



Please, have a seat . . .

Church pews are not a high priority here in Malawi even though there are thousands of churches across the country. The quality of the pews may vary greatly from one region to another depending on the wealth of the congregation. I thought you might be interested in seeing what all is available to our brethren here, although I doubt that any of our American brethren will be clamoring for the same types of seating.



First, there is the all natural seating. I think they read in Genesis 28 that Jacob used stones for pillows. If it worked for him then surely it works for them.



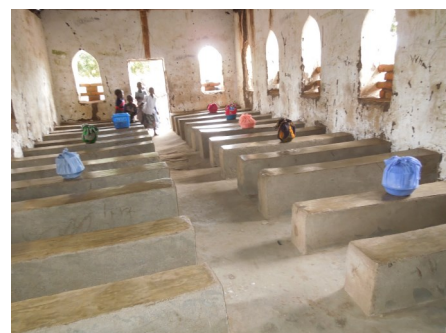
Then there is the rustic seating. The advantage of this type of seating over the natural is that it is easier to move the bench to make a little more leg room. The disadvantage is that it is not as durable. It is subject to termite damage and eventually it will rot, needing then to be replaced. Replacement, however, is not that difficult or expensive.



Some congregations prefer the clean sterile look. Everyone sits on the floor except for the preacher and two or three church leaders. Everyone always stands for the song before prayer and the invitation song. Regardless of the seating, or lack thereof, services can last two or three hours.

There are some places that have started getting pews. They are not yet padded, just simple wooden benches. Some people still have to sit on the floor. I am never sure if it is because they cannot afford more benches, or if there are some who just prefer the floor

Once in a while I will visit a congregation where brethren have made concrete pews. There is no question about it. These are really nice. Some brethren can only dream about having concrete pews in their meeting house. Some probably think it is too elaborate. The next thing you know they will be bringing cushions!



We are renting a guesthouse from a family who moved here from South Africa. The house is situated in a nice community, and there are several houses in the neighborhood. One thing that is immediately noticeable when one enters the subdivision is security. Every home is a virtual fortress protecting those within from intruders and invasion from without. Its not just this neighborhood that is so well protected—homes all around Blantyre have their walls, and gates, and guards. Businesses are sealed up at night, and the grocery store we patronize has armed guards watching the front of the store during business hours.

When you enter the drive to our residence you first notice there is a wall around the property with an iron gate that is padlocked. The wall and the gate have six strands of electrified wire across the top. Should that wire



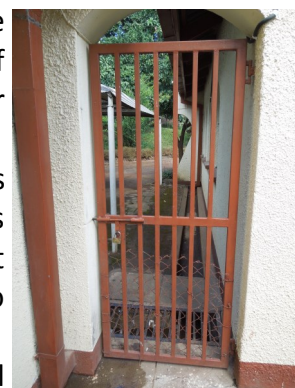
The main entrance with electrified wire across the top.



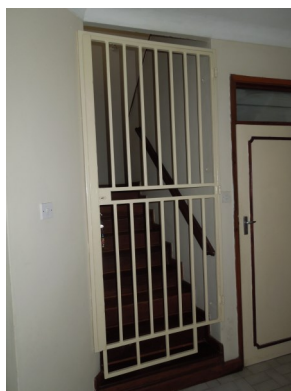
Jima's bark and growl are not for the faint of heart.

be cut or shorted out an alarm goes immediately to a security company. If someone should figure out how to get over the wall and into the yard he is faced with two more obstacles—a trained dog and night watchmen. Before you can get into the house there is another padlocked gate that one must enter through into a courtyard. The door of the house has a deadbolt, and once inside there is another door with a deadbolt to get to the hallway leading upstairs where we sleep. The stairs themselves have an iron gate that is padlocked. (It is a really big deal if I have gone to bed and think of something in the car that I want.)

The crime and lawlessness here is perpetuated by poverty and desperation. Many people here earn less than forty dollars a month. There is a wealthy class and a poor class of people. It has been that way for some time, so I do not think it is going to change anytime soon.



The iron gate leading to the courtyard and door.



The iron gate leading upstairs.

Despite all of the protection that is afforded us we still get intruders on a daily basis. Sometimes I hear the sound of one at night after I have gone to bed. I'll jump up and turn on the lights, but they are brazen and do not flee. Marty and I will go through the house clapping our hands as if we are possessed with some sort of mental disorder; we douse ourselves with smelly oil; we hold our breath and spray cans of Doom—but still the mosquitoes come! Not all mosquitoes carry malaria, but we are not smart enough to know the "really bad" ones from those that are just "bad". We both have been bitten numerous times, but we each are taking medication that is supposed to help prevent malaria.

Most of the rural parts of Malawi are poor, but the gospel has touched their lives. There are thousands of Christians here in this country. They cling to the hope of a resurrection and a New City where there will be no poverty or crime, or malaria. Pray that things will get better for your brothers and sisters here.

