

May 2016

Dear friends,

Once again it is graduation time and, as is now the norm at Justo Mwale University, our sparkling new graduates have already been serving as pastors since November or December. This year I (Sherri) took it upon myself to ask some of them what the biggest surprise has been in their first few months of pastoral work. In their answers I found insight to the challenges they face; I also found tidbits of challenge and inspiration for me as an American Christian. Read on, and let our recent graduates challenge you, as well...



Happy JMU graduates Sam Ruzivo and Charles Ngoma lining up for the ceremony
(Photo by Johanneke Kroesbergen)

Graduate #1:

One of this month's graduates is ministering in what was built as a middle-class neighborhood, in a nation that is now struggling economically. Unlike for many of our graduates, her church is a manageable size, and she feels quite able to know her parishioners and their families personally. She loves her church, but has been challenged by how few people have jobs: only five out of about 90 adults are employed right now, due to a recent downturn in the economy. Those five individuals and their families feel a lot of responsibility to carry the church, financially. And of them, two are nearing retirement age, which underscores the question of what lies ahead.

Challenge for us:

How often do we in the American church thank God for the jobs within our congregation? Do we take it for granted that most people in our church are gainfully employed or at least have a fairly adequate

pension and/or Social Security to rely on? What kind of involvement do we have in our own churches with those who are seeking work for one reason or another?

We also feel this story underscores why it's important for congregations in the USA to think about provision for training not only their own pastors but pastors in places like Africa, as well.



Sherry with new graduates Mary Limula and Shingi Masunda

Graduate #2:

Another of this month's graduates shared with me that his biggest surprise happened in a recent meeting, when one elder expressed, in front of all of the other leaders, that he was disappointed things haven't improved more with this new pastor's arrival. Ouch. Fortunately, the other leaders have been extremely supportive, which shows me this is a relatively healthy church in which to get one's "sea legs" as a new pastor. Other new pastors, though, may not be as fortunate.

Challenge for us:

Do we rally to support leaders in our communities when people express disappointment toward them? How do we personally get involved to encourage those who are trying hard to serve but who might be living under unfair/unrealistic expectations, or even receiving unfair treatment? Have I encouraged my pastor lately?



Justo Mwale University's 2016 BTh graduates -- All are now serving in congregations.

(Photo by Johanneke Kroesbergen)

Graduate #3:

This graduate has actually been in his new congregation for over a year now, but has the added challenge of his placement being in an area with two different main languages, neither of which is he yet fluent enough in to preach. This kind of church assignment is a common phenomenon in Zambia, a country with 72 languages. Our new graduate handles it by so far preaching in his own native language, which is somewhat related, as he continues trying to learn the other two languages alongside his other pastoral duties.

He also is very aware that over the past year in his position he hasn't yet visited some church members, because several live rather far away and the roads are impassable in rainy season. Now that the mud and the streams are drying up, he hopes to pay more visits soon.

Challenge for us:

When we don't measure up to all the challenges presented to us in ministry or in service, do we still give the best we have, and take steps to overcome the difficulties more fully in the future?

These are just glimpses of a few conversations I enjoyed over graduation weekend. Perhaps God will use one or more of these faithful people's stories to encourage you in your own church community on the other side of the world.

Thank you for all of your care that has supported us over the entire four years this graduating class (and the one before it, too!) studied at Justo Mwale. It is such a blessing to watch people grow and develop as student pastors and then be sent out to shepherd and build up Christ's church all over southern/central Africa. We so appreciate the prayers, encouragement, and financial gifts that help us to serve here over the long haul. If you

would like to offer a financial gift toward our sending and support costs for 2016 (or perhaps even sign up for ongoing monthly giving), click [here](#). (And then click where it says "Give to Professor, Justo Mwale Theological University College".)

Meanwhile, please do pray for God's continued and deepened touch to build up the church in Africa through our ministry alongside such persons as these.

Please also pray:

- *For our upcoming time in the USA this July, August, and part of September...We love to get time with extended family and supporting congregations, but it is always hard to juggle visits to churches; time with parents, siblings, and other relatives; and the rest and re-tooling we need to return to Zambia renewed and refreshed.
- *For our family in transition: On this visit Dustin will stay in the USA for 7 weeks beyond Sherri and Christopher, in order to settle Clayton in at (gulp!) college in September. Please pray for all of us at this transition time. Especially, please pray for Clayton to get off to a good start with studies, friends, fellowship, and Christian perspective at Stanford University.
- *For the four new YAVs (Young Adult Volunteers) who are preparing to head to Zambia at the end of August for an intensive year of Christian service and cross-cultural living. More about this in our next letter, but please pray for them now as they prepare to take this huge step!

Once again, we appreciate your prayers, care, and financial support so very much. Thank you.

Yours in Christ,

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Our family on Clayton's high school graduation day