

# WOMEN OF GRACE WIDOWS' FUND

DECEMBER 2022



The Women of Grace Widows Fund is an ecumenical mission in Northern New York, supported by donors of all faiths. Past and current board members represent a variety of churches in the north country. We welcome your participation! You can reach us by email at [info@womenofgracewidows.org](mailto:info@womenofgracewidows.org)



## THOSE WHO ARE HELPING TO KEEP GRACE'S DREAM ALIVE

### **CURRENT WOGWF BOARD MEMBERS**

**Renee Waterbury**  
**Angela Elmer**  
**Kathy Curtis**  
**Cindy Hall Swan**  
**Andrea Swan**  
**Margot McGorman**

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### **SAM CHIRWA, our Field Manager**

Sam Chirwa, our faithful field manager for more than a decade, meets the widows' critical needs, provides medical transportation when needed, and purchases basic Covid supplies. Sam also buys and delivers building materials for housing, and engages the services of skilled workers as needed to install iron sheet roofs.

AND

### **YOU, The Faithful Donors**

whose amazing generosity continues to allow us all to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in Malawi. Thank you so much for your continued support!

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Our founder, Grace Chiumia, experienced as a young mother, the devastation and perils of widowhood in Malawi. In this patriarchal culture, her dead husband's family took back "his possessions", including everything in the house, even furniture.

Unlike many widows, she had a nursing education and found work as a malaria bed net coordinator. In 2008, partnering with church missionaries from NNY, Grace formed

the

### **WOMEN OF GRACE WIDOWS' FUND (WOGWF)**

to assist less fortunate widows.



Grace Chiumia, our founder, remains ill and continues to be lovingly cared for by her family in Malawi. Please continue to pray for her peace and comfort during this difficult phase of her life.

## In May 2023, a WOGWF team will travel from the USA to Malawi

to see how various projects have progressed. Kathy Curtis and Margot McGorman will visit the sewing project, and look at housing projects that have been completed during these last 3 years of Covid. Kathy and Margot will meet with the widows, and listen carefully to their joys, hopes, and concerns in order to discern any new future directions for the WOGWF. After 4 years apart, we will celebrate by eating s'mores around an open fire with the widows. We are very blessed to finally re-connect with our friends in Malawi after such a long hiatus.



## ONGOING HOUSING PROJECTS

Housing improvements continue for our widows. The widows decide who among them is next in line for a critical housing improvement. Projects include iron sheet roofs, outside wall plastering, outside ground level gutters for drainage, cement floors instead of dirt, and windows and doors.



Gladys' house still needs windows and doors



Without plastering and a ground level cement gutter, these walls are still vulnerable in the rainy season.

## PANTIPLUS WASHABLE MENSTRUAL KITS

In August, Rev. Dr. Andrew Long, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Watertown NY traveled to Malawi to meet with many of our church mission partners. He was able to transport a number of USA made PantiPacks which he gave to Mzuzu University Student Services on behalf of the Women of Grace. These washable menstrual kits will be distributed to ultra-low income female students to reduce this hidden barrier to education. Thank you Dr. Long!

More than 40 additional "Made in the USA" PantiPacks will travel to Malawi on a cargo ship in November. These kits will be shared by Mzuzu University students and Mbowe Elementary School. Since 2017, Annie Ghambi, the Mbowe Head Teacher, has provided small group instruction in how to use the PantiPack as the young girls in her school come of age.



Board Member Angela Elmer has packed 40+ US made PantiPacks



Young girls learn to use the PantiPack Menstrual Tracker



Annie Ghambi, top right, Mbowe Head Teacher

## CHALLENGES IN MALAWI

### COVID

As of late August, vaccine access continues to be very limited, with only 8% of the population having received just 2 doses. Bad roads, limited health clinics and supply chain are but a few of the hurdles affecting access to vaccines. Vaccine "vans" provide mobile vaccination clinics in rural areas. Pediatric vaccines are still not available in Malawi, and so far, schools continue to require masks.

In late 2021, after 2 years of Covid restrictions, the widows making the washable menstrual kits ran out of the specialty waterproof fabric we bring on mission trips. Fortunately, Sam was able to pick up the fabric needed from Pastor Joseph Wyson, who supervises a PantiPlus workshop in the capital city of Lilongwe. Thank God for our supportive partners in mission!!

### INFLATION

In late May 2022, the Central Bank of Malawi devalued their currency (the Malawi Kwacha) by 25% in response to global economic forces. This immediately raised prices for anything that is imported: medicines, food, building supplies and more. Very quickly, locally produced products were affected. For example, within days of the devaluation, Illovo Sugar Malawi, which produces about 60% of the sugar in the country, announced a 25% increase in their prices. It cited a sharp increase in the cost of production, for which it needs imported goods like fuel and fertilizers. As in the USA, inflation affects the day-to-day life of the lowest wage earners the most. Fortunately our strong US dollar helps us maintain our purchasing power when we purchase goods and services for the widows.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP THE WOMEN OF GRACE?

Watch for details of our **Spring Take-out Dinner in 2023**.  
All money raised will support the mission projects of  
the Women of Grace Widows Fund.

**First Presbyterian Church has again designated their Christmas Eve Offering to the Women of Grace Widows Fund. WOGWF is truly blessed by the faithful support of First Presbyterian Church. A matching grant of up to \$3500 will be provided for any WOGWF donations received from Dec 15, 2022 thru Jan 31, 2023 either through the mail, electronically, or on Xmas Eve. Thank you for helping us reach this matching goal!**

Yes, I want to support the Women of Grace Widows' Fund with their continued efforts to assist and empower widows in Northern Malawi. Enclosed is my/our donation of:

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU!

Please make your check payable to: **First Presbyterian Church with WOGWF in Memo Line.**

Mail check and completed form to **Watertown First Presbyterian Church, Attention: WOGWF, 403 Washington St., Watertown, NY 13601.**

For online donations click the **DONATE** button on our website at [www.womenofgracewidows.org](http://www.womenofgracewidows.org).



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### THE MISSION OF WOGWF IS:

*To alleviate the extreme poverty faced by widows in Malawi by providing funding to meet basic food, shelter, and safety needs, while creating opportunities and resources that enable and empower widows to establish their own self-sufficiency and independence, regardless of religious affiliation.*

**The WOGWF works in 3 villages in  
Northern Malawi:  
Mzenga, Mchengutuwa, Mbowe**



Pastor Andrew Long meets  
the Widows



Excited Mzuzu University Students  
receive Pantipacks



A safe and secure house for  
Widow Coliness

*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people.*

~ Revelation 22:21