

DOWN to EARTH

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Paul and Helen Jones' crossroads



Paul and Helen Jones are writing to tell us about their life journey and work with Emmanuel International (EI). Paul and Helen have been the EI Country Representatives in Malawi for 31 years and from the end of 2018, Paul will be the EI International Director.

"This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."

Jeremiah 6:16

The verse goes on to say *"But you said, 'We will not walk in it'."* Discerning God's will for your life!! Isn't that one of the big questions we all face at some point in our lives? God has given us the answer... ask and walk. And therein lies the choice: to walk in faith believing that God is daily directing us in His Way, the Good Way. Or go our own way.

Life is a journey and we are all on this journey. We each have a story to tell. Today we have been asked to tell our story...

Paul grew up in small town Canada, same home, same church, same friends his whole life. I, Helen, grew up in Ethiopia, daughter

of missionaries working with Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), people coming and going, often moving, third culture kid. We met at EI in Canada in 1982 and on March 31, 1984 became another "EI couple" statistic. Our son, Graham, was born while we were still in Canada and our daughter, Merijam, was born our first year in Malawi.

Paul's first assignment was relief in Haiti, an interlude for his team who were headed to Nigeria. Nigeria work was cut short when it became impossible to manoeuvre due to the maze of 'bribes' required. From there, he went for 6 months to Somalia to help with



Helen and Paul with Graham and Merijam in 1988

relief work. His next assignment was to Jamaica; this was cut short when he suffered an eye injury (opening a Coke for Didit, then still a Catanus!). This saw him back in the Canadian home office and working in the training school that El ran for teams in those years.

My first introduction to El was working in Somalia, the same relief work Paul did - but before he was there. After 9 months in Somalia, I returned to the States but applied for a full time position with El working as Health Coordinator. I worked in the international office in Stouffville until our marriage and during that time visited El's health projects in the Philippines, Haiti and Dominica.

Soon after our wedding, we were sent with a small team to Ethiopia to help the SIM set up some relief work in Southern Ethiopia. I was pregnant with Graham at the time... but that is a whole other story! When Graham was just 1 year old, the family moved to Sudan, expecting to be there for some time. However, after President Reagan bombed Libya, there were Libyans in Khartoum targeting Americans, so Graham and I were evacuated out and returned to Canada. Paul, being Canadian (and they weren't evacuating anyone!) stayed on but returned to Canada when advised that it would be a long time before it would be safe for dependents to return.

Around that time, the Evangelical Baptist Church of Malawi had sent a request to El for assistance with refugees coming in from Mozambique. These refugees were moving into areas of EBCM churches but the people in these rural areas were so poor that they couldn't really help these new-comers. El's first assistance in Malawi was providing relief in the form of home and farm necessities to these refugees. The church at that time consisted of 25 rural congregations in

Machinga District. Today, EBCM has over 300 churches across Malawi and 33 more churches in Mozambique.

In the mid-80s, El changed tactics. Initially, all work in project countries was done with and through a team leader from the partner church of the host country. These team leaders would come to El Stouffville and train the team that would be coming to work with them. I can't remember but I think at that time people would go for a 2-year term. In the early 80s, it was decided that there should be Country Representatives in each of the project countries. Initially these would be El missionaries. This would be a stepping stone towards establishing a national from the project country as the Country Representative.

In 1986, we were sent to live in Tanzania with El Country Representative Andy Atkins, Judy and their son, Caleb. Andy was El's first country/regional representative and we lived with them to learn the ropes of "country representatives." At the time, we were waiting for visas to begin work in Malawi.

In January 1987, the family officially moved to Malawi to start working with the EBCM church, our host. And here we are, 31 years later! We had never envisioned being in Malawi this long.



Paul and Helen, with Bukay in Tanzania, 1987

During those first years, we actively recruited our replacement, saw him through training in Malawi and in Canada and in 1993, we moved back to Canada, thoroughly expecting to be moving to Ethiopia. After three years of waiting in Canada, our visa for Ethiopia finally came through. That same week, the mission received a letter from our replacement to say that he would not be staying with the organization. So the mission Director gave us the choice: Ethiopia or Malawi? For various reasons, Malawi was chosen and in 1996 we came back.

“Ask where the good way is and walk in it.” Throughout, with each phase, we have relied on God’s direction and are grateful for His faithful goodness. For sure there have been highs and lows...

- From the start, we were blessed with a good friendship with our Partner Church Director. Very early in our work in EI, Abusa Munyewe asked us to agree with him that, if there arose difficulties, we would go to each other first before going to others. It was a great principle to live by.
- At one point, our support got low and the home office told us we would need to leave the field. It didn’t feel like the right time and we cried out to the Lord. He answered our prayers abundantly and provided the needed support. And since that time, God has met our support needs and we’ve been able to carry on.
- Seeing the growth of both of our partner churches has been such a privilege. The two partners are very different and there have been a variety of opportunities for working together: evangelistic outreaches, infrastructure support, fund raising for church needs, relief support, projects to assist those in need, health interventions to name a few. Most recently, it was such a



Community Engagement



Irrigation



Bakery



pleasure to have the input of our partner church leadership in the development of El Malawi's Strategic Plan for the next 5 years. We really are looking forward to seeing how this will unfold!

Best of all, through all these years have been the relationships that God has blessed us with... wonderful national staff, so many different missionaries who have come through the organization, visitors from outside coming for mission trips. It has been an incredible journey, an opportunity for learning and growing and most of all, the blessing of knowing that we are in God's hands and following His way.

So, how do we come to this next phase in this journey? For several years, I have felt the longing to move back to Canada but the timing was not right for Paul. Though we have asked God to bring our replacement, to date He had not done that. In January this year, being concerned about the delay in finding an international director, we were aware that this situation could not continue indefinitely. With the encouragement of several others, Paul decided to apply. We love El and are convinced of its relevance and unique contribution to God's kingdom-building in this day and age. We are here to serve.



With Henry in 2017

In many ways, on the family front, it is perfect timing. With aging parents needing extra assistance, children expressing their desire to have us closer and of course, a grandson(!)... these were additional compelling factors in our decision. We plan to live with Paul's folks in Port Perry and have our office there. Our hearts are wide open, asking the Lord to show us how to do what is set before us. Here goes another steep learning curve!

Walk in the good way and you will find rest for your souls! And in every way, though we know it won't be easy making this transition, God has whispered peace into our hearts. We are eternally grateful to our Heavenly Father for His gift of grace, for the privilege of being His servants. To God be the glory!



Rob, Merijam, Helen, Paul, Graham and Molly, in 2016



Grandson Henry's 1st birthday (with dad Graham and mum Molly)