
A Mission To Help Malawi

State Native Raises Money In America For Struggling African Nation He Has Adopted

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After almost a decade in the Army traveling to impoverished nations, Stafford Springs native Scott Martin became a born-again Christian and headed to Malawi to do missionary work.

When he moved there almost three years ago, the country's name was barely a blip on the American public's radar. But since the media learned that Madonna was considering adopting a baby boy from that southern African country, the name Malawi has made international headlines almost daily.

Martin hopes that with the country's newfound popularity, people will donate money and time to do what he has been doing for the past couple of years - helping to improve the lot of people living in that third-world country.

"Nobody hears the name of Malawi. ... The last year and a half there's been this drought and nobody hears a thing about it," Martin said. But now, "I believe the publicity is good because everybody knows where Malawi is."

Martin, 34, and his wife, Maria, a Malawian, are in the United States for six weeks to raise money for their missionary projects. Martin's local parish, Church of the Living God in Manchester, has helped fund his stay overseas and parishioners have gone in teams to help them in Malawi.

But there is always more needed, Martin said.

"We live around abject poverty. We see funerals every single day. ... Imagine having hospitals and no medicines and people dying," he said. "... A Malawian's life is for the next meal. Tomorrow they'll work so they can eat the next day."

The nonprofit humanitarian organization Global Ministries and Relief sent Martin to Malawi in March 2004. Since then, with help from the organization, the Manchester church and donors, he and others have established several churches, helped teach adults and children how to read and write and educated locals to be pastors. He also employed 22 families in a food-for-work program, where they farmed in irrigated fields for a year so they could provide for themselves. During that time, the families received bags of maize, a national staple.

All their work, Martin said, is to "make people self-supporting so they don't have to lean on Westerners for support."

During their stay in the U.S., Martin and a few friends through the Manchester church are researching and writing grants to get funding from big nonprofit organizations.

"A lot of these people donate large amounts of money, but they'll go to the [United Nations] and a lot of that money never touches the people on the ground," Martin said, listing malaria research projects and paying off the national debt as areas where the money goes. "It takes organizations that are willing to work in the village. Whatever we get goes directly to the people in the village."

He said with a \$650 donation, they were able to fix four wells and give people in three villages clean drinking water.

Members of the Church of the Living God have been helping the Martins with more than money.

Patricia Stryker, a Realtor in Windsor, went on church missions to the Martins' village two years in a row. On her second trip, she attended the Martins' wedding and learned that most women in Malawi have to rent their wedding dresses from other women whose sole income is renting out the handful of dresses they have.

"The women here in [the U.S.], they usually buy their dresses, wear them for a day and hang them in the closet," Stryker said. By donating the dresses, she said, "We can help women get a couple of jobs and more dresses will be available."

Stryker said she plans to bring the dresses along with her when she and a team of missionaries go to Malawi in June. Stryker said she is writing a children's book and the proceeds will go to Malawian orphans. She also is collecting nets, which are used to cover families when they sleep so they aren't bitten by mosquitoes that spread malaria.

"It's amazing work," she said of what the Martins are doing. "It's like something being built out of nothing and just God is blessing it."

Fellow church member and friend Joseph Milazzo said the work the Martins have done is impressive.

"They can see exactly each and every day how these people live and survive and how they can help them without changing their culture, without imposing their thoughts and their ideas, as much as just helping them learn how to do things for themselves," Milazzo said.

To donate wedding dresses and anything else, contact Patricia Stryker at the Windsor real estate agency The Master's Key, at 860-688-1400. To learn more about Scott Martin's story, visit his blog at <http://www.missions.gmrinc.org/scott/>.

<http://www.courant.com/news/local/hc-malawi1105.artnov05,0,1750010.story?coll=hc-headlines-local>

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