

## **Remembering How I Grew Up** *by Deacon Charlie Richmond, Jr.*

I was born in deep rural Byhalia, Mississippi in the year of 1949. After graduating high school, I attended and graduated from Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi approximately 15 miles from my hometown.

As a young five year old boy, I remember walking five miles to school with the older children and carrying my lunch each day because there was no cafeteria. Water was pumped from a well outside and brought inside for drinking. The toilets were outside behind the school building.

During my childhood years, I remember my parents working as share croppers raising cotton and corn. These crops were harvested in the fall of each year by hand and a portion of the money from the sale of the crops went to the landowner (50%). After the creditors were paid, there was very little money left for the personal use of our family.

There were times when there wasn't enough money to pay everyone we owed. As a result, the holes in our clothes were patched and cardboard was placed in our shoes because the soles had worn out. School homework was completed by lamp-lights; there was no electricity in our home. Just remembering how I grew up.

We carried drinking water from a community well and our clothes were washed with water from a nearby stream. The area where we lived was 90% percent agricultural. Our source of meats included cattle, hogs, and chickens. The cattle also produced milk and butter. Some of the cattle and hogs were taken to the market and sold. The chickens produced plenty of eggs.

From our fruit trees, my family made jellies, jams and preserves to eat. During the winter months, our food supply came from preserved meats and canned fruits and vegetables. The only items purchased from the local store were sugar, salt, flour, etc. The only store within miles would allow us to use their grinding mill to grind our corn into cornmeal for baking bread. Just remembering how I grew up.

By the time I reached my teenage years, share croppers had begun to secure factory jobs in the urban cities opening the doors for independence and opportunities to purchase their own homes through FHA and VA loans. I thank God for what I experienced growing up in rural Mississippi.

After becoming an adult, I could look back over my life and see how God ordered my steps as He prepared me to work in the mission field. My first trip to the mission field was in 2014 to the mission site in Bluefields, Nicaragua, Haulover, Kukra Hill and Awas. Since then, I have traveled to other mission sites that include the Republic of South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Malawi.

As I traveled to the various mission sites, I discovered that the needs were real and unbelievably greater than I ever expected. One of my greatest discoveries was the hunger for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our purpose and focus became clear to me, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Along my travels from Country to Country and mission site to mission site I also discovered that the humanitarian needs were just as great; therefore, as we spread the Gospel, I unmistakably understand the importance of helping to meet the humanitarian needs of our brothers and sisters as described in Matthew: 25:31-45.

These discoveries led Rev. Terrance Griffith, Executive Secretary, and some state Foreign Mission Representatives to develop a fundraising strategy to raise money for operation of the mission sites in Africa and Central America. Our aim is to reach across all of the state conventions of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. sharing our discoveries and requesting financial help from all six regions, all state conventions, district associations, pastors and church memberships, asking for consistent giving on a regular basis, as well as taking on projects at the mission sites.

The budget for the mission sites would be assigned to the six regions of the NBC, Southeast, West, Far West, Midwest, Northeast and Southwest.

The Southwest Region; Arkansas, Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas has been assigned to the work at the Providence Industrial Mission site in Malawi.

Recently, I was assigned to the position of Director of Foreign Mission; this position encompasses the Southwest Region. I am most appreciative to Dr. Vernon Swift, Vice President of the Southwest Region for entrusting this work to me.

Our vision is to assist the Providence Industrial Mission in Malawi in reaching self sustainability. The assistance from the state convention presidents, moderators and pastors of this region that I have visited has proven to be a blessing from God.

**Words cannot express my gratitude to the mission team that is currently in place: Rev. Carlos Wilson, Rev. J. Y. Williams, Dr. Frederick Anthony, and Rev. Collins Pettaway. This team has made it possible to generate nearly \$30,000 since November, including funds to dig 9 of the 10 wells promised in 2016. Arkansas is leading the way with four wells.**

I have had the opportunity to visit six conventions, some more than once; and have spoken to nine of the convention presidents. My plans are to visit the other conventions with a plea, "We need your help!"

My travels to these mission sites reminded me of my years growing up in Mississippi and the adversities that we had to overcome with God's grace and mercy. Remembering my deep rural Byhalia, Mississippi experience, I believe that the Providence Industrial Mission Site in Malawi can also overcome adversities. What will self-sustainability look like? I truly believe that working in unity will provide the help that is needed so that there can be full utilization of the 70 acres mission site.

We need new maze mills. The residents could grow their own vegetables, raise cattle, chickens and fish for consumption as well as take their products at the city markets to sell. Transportation and

warehouses for storage are required for storing goods and the farming supplies and equipment.

More importantly, it is necessary to have a structure in place to manage sustainability. Business as usual must no longer exist. We must continue to repair churches and plant new churches to serve the people of God while spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Southwest Region's ultimate vision is to see the Providence Industrial Mission Site become self-sustaining. With help from the 20 state conventions within our region, the Southwest Region can position itself to see our vision for the Providence Industrial Mission come to pass through goal setting, projects and consistent giving from our churches on a regular basis.

When these actions are accomplished, the Foreign Mission Board will be able to "Extend the Reach" into areas that they have never been before. This should be a vision and goal for each of our mission sites.

Submitted by:

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