

FEBRUARY 2025

# RAFIKI FOUNDATION MISSIONARY NEWSLETTER



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Missionary #253

Dear friends and family,

## Rafiki Malawi: An Ever Expanding Family

This past weekend, we invited some of our oldest and most faithful Malawian friends over for dinner with the Rafiki Missionaries. Around one end of the table, I sat with two of our local Rafiki Board members who have been friends for over a decade, and the wife of the late Egbert Chibambo, whose determination more than twenty-five years ago provided the land that this Village sits on. Around the other end were our newly arrived missionaries, the McDaniels, hosting the dinner at the same table that Jay and Maureen Richards and I used for such dinners when they were here. The Rafiki Malawi story now spans about a quarter century, and the members of our family continue to grow and spread through the entire country. God has blessed us!

## Growing Missionary Team

After months of earnest prayers and a flurry of communication wherein we solicited help from every friend and partner we could think of, the McDaniels' visas were finally approved in late November, and they arrived here in Malawi just a few weeks later—in time to see closing school recitations and celebrate Christmas in Malawi! Bryan and Alexis, along with their three children Elijah, Alaethia, and Jonathan, are settling in very well, and their presence is a blessing.



(Nearly) the whole Rafiki family together for our annual Christmas party.



The McDaniels arrived just in time to have the kids participate in the Christmas story skit during the party.





Our school recitation crowds now barely fit into our gym!

This brings our current team count to nine—myself, May, Bryan and Alexis (plus three kids) as permanent missionaries, Joshua still here for more than half of 2025 as he serves a year-long term, and Jane Hoadley who arrived back here early in January to serve once more with us for a three month stint in RICE. It is such a joy to have a “full house” of team members. This also means that the workload can be spread more evenly. Alexis is taking up the task of managing our Village finances and overseeing the graduate Rafiki kids who are out of the Village on Rafiki scholarships in various tertiary programs. May will therefore be able to focus more wholly on resident childcare and RICE. And me? With great thankfulness, I am officially turning the Village Administrator role over to Bryan as of mid-February so that I can put my attention back on my headmaster duties and serving as RICE Principal. Joshua continues to be a jack of all trades, helping in all departments as needed and being an invaluable gap-filler here, there, and everywhere. It has been a great relief to me to have these roles shifted and the load of responsibility spread.



The McDaniels meeting old Rafiki friends as we visited a partner church.

## A New “Baby”

Last week, the “powers that be” from Rafiki and University of Livingstonia sat around a table to drink tea and iron out details of finally opening our doors to students in March. The vice chancellor commented, “we are here to celebrate the birth of a new baby—RICE, which was brought forth by the partnership of Rafiki and UNILIA.” Truly, the process of creating this baby—through facilities renovations, curriculum editing, bureaucratic processes of national accreditation, and endless back and forth between our UNILIA partners and our Rafiki Home Office—has sometimes felt like years-long labor pains. But we praised the Lord as the vice



Meeting with our UNILIA partners.

## Prayer Requests

- *For the new missionary team to form good, strong relationships and work well together for the good of the Village*
- *For a good number of applications and a successful first student intake for RICE*
- *For our graduates to remain faithful to what they have learned and received and heard and seen, and grow mightily in the callings the Lord has given them*
- *For our parents and teachers to grow in understanding and commitment to the vision of classical Christian education*
- *For my trip to the US in March for our yearly enrichment meetings at the home office.*



chancellor officially constituted the management of RICE and we set dates for a student intake! Getting the word out about this strangely named “bachelor’s in classical primary education” is a bit of a challenge, but we are praying for up to forty students in our first cohort.

## A Burgeoning School

As you may remember, we had to do major, rapid-paced renovations to several buildings last summer to accommodate growing classes in the school. We continue apace as we plan capital improvements for 2025. Next year, we will open our second fourth grade class, and we have to figure out how to shift classes and resident cottage placements to make room for yet another new classroom. We also hope to redo the stubbly field that serves as our football pitch, leveling it and turning it into a proper playing field for both our school and our RICE college to use.

On the other hand, we experience some attrition in seventh to eighth grades, so we continue to pray about ways to effectively communicate the vision of Rafiki Classical Christian School to parents of children headed into upper school. Like many classical schools in America, the primary grades are packed to the gills, but parents’ faith in this unique classical education model gets shaky as the kids climb into upper school and come face to face with the all-consuming national exams. They often retreat to schools that are familiar in their focus on teaching to these tests. Many parents also find that their children are so far ahead academically by sixth grade here, that they can successfully test a grade or two higher into elite private and boarding schools, and so they opt for that impressive opportunity. We so want our teachers and our parents to really grasp the vision of classical education and watch it bear fruit all the way to graduation from grade twelve, so we are strategizing on ways to meet more with our parents, answer their questions, and give them an inspiring view of classical Christian school graduates.

## Empty Nesters

At the same time that the school grows, the number of resident orphan children on campus shrinks. “Empty nesting” might be a stretch, considering we still have twenty kids here, but it feels small and quiet compared to a few years ago. After this school year, we will shrink to just fourteen kids. And yet this also means that we have more of our graduates out there in the community, becoming successful young adults!

Tracking, funding, communicating with, and helping our sixty-plus graduates who are on Rafiki scholarship in university or vocational training is now basically a full time job, full of challenges, and sometimes the frustrations of advising youthful men and women who have much to learn about life and godliness—as did we all at that age. It is full of joy too, however!

Many of our young people go through a tough adjustment period as they learn to live “normal” Malawian life outside the Village and realize that they have been raised and educated to be different than almost everyone around them. It is inspiring to watch many of them developing hearts to use what they have been given to serve—they teach English and Bible in their neighborhoods and churches, their families rely on them for help in big decision making because they can think clearly, and they are the first to be appointed as class leaders because of their ability to communicate confidently.



Grammar school students enjoying our latest school renovation—a newly expanded playground.



Head teachers hashing out term two vision and logistics over a late dinner on a Friday night.

As I was out walking through the neighborhood a few weeks ago, one of the local chiefs eagerly came up to greet us and to excitedly point out the house where one of our graduate girls has been leading a youth outreach program. He is thrilled by her impact on the children of his village, and we are equally pleased to see her serving the Lord effectively with the training she received here at Rafiki. Our graduates are spread out all over the country now, and we are joyfully heading into the years of “reaping” as many of our oldest are beginning to graduate this year and next.

### **Growing in Grace**

And through all the dynamics and drama of leading this big, diverse, gangly, beautiful family, I continue to grow in grace. As I look at this Rafiki campus and see that it is not the same place as it was when I arrived three and a half years ago, I recognize that I am also not the same as I was. By God’s grace, I am smaller than I was—much more aware of my weaknesses and inabilities and dependence on the Lord and on other people. And yet I am also greater—greater in patience, greater in trust of my sovereign Lord, greater in my love for all these members of my Rafiki family, greater in my gratitude for all of you international partners who make my life here possible. I am... greater-souled, I hope. As my Lord has graciously done a work to stretch and grow me and this ministry, I am sure, as Philippians 1:6 says, that “... **he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion...**”

Love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anna".

Anna Liebing