

M A L A W I 2 0 1 3

St Benedict's High School

In partnership with St Patrick's - Malawi

St Patrick's Minor Seminary

Situated in the north of the country, St Patrick's is a boarding school for boys of secondary school age from the diocese of Mzuzu who are considering studying for the priesthood. Because of its fine reputation for academic achievement and formation, many boys apply for a place annually but only around 40 are selected each year. Families make great sacrifices to send their sons to St Patrick's as secondary school education is not free in Malawi. The school has 4 classrooms, 2 science labs, a library and houses around 120 boys in 4 very basic dormitories.

With a history going back to 1952, the school has a very proud tradition and although only a very small number of students go on to study for the priesthood, many young men progress on to college and university.



Exchange visit to Malawi

In June of this year I had the great privilege of travelling to Malawi with a group of staff and pupils to visit our new partner school, St Patrick's Minor Seminary in the northern district of Rumphi. Over forty of our S4 and S5 pupils applied for a place on the trip and following a selection process involving a written application and interview, seven were chosen. Sophie Berry, Niamh Boyle, Luke Cochrane, Gemma Gallagher, Matthew McNish, Ryan Ross and Sarah Turner along with teachers, Miss McFadden, Miss Gilfillan, Mrs Kelly and myself set off from St Benedict's on a trip which would open our eyes and hearts to the needs of a school community struggling to survive. Known as 'The warm heart of Africa', Malawi lived up to its reputation. The welcome we received touched each of our lives in different ways but left all of us with a deep and profound sense of wonder. With very little in terms of material wealth, the people we met were rich in joy, peace, love, compassion. . . – the list goes on, and this they shared with us freely and without reservation. This was without doubt, a faith filled experience for us all.

Robert Johnston
HEAD TEACHER

Living conditions

By Malawian standards, the accommodation at the school is quite good for the boys and staff. By our standards however, their living conditions would be judged as intolerable and the buildings would most certainly be condemned. Pictured here (*left*) is a typical dormitory accommodating 40 boys and their washing facilities. Although there is rudimentary plumbing at the school, there is no running water for the boys or the staff and buckets are used to carry water from a central supply – when available. The electricity supply throughout the country is unreliable due to very poor investment in essential infrastructure and power cuts are a feature of everyday life for most people.

The boys work hard to keep the school clean and tidy through a daily programme of chores which would horrify many of our young people but they have great pride in their school.

Facilities

Although the school buildings are in a poor state of repair, they do provide the very basics to enable the boys to follow a very challenging curriculum. Subjects studied include: Mathematics, English, History, Physical Science, Biology, Agriculture, Geography, Chichewa (the national language of Malawi) and Bible Knowledge. As teachers, we were overwhelmed by the boys' thirst for knowledge. Their determination to master new skills and concepts, with very little resources to support them, is astounding and caused us to reflect on how lucky we are even during these 'financially austere' times in education.

The school however is in a very fragile state and will require considerable renovation over the coming years if it is to continue providing an education for these very capable and eager young men.





'It is better to give than to receive'

Perhaps at the back of our minds when we began this partnership with St Patrick's was a notion that we in St Benedict's would be the benefactors, the 'givers', in the relationship. The collective experience of both pupils and staff however who visited Malawi was that we received far greater riches than we could ever provide for them. The school motto, by which they live their daily lives, says it all: *'it is better to give than to receive'*.

Pictured above is a typical village situated less than a mile from the school. It is from villages such as these that the boys of St Patrick's come. The people of this village welcomed us, in song, with open arms. With great pride, they showed us round their homes and made us their honoured guests.

During our time in Malawi, we learned that this is an equal partnership between our two schools and that both communities of young people, of St Benedict's

and St Patrick's, have an incredible opportunity to learn and grow together despite being many hundreds of miles apart. Over the coming years our young people will form friendships and learn about each other's culture. This very special bond will be strengthened in March of next year when a group of staff and students will come over to Scotland. We have a great deal to do in preparation for this visit but you will be hearing more of these plans in the weeks and months ahead.

It would be very easy to become overwhelmed by the many needs of this community but through the partnership between our two schools our hope is that the young people of St Benedict's will realise that they can make a difference in this world to the lives of those less fortunate than themselves.

Please keep our partnership in your prayers.



Please help

Having reflected on our experience, staff and students decided that we need to develop a long term strategy which will support the community of St Patrick's to continue to deliver a first class education to the boys while catering for their most basic of needs.

We have set up the "Friends of St Patrick's" hardship fund which aims to attract 100 people who will commit to a regular monthly payment of £5, £10 or £15. With this level of funding we could make a real difference in the lives of the boys in St Patrick's providing schools fees for boys who have been orphaned and supporting long term improvement initiatives for the school.

If you are interested in supporting this venture, please take a moment to complete the form attached and return to our school office, marked 'FAO Head Teacher'.

*Yewo chomene
(Thank you)*

Friends of St Patrick's

**To assist, please complete the form below and return it to:
Friends of St Patrick's, St Benedict's High School, Bridge of Weir Rd, Linwood, PA5 8EX.**

To Bank (name of your bank)

..... Branch

Bank address (if known):

Please pay to: Bank of Scotland, High Street, Johnstone

Acc name: St Benedict's High School

Account : 00355007

Sort code: 801653

Please credit the sum of :

- five pounds (£5), - ten pounds (£10), - fifteen pounds (£15), (delete as appropriate)

..... monthly on the 1st of each month commencing [next month's name:] 1st 2013

to St Benedict's High School account.

Your name :

Address :

.....

Bank account no: Sort Code:.....

Signature

Date

Thank you for your support.