

October 2003 in Tanzania

Bishop Thomas A. Skrenes

From October 8th to October 20, I visited the people of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. During this, my second trip to Africa, I attended the bilateral consultation on the future of our companion relationships in Moshi and met with our own Eastern and Coastal Diocese companions in Dar Es Salaam.

Tanzania Consultation - ELCA-ELCT Meetings on the future of our companionship
My first week in Tanzania was spent in meetings with representatives of the 20 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) dioceses. We met in Moshi at a beautiful Lutheran retreat center which was a gift to the Tanzanians from the German churches. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) had representatives from 17 of the 20 synods in companionship with the Tanzanians at the Consultation. Seven ELCA bishops and about a dozen ELCT bishops attended. In all about 80 people including Churchwide staff assisted. The German and Scandinavian Churches were also present. There were several days of formal presentations followed by discussion groups and panels. The topics included: Defining Companionship, Cultural Barriers, Wholeness, Accountability, Sharing Gifts and Communication.

Our ELCA Churchwide staff including Gaylord Thomas, Lynda Tideman Minnick and Sandra Halloway were superb in their leadership of the event. A statement was written and adopted which outlines the continuing partnerships between our two church bodies and our hopes for the future. Relationship building over meals and Atea times were as important as any papers given.

A few points made clear to me at the Consultation:

1. Communication is recognized as a cultural barrier for the companion relationship between the Africans and the Americans. Again and again we heard that Africans communicate best in Aface to face meetings. The Americans repeatedly voiced concern about the African lack of written responses to American letters and gifts. On their part the Africans want visits and relationships with our people and welcome Americans to come to Africa not as tourists but as Christian friends.
2. Accountability is an issue for the Africans as well as the Americans. Transparency is a goal, something which we will have to work on in our financial dealings. On our part we will have to recognize that the American way of doing business is not universally recognized as the best system.
3. Companionship means being honest. We must be able to tell each other the truth. The Africans are very concerned about the current studies on sexuality in the ELCA. We were told clearly that our relationships will suffer with the African churches if the ELCA in any way condones or blesses homosexuality.
4. HIV-AIDS is now a focus of the African Church and must be a part of our continuing companionship. Our ELCA missionary, Dr. Mark Jacobson, spoke to the ELCA representatives and told us that the best estimates are that 12% of the people in Tanzania age 15-45 are HIV- positive. It is a national problem but is still largely located in the urban areas and affects mainly professionals and other middle income persons. Eighty to ninety percent of the victims are heterosexuals and children. Medications for treating HIV-AIDS are now available in Tanzania but the cost (\$80 a month) is prohibitive to most people. So while the disease kills many, those with money are having their lives extended.

Malaria continues to be a killer disease with more dying of this illness than HIV-AIDS. Malnutrition is a great threat that chronically complicates life in Africa.

5. There is a security problem everywhere with crime an issue in urban areas. All homes are locked and many private guards are employed to deter criminal activity. Even the diocese offices in Dar Es Salaam are secured during the day and barred shut with heavy steel rods at night. One employee told me that he lives and works in a Alittle prison. The rapid urbanization experienced in the last decades adds to the complex social problems facing Africa. Corruption in the governments is a tremendous burden.

6. All parties have concerns about the disparity that exists between Arich and Apoor dioceses. Our Eastern and Coastal Diocese is the wealthiest of the 20 ELCT dioceses. There are still several dioceses in the more rural areas of the country without electricity.

7. Dependency upon the northern churches (European and American) to fund projects threatens local initiative. The entire nation of Tanzania is seriously underdeveloped and under capitalized. This is in part a legacy of colonialism and a disastrous socialist system which is still being dismantled. European, American and South African financial interests are in control of significant national resources in Tanzania. A question for our churches is AWhat amount of assistance is helpful? Who decides on the funding of these projects? Donor churches in Europe and America must listen to the Africans for direction and leadership.

8. The ELCA and the ELCT have jointly decided that an organization that coordinates our work together is needed and in response to that need have formed the ALutheran Mission Cooperation. (LMC) The national church bodies want the synods and dioceses to work through the organization. The Finance Secretary of the LMC is a lay ELCA missionary, Daniel J. Smith. One service they provide is the facilitation of wire money transfers. He is willing to (at no cost) transfer any payments we make directly to the bank accounts of whatever Lutheran organization we choose in Tanzania. In the future we should use the LMC to save bank charges and to minimize the possibility of fraud.

Eastern and Coastal Diocese Leadership Issues

Dr. Hance Mwakabana continues as AActing Head of the Diocese since the removal of the previous bishop. Dr. Mwakabana's appointment by the ELCT Executive Committee continues until a new bishop is elected in December 2004. The current AActing Head has an excellent reputation throughout Tanzania. We did not meet when I was in Tanzania since he was leading bible studies at a diocese convention and visiting with his family hundreds of kilometers from Dar Es Salaam.

I spent one evening with former Bishop Elinaza Sendoro and his wife. The Sendoros are revered by the people of the Diocese. The diocese with the help of the Tanzanian Prime Minister (a Lutheran) built a home for the Sendoros in the Mbezi Beach area. I was warmly welcomed. Bishop Sendoro and his family have spent many years in the US and in Europe. He is a 1967 graduate of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago and a seminary classmate of Dr. Art Puotinen, our pastor in Iron River, Michigan.

Appointed by the President of Tanzania to chair the APeace Commission with Moslems and Hindus, Bishop Sendoro is considered a national statesman. In conversation at his home he expressed concern that European Lutherans are compromising with the Muslims of Europe. He was especially critical of Lutheran

Churches in Germany that allow Muslims to gather for prayers in Lutheran church buildings. Bishop Sendoro sends his greetings to Bishop Dale and Jo Skogman and all others he met while he visited our synod.

I was warmly welcomed and well cared for by the Diocese General Secretary Eneza Abraham and his assistant, Pastor George Fupe. Secretary Abraham and Pastor Fupe are warm and gracious people. Pastor Fupe has studied in Europe, speaks English well and is extremely responsive to e-mail communications. I recommend that any communication to the diocese copy Pastor Fupe. He responds.

Library Project at Kisarawe Lutheran Junior Seminary

I had a very fine day at the school. Our library project continues. I met with the project architect Mr. Joseph Njau and the project general contractor. I am impressed with both.

The second floor of the project was incomplete in mid-October. The walls are up and the third floor is in place. The third floor walls and the roof have yet to be built. Windows and doors are being manufactured for the second floor and are soon to be completed. Concerns by the builder included slow payment of bills by the diocese. After a meeting with the architect, builder, the diocese General Secretary and myself, it was decided to respond quickly to questions and concerns that our synod's project director, Pastor Robert Langseth have lifted up in recent communication to the diocese. The written responses to those questions and concerns were given to me before I left Tanzania. I have forwarded them to Pastor Langseth who continues to serve us all by his leadership with the Library Project. The Junior Seminary is an important part of the ministry of the Diocese. Of the 700 secondary schools in Tanzania, over half are private or religious based schools. Our Junior Seminary at Kisarawe does well in the national examinations each year. There are 312 students (tuition about US \$300 a year) at the school. Mrs. Margaret Bulugu is the school's headmistress. She is the glue that holds the school together. Challenges facing the school in the days ahead include: water, teacher retention and teaching resources. All water must be transported to the school. Digging wells has failed to find water. A collection system for rainwater is being developed for the library and on several of the homes of the teachers. The school cannot expand until the water problem is resolved.

Teacher quality and retention is a concern. Since the salaries of the school teachers is minimal, there is a problem with teacher turnover. The national government faced with increasing students and declining numbers of available teachers, has reduced teacher standards nationally. Only about 12% of Tanzanian youth attend secondary schools with only 1% of Tanzanians entering a university. Education is repeatedly cited as Akey to Tanzanian social and economic development.

I examined the learning resources in the library and was disappointed to see so many old books and resources. They would have been long discarded in American schools. Most books and encyclopedias are dated in the 1960's. We need to ask the Tanzanians how we can improve the quality of their library with more modern resources. Should we provide resources directly or should we send funds to purchase resources locally?

Women's Center at Mkuza

Progress is being made at the Women's Center. This vocational center teaches young women skills in sewing, gardening and other income generating work. To date one classroom is in place and functioning. A 48 student dormitory has also

been built-a gift from the Finnish Lutheran Church. It is an excellent facility with 12 identical student residence rooms. I brought with me a gift of US \$218 that was offered by one of our congregations and the money will be used to purchase beds for rooms.

It is estimated that US \$3,360 is needed to fully finance the purchase of beds and tables for the 12 rooms. Perhaps our synod congregational women's groups can be encouraged to sponsor a room at Mkuza for US \$280. I think this would be an excellent project for our Synod Womens' Organization.

Mwangaza Teacher Center Ministry

A visit to the Mwangaza Center was impressive. The Arusha Center is sponsored by the ELCA and the ELCT to promote excellence in the fifty secondary schools of the ELCT. All twenty dioceses send teachers to seminars and the program staff including the Director, Seelah Kissioki, travel throughout the nation to provide programs to enrich teaching skills. A new Assembly Hall just completed adds to the campus along with dormitory space for teachers attending seminars. In addition to the regular teaching classes offered by Mwangaza are HIV-AIDS Education for teachers and Mother-Daughter, Father-Son programs for parents and children. Each ELCA Synod contributes US \$1,000 a year to fund this work and each ELCT diocese contributes US \$500. With 60-80 children in a typical secondary classroom, meager resources and modest teacher education the work of Mwangaza is desperately needed. I am delighted that we support this effort.

Tumaini University-Dar Es Salaam

The word Atumaini means in Swahili Ahope. This Lutheran university consists of three constituent colleges, namely: Iringa University College located in Iringa; Kilimanjaro Christian Medical College in Moshi and Makumira University College located near Arusha. In the past two years Tumaini University has added a Dar Es Salaam campus in our Diocese. This brand new school is the remnant of the Waldorf College project which failed several years ago.

The current Dar campus consists of offices and classrooms located in a leased facility in the downtown. I visited the school and learned about this new project of the Diocese. The Tumaini University is working to have this campus fully accredited as soon as possible. Presently, there are about 100 students. Admissions people told me that 250 more have applied for enrollment and they hope to have 300-400 students in place very soon. The school has six permanent faculty members with about 20 other persons on the staff. The Dar campus offers undergraduate degrees in Business, law and Library services. All classes are in English. The tuition is about US \$1500 a year for each student. Most students are being sent to the school by their employer or by middle class parents. I talked to several students. I found them to be bright and ambitious. They are eager to learn.

The school inherits about US \$150,000 debt from previous unpaid rental leases. In addition they are currently paying US \$108,000 a year in rental costs. The Diocese is trusting that this school will flourish. It seems to me that the largest city in Tanzania should have a Lutheran school. I will encourage Dr. Robert Ubbelohde from our Finlandia University to explore with the Tumaini faculty the possibilities of companionship.

Evangelical Growth-Projects and Possibilities

The Tanzanian Church continues to grow. There are a dozen huge building projects under construction throughout our Diocese to accommodate the large

congregations that are being developed. I visited several churches. I even was able to baptize seven babies on one Sunday. A total of 20 children were baptized at this church on that day.

I presented a \$500 check to the building fund at the Kimara Church from Calvary in Minocqua. On a Saturday afternoon I visited with their pastor and the congregational leadership. The congregation has 2000 baptized members with 1500 in worship on Sunday. They have one pastor and they too are in the midst of a large building program. While we were there the Senior Choir was practicing for the District Choir Contest. A group of 8 children (about 10 years old) were meeting with a lay evangelist to prepare for baptism. A youth choir was practicing under a tree with electric guitars and a group of at least 40 were meeting in a Confirmation Class. And about 15 boys were in the church balcony to practice for a play they were presenting in worship on Sunday. Church life is vibrant and busy!

The Eastern and Coastal Diocese is trying to find the money (about US \$115,000) to purchase a radio station and to go on the air in Dar Es Salaam. Currently the Moslems, the Roman Catholics and the Pentecostals have radio and the Lutherans see the need for another Christian station.

Economic Developments

Our diocese has a number of well connected government officials and business persons who are encouraging the church to find income producing businesses. The Diocese has an option on a commercial block of properties in the downtown area. They are interested in this acquisition for the leases and rental income. It seems to me unrealistic that they are going to find the capital to purchase it.

Luther House

Two years ago resources from our synod paid for new beds, air conditioning and new paint for Luther House-the rental hostel owned by the diocese. Due to the renovation, rentals have been increased some. It still is a bargain. A night's lodging can be rented for about US \$20. The manager of Luther House told me that the income is excellent with rooms nearly fully rented every evening.

Vacant property facing the Indian Ocean

I had a fascinating conversation with a young Somali businessman Mohamed Nur. Educated in South Africa and the United States, this 32 year old has a successful restaurant operating in two locations in Tanzania. He built the ACity Center outdoor café in Dar and has another restaurant in Arusha. His Tanzanian pizza is excellent! Mr. Nur has made a proposal to the Eastern and Coastal Diocese to build a upscale European style open air restaurant on the vacant lot directly behind Luther House facing the Indian Ocean. The gravel lot is currently used for parking during the day and is empty at night. He believes that the restaurant could be a revenue source for the diocese as well as an employer of one hundred people and an attraction for the area. General Secretary Abraham is reviewing the offer but told me that he thinks his Executive Committee will not approve of the project. It seems to me (and I expressed this opinion to the General Secretary) that this idea has merit and needs to be explored. I suggested that a Lutheran businessman should be engaged in the project with Mr. Nur. This would make it more palatable to the Diocese.

Stewardship and Mission Struggles

The General Secretary of the Diocese shared with me some concerns that are surfacing concerning the business interests in which the Church is involved. He told me there is a feeling that the evangelical passion for the growth of God's church

cannot take second place to the financial interests of the Church. It will be fascinating to watch the Tanzanians deal with this tension in the years ahead. On the last evening I was in Dar, I had dinner with the Chairman and part-owner of the New Africa Hotel. Mr. J.D. Minja is a retired government official (former Ambassador to Canada and former Commerce Minister for Tanzania) who has renovated and improved this western style hotel. Mr. Minja has four sons, all educated in the United Kingdom. He is concerned that his children grow up to be Tanzanians-not Englishmen. Yet his boys are not interested in their tribal language and culture and are not active in the life of the Church. This is very troubling to him! Perhaps Mr. Minja's concerns will face the church in greater numbers as economic development produces more persons of middle class economic status. It is said that ADoubt is the disease of the wealthy.

The Future of Our Work Together

We are now moving toward the second decade of our relationship with the people of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese. What has worked the best in the past continues to be the prescription for the future. There will be more exchanges of people between Africa and the United States. We will need to bring more Africans here and more of our own synod people will make the trip to Africa. It is only by being together can we grow and learn from each other.

In 2004 the plan is to send a group of women lead by Luanne Skrenes and Cindy Cowen to visit the women of Tanzania. We will continue to participate in the Teacher Exchange work of the ELCA and the ELCT. The Library Project will be completed in 2004 and dedicated to the glory of God next summer. A program of AClergy Exchange begun with Pastor Steve Cowen and Pastor Jimalee Jones needs to be continued. Perhaps 2-4 pastors can visit Africa and receive visiting pastors from Africa in 2004-2005. A youth trip to Africa can be planned in 2005.

It would be important to bring the new Eastern and Coastal Diocese Bishop and spouse to our synod in the year following the election in December 2004. Either me or a representative of our synod might participate in the Consecration of the new ECD Bishop in the Spring of 2005. Others from our synod including Dr. David and Mrs. Mary Lou Blomquist will continue to assist in the teaching work at the Lutheran Universities in Tanzania. Our Finlandia University is encouraged to find a companion project with the Tumaini Dar Campus.

The Northern Great Lakes Synod Companion Synod Committee remains an exciting and important group of mission planners. Nearly all members of the committee have been to Africa at least once, and all sense the vitality of the African church. How can we learn from the African zeal for the Gospel? How can we grow and mature as a church as we assist our brothers and sisters in Tanzania?

While in Africa I studied and prayed the Book of Philippians each day. St. Paul writes;

AIIf then there is any encouragement in Christ, and consolation from love, and sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete; be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of the same mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. (2:1-4)

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Northern Great Lakes Synod-ELCA

October 31, 2003
Reformation Day