

Greg and Sarah Akers

2024 ZEMA Annual Report

2024 has been a big year of learning and growing for us as a ZEMA missionary family. We have finished our years of probation and started as fully-fledged members. We had thought this would mean we had learned all there was to learn, but having arrived at this place we realize that the learning will never end. To this point, we are so grateful for the continued mentorship we receive from Luaan and Susanne Goosen, and continual guidance from Paul Seelhammer and the older generation of missionaries - the Kuehls, the Akers and the Seghers.

Our language studies took a back seat for a number of months as we redirected our focus. Greg began spending more time editing the ZEBs material, looking to try and make the lessons more clear and simple for the context we are in. While Greg enjoyed doing this, we quickly realized that the language cannot take a backseat, and so Greg went back to weekly classes. While the learning can sometimes be slow, it is consistent, and we are seeing the benefit over time.

Sarah continues to go with Susanne to her Scripture Union classes in King William's Town. This year, Sarah began teaching one of the classes as well. She is so grateful for Susanne's immense wealth of experience and gifting, and benefits from her guidance. Sarah is growing in the gifting and talent of teaching children the Bible stories.

At the Annual Missionary Conference, Greg was voted onto the Field Council. This gives Greg an opportunity to be a part of the behind-the-scenes conversations and a part of the discussions that guide the forward movements of the organization. Greg has been so struck by the wisdom required to be in that position, and it has certainly fueled our prayer life for the Field Council in general but particularly for Paul in his position as Field Director. We are grateful for Paul's wisdom and tact, and trust that the Lord will continue to grow him and enable him in that post. Greg also has a clearer picture of the challenges of the missionary families, and it is a calling to deep prayer and consideration of each family too.

Our ZEBs classes have been hampered this year by opposition from Church leaders who are not happy with the teachings of our classes. There are a growing number of Church fraternalists who do not permit their members to attend our classes because we speak against the practices of their churches, including communication with the dead and the pride of Church leaders. We have been called demons for teaching our students that the spirits the witch doctors communicate with are unclean. Some students who have made first-time strong declarations of faith in Jesus in our classes have stopped attending once they went back to their old Churches. We believe that the Church leaders prevented them from returning to us.

Nonetheless, the work continues. We have taken opportunities to evangelize at schools and in Churches. Our ZEBs classes in King William's Town and Mdantsane we plan to shutter for low-attendance but start up in Mbaxa which has a promise of great attendance and responsiveness.

This year marked a big year for us and for ZEMA as we were able to start a ZEBs class in Malawi. The country was a destination of evangelism in the 1990s for ZEMA, but the door for the work there closed some two decades ago. However, through a God-encounter at an evening service, Luaan was invited to visit Malawi in 2023 and through that, we were invited to teach *This We Believe* for Zion Church leaders in Blantyre, Malawi in June of 2024. While we were there, we met leaders of other Church denominations who speak of the Zionists in Malawi as an *unreached* and *closed* people group, because they refuse communication and connection with other Church groups. However, when we arrived, we had a group of over 60 leaders who attended the *This We Believe* class.

This class led to the *first ZEBs class of Malawi* starting in October of 2024. Greg, Luaan and Ron Eardley flew up to Blantyre and taught three lessons over three days to a group of about 100 Zion Church leaders. While this has been encouraging, MORE REQUESTS have come in. They are asking us to move north, and we are considering the best way to do this. We plan, in April of 2025, to continue the class in Blantyre, but to visit Lilongwe and Ncheu to see if we can reach more Zionist groups there.

We continue to trust the Lord for the finances for these travels, but we are grateful as well for Greg and Carlene Seghers and their work to raise the funds for the *New Fields Fund* which will assist with the travel costs.

Greg and Sarah were also greatly encouraged by a growing relationship with the NorthBridge Church team who sent a group to minister alongside us in 2023. We are grateful to the Lord and to NB Church that they unexpectedly offered to support us financially and invited us to come and visit them in Illinois for their Missions Focus month of January 2025. We traveled up to Illinois at the end of December, 2024, and will be flying back to East London on January 20. Greg will preach at NB Church on January 19. We know that NB has a long history of partnership with ZEMA as a whole, and with Greg's parents, and are very grateful for the encouragement of this partnership. While we are in the States we are also meeting with the CCC Missions Board, the ZEMA Board, and as many as we are able to make known our particular work and ZEMAs work amongst the Zionist people in South Africa.

On the family front...

Olivia (now three years old) started attending a very small, half-day playschool three days a week this year, and has really enjoyed it. She has grown a lot and is a delight to her teachers and friends there.

Rayah (now five years old) has been attending a playschool half-day five days a week. She has changed so much over this year and is learning about navigating friendships (good and bad) but is already showing character by trying to teach her friends to be good friends and looking out for those who are lonely.

Sarah, with the tiny bit of freedom that three mornings a week brings her, has been delighted to start doing counselling therapy again. She has partnered with corporate organizations to do counselling for their workers when they need it. Though the organizations are corporate (secular), Sarah has been struck by the spiritual need of the people who come to her. When possible, she shows them the hope of Christ. Though this may put a target on her back at some point, every person who comes to her finds that for the first time they have something to work towards - a hope that the world has never given.

Greg is always thankful for the work of ZEMA and for where we live. While we are sad to be far from family, we also know that the Lord has given us much good where we are. Greg's Dad is still recovering from cancer, but is doing well.