



THONDWE NEWS August 2025

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Rev Fraser Edwards of Innerleithen, Traquair and Walkerburn Parish Church in the Scottish Borders described it as an "inspiring" trip to the warm heart of Africa.

In his own words, he provides an insight into what is a mutually beneficial twinning partnership rooted in faith and friendship, which demonstrated to him that Christians, regardless of where they live in the world, are all one in Christ.



Elwin Kachere,
Thondwe Session Clerk, Rev Fraser
Edwards, Rev James Chigoli and Trevor
Ndisale, Partnership Committee chairman.

"In 2021, I was ordained and inducted as the minister of Innerleithen, Traquair and Walkerburn Parish Church.

Since then, I have been learning about our congregation's 19-year-old partnership with [Thondwe CCAP in Malawi](#) and exchanging WhatsApp messages with the minister in Thondwe.

Former Moderator of the General Assembly, Very Rev Dr Shaw Paterson, had visited Thondwe in 2024 and then came to our church to share about his visit earlier this year.

This visit inspired the Moderator's ['Let your Little Light Shine' challenge](#) to fund solar-powered lights that children can borrow from their school and so far more than £52,000 has been raised.

I was delighted to have the long-awaited opportunity to visit for myself and travelled to Thondwe in June as part of a small group.

Everyone that we met extended such a warm welcome to us and seemed so pleased that we had made the journey to visit.

Nothing was too much trouble in terms of looking after us.

Luke 3:11 says: "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

In Malawi, I could really see this in action and people who have relatively little were much more willing to share than we might be in the UK.

The ministers I spoke to all shared that regularly the people of their parish could turn up to their door needing food and would go away with whatever the minister had, even if the minister and family would go hungry to do this.

I was inspired by faith that goes deep and real trust in God.

Our first day was in the community and everywhere I went there were signs of the partnership at work.

A banner made by Walkerburn craft club in the parish hangs with pride of place in Thondwe, the finishing stones of the new bridge linking parts of the community have 'ITW Parish' etched into the concrete. (See pic page 4). The bookcases in the school library have small plaques with the names of ITW Church members who sponsored them and in partnership with our local rotary club, the classrooms have been getting equipped with desks and lifting learners off the floor.



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Cryton Mbanira, School Headteacher, Rev James Chigoli, Rev Fraser Edwards and his daughter Anna Edwards and David Kerr, ITW elder and Partnership Treasurer, with pupils

The long-term benefits of the partnership are seen throughout the community and there is a close relationship.

This is not just about sending donations but working together for the benefit of the whole community and learning from each other.

Being there for Sunday was a real joy. Our partnership minister, Rev James Chigoli, looks after four churches and Thondwe is just one of them.

Early on Sunday morning he took me to share in a wedding service in Mpita CCAP – I have never seen such joy, singing and dancing in church.

Following this service, we returned to Thondwe to share in the Pentecost service, and it was a privilege to be invited to preach.

It was a special time to reflect on the different nations gathered at Pentecost and now for Scots and Malawians to join in worship together – all one in Christ Jesus.

One key pillar of our partnership is education and St Ronan's Primary School in Innerleithen has a strong link with the primary school in Thondwe.

Primary education is free in Malawi but there are fees to pay for secondary school, so we have also begun to support girls through secondary school.

The first cohort of five sponsored girls completed secondary school this year and we were able to hold a graduation ceremony for them.

To hear these confident girls' share of their hopes of continuing into further education as doctors, accountants and lawyers was a real encouragement.

We visited many other projects which are in progress including a new water borehole for the school and the church garden where food is grown collectively to support the community in what is known as the hunger months.

The fruits of a long-term partnership were seen at every turn and the bonds of faith and friendship are a gift to both sides of the partnership.

Perhaps other Church of Scotland churches would be interested in partnership with a church in Malawi?

I know there are other ministers in Zomba Presbytery who would be delighted to share learning with congregations here.

One practical request which came from Zomba Presbytery was for donations of clerical wear to support their ministers.

If anyone reading has clerical shirts, collars or robes that they would be willing to donate then please get in touch.

Donations could be posted to Innerleithen, Traquair and Walkerburn Parish Church and then we can arrange for them to be shipped out to Malawi by The Bananabox Trust.

Please contact fedwards@churchofscotland.org.uk for more details if you are able to help.

Our travel costs were supported by a [Faith Share Grant](#) and we are very grateful for this support.

Carol Finlay, who until recently was the Church's congregational engagement officer, was also a great source of advice before I travelled.

Thondwe is a rural village without electricity and so there are real limits to electronic communication.

Being able to show up in person, to shake hands, to pray together and to learn from each other about how to follow Jesus is such a fundamental part of our partnership."



BEFIT (Building Education Foundations through Innovation and Technology)

Thondwe Primary school like others in Malawi faces many challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching materials and a shortage of trained teachers. To overcome these difficulties the Ministry of Education has provided electronic tablets (like Ipads) to improve poor literacy and numeracy standards. The tablets come pre-loaded with educational software, allowing the children to learn at their own pace and in their own language. This 10-panel solar power battery system that recharges their tablets overnight, ready for classes in the morning, provides younger children with a personalised learning programme to realise their potential. The teachers are delighted that Thondwe has been selected as a pilot school and reckon it's improving school attendance, so they claim it's been very successful. A learner said *"I like the tablet because when I make a mistake it does not move on to the next learner, it tells me to try again and when I try I get the right answer"*



Ettrick and Yarrow Gift to Thondwe

We were pleasantly surprised and delighted to have discussions with members of their kirk session on a possible donation to the GET-IT girls education in Thondwe Fund. They heard good news of the girls completion of secondary school and wanted to invest over £800 that had been set aside for a similar programme in Kenya that had lapsed due to a loss of communication. We agreed on assigning their donation to the "Ready to Learn " materials which are an important aspect of the programme.

Wrinkly Roofs

In 2023 the partnership hatched a 3-year plan to replace thatched roofing with metal material on 25 homes by end 2025.



IN 2023 we managed to complete 6 houses, in 2024 we managed a further 5 at the start of 2025 we completed 3 houses and now with the support of funding for 8 roofs by the Rotary Club of Carlisle Castle whose President is Paul Faris we are well on the way to achieving that goal at 22 houses.

Thondwe families are on the front line of climate change, and we want to help them prepare against future climate shocks which will occur for sure. The recent church team visit included meeting many of the new roof owners who were thrilled with this home Improvement scheme. Not only does it provide improved health outcomes and the practical benefit of metal roofing but also dignity, security and supports the local community. Victoria Kerekesa and her son are really pleased with their roof, and the visiting team thought it looked good. Special thanks to Paul and Carlisle Castle Rotary club for

their generous support of the Wrinkly Roof programme

Bananabox Trust

Our shipment of 15 boxes containing Good News Bibles from Earlston Church, cycling kit from Peebles CC, spectacles for Mzuzu hospital and phones for Ekwendeni youth with hearing impairment is due to arrive in Beira, Mozambique on 19th August with an anticipated arrival time in Malawi of mid September.

Solaraid School Light Library

Thondwe's school Light Library has proven to be a success for improving educational outcomes and providing family support. The library which provides solar lights for learners to borrow and use at home, addresses issues of no electricity or poor candlelight. The head teacher reports that end of term results have improved because of increased study time and has appealed for more study lights, approximately 25 to reach 100.

Elizabeth Parker and her sister plan to walk the 60 miles of St Cuthberts Way from Melrose to the Holy Island of Lindesfarne in Northumberland at the end of August to raise money for the study lights. If you would like to give her some encouragement and sponsorship, please contact her.



Church Garden

The Garden committee reported a modest harvest of 20 bags of maize. This is considered a poor crop caused by dry spells and weather disruptions with lower rainfall than last year. Nationwide there is concern that production of maize is falling at a time when the population is increasing, creating a high demand for food.

The trial introduction of pigeon peas and ground-nuts had mixed fortunes. Although the nuts were reported as a failure the peas were considered a success, and we await a report on the final value of the peas crop grown for 3 reasons: income generation, soil fertility and climate change adaption.



Empowering 500

Another milestone was achieved when 40 more desks were delivered making it a final total of 260 desks and 520 children lifted off the floor in our L.E.N.D (Learners Need Desks) programme, started in 2018. As customary parents come together to paint the classroom in readiness to receive the desks. This programme will now be paused as other priorities are considered. Head teacher Cryton reported "that standard 6 learners will be writing exams in a very conducive environment, helping improve results"



End of Thondwe News