anyone, but we have a Catholic approach and explore marriage as a sacrament. If you would like to know more, check the website, wwme.org.uk or grab hold of one of us next time you see us.

Sue and Mark Stubbings

The Young Magazine

Continuing the article on pilgrimages in the last magazine . . .

Special pilgrimage journeys are not just for Christians; followers of different religious faiths may also feel drawn to particular holy places.

Buddhists have many famous places of pilgrimage in several countries in Asia, of which the most important are Lumbini (Nepal), supposedly the Buddha's birthplace, and Kusinagar (India), where he died.

Hindus are encouraged to make pilgrimages to sacred places associated with legendary events from the lives of various gods, but it is not compulsory. They go to sacred cities and temples such as the one built by Garhwal kings in the ninth century in honour of the god Vishnu. The *Kumbh Mela* is one of the largest peaceful gatherings in the world, with thousands of pilgrims gathering to bathe in the sacred river Ganges to be cleansed of their sins.

The holiest place for **Muslims** is Mecca (Saudi Arabia) and every year, millions of them go there, as it is one of the five pillars of Islam for every adult Muslim who is physically and financially capable of undertaking the journey, to carry out Hajj (as the annual pilgrimage is known) at least once in their lifetime. The prophet Muhammad, who

founded Islam, was born in Mecca, which is also where he received the first revelation of the *Quran* (holy book of Islam). His final resting place is in the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina (Saudi Arabia), which is the second holiest site in Islam.

The most sacred and visited **Jewish** site is the Western Wall, the remaining part of the Second Temple in the old City of Jerusalem. The first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, and the second by the Romans, so this wall became a place of worship and mourning (it is often called the Wailing Wall). There are numerous lesser Jewish pilgrimage destinations.

Sikhs do not place great importance on pilgrimage but the Golden Temple at Amritsar (India) has become the spiritual and cultural centre of their faith. Built in the early 1600s from marble and then overlaid with gold leaf, it is the most important gurdwara (place of worship) in Sikhism and houses the holy text known as the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Some places are important to pilgrims of different faiths, eg, the Holy Land is a focal point for followers of not just Christianity but Islam and Judaism as well. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is an Islamic shrine on Temple Mount, built over the Foundation Stone which is the holiest site to Jews because it is seen as the place where God's divine presence was shown more than in any other place (they believe it is where he created Adam, the first man, and where Abraham attempted to offer his son as sacrifice). It is also a UNESCO World Heritage site.

In Sri Lanka, there is a holy mountain considered sacred by four major religious groups; *Sri Pada* has a rock formation near the summit which according to the different beliefs, represents the footprint of Buddha (Buddhism), the prophet Adam (Islam), Shiva (Hinduism) or St Thomas (Christianity).

So whether you go as a tourist, a hiker or for religious reasons, perhaps it's time to check out where you would like to go on pilgrimage! You will gain new insights, deeper understanding, blessings and perhaps even healing.

Helen O'Connor