

Companion Synod
25th Anniversary
Jubilee
2017

**Eastern & Coastal Diocese,
Evangelical Lutheran Church
in Tanzania**



and



Northern Great Lakes Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church
in America

out for me as being different to our practice or experience, for which I believe, the Church is stronger. The people prayed ... ALL the people prayed. They didn't turn automatically to the Pastor, but it came from within. And then I couldn't help but notice that almost everyone came to worship carrying a Bible. Central to all they did was prayer and God's Word. And it showed. The churches were full and the people were active. Yes, God is alive!"

* * * * *

"Since returning from Tanzania, I have been asked by a number of people, "How was your trip?" I am struck by how one simple question can be so difficult to answer. How was my trip? Words are inadequate. My pictures fall short. How was my trip? I cannot tell you how it was. It is just as difficult to answer that question as it was when I returned from my first trip to Tanzania. There is much that I experienced during my time in Tanzania that I believe every western Christian needs to experience. I went to Tanzania to learn and to build relationships. I was not there to evangelize, proselytize, fix, or otherwise impose my western view of the faith we share, nor my western view of the world and the church's role within it. I was there to learn, and boy did I learn. I certainly learned about the people and culture of Tanzania, but more than that I learned a great deal about myself. I learned about hospitality and how poorly I fail at showing it. I learned about time and how enslaved I am to it. I learned about worship and how disengaged I have been with it. I learned about persecution and how sheltered I have been from it. I learned about contentment and how easily I have lost it. I learned about joy and how far I have been from it. Yes, I learned a bit about myself while I was in Tanzania. How was my trip? I'll ask you the same question when you return."



*Pastor D. J. Rasner
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
Hancock, Michigan*

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Grateful to God

By Bishop Alex G. Malasusa

“that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us...” John 17:21

I am grateful to God Almighty for 25 years of partnership between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT). We thank those who pursued the vision of this partnership between the then 20 Dioceses of the ELCT and 20 Synods of the ELCA.



Bishop Malasusa & Bishop Skrenes

Above all, I observed the partnership of my own Diocese, the Eastern and Coastal Diocese (ECD) and the Northern Great Lakes Synod (NGLS) and found it to be of a special kind which deserves to be emulated by other Dioceses.

The partnership between the NGLS and the ELCT-ECD has taken a holistic approach, catering for the spiritual as well as material well-being of our two church bodies to answer to Christ’s prayer for the unity of believers as recorded in John 17:21.

In this sense, it is first and foremost a spiritual expression of that unity in our common faith that our salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ comes through grace and not justification by law, as Martin Luther taught us. The mutual being of the Father and the Son is the ideal unity sought by our two churches so that we may be one in them as prayed for us by the Lord Himself. That is the bedrock of our relationship. That is why and how, through this partnership, we are able to walk together in fellowship.

work that it took to entertain, despite all the money they spent on me for cabs, *bajajis* (what we would call rickshaws, 3-wheeled taxis), and food, they continually said how blessed **they** were to be helping out a *mchungaji*, a pastor, a brother in Christ. There is much more I could say about Tanzania, but let this suffice for now. It will be a time I will never forget and, God willing, hopefully I’ll get back there some day and bring the family too!



*Pastor Christopher Johnson
Christ the King Lutheran Church
Escanaba, Michigan*

* * * * *



*Pastor David Hueter
Zion Lutheran Church, Manistique
and Bethany Lutheran Church,
Isabella, Michigan*

“The highlights were many: the honor of preaching at the opening of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese General Assembly, or the worship at Magomeni Lutheran Church with five choirs and brass that added to the worship – four hours long and yet it did not seem so! Instead of through emails, it was meeting face-to-face. Instead of merely talking about the ministries that our Northern Great Lakes Synod supports, there was opportunity to visit and see for ourselves.

Or how about attending a wedding of one of their pastors, or the ordination service of three new pastors? And the hospitality that was offered from the beginning to the end is something we could all learn from. So many things, and yet these two stood

Three Pastors: Reflections on Their 2014 Companion Synod Visit



“Our time, as others have shared so far and over the years as well, was such an amazing time and such a gift for me. I admired not only all the things that the Eastern and Coastal Diocese was up to, but also the strong relationship our synod has with our brothers and sisters in

Christ in Tanzania. I admired our partner church, Magagoni, and the many things they were doing even though over 40% of their offerings went directly to the diocese. I admired Bishop Malasusa and the respect he was given by the members of the diocese he led. There was much to take in, much to reflect on, much to be inspired by, and much to be challenged by as well. For example, the biblical literacy of the young and old puts us to shame. As a pastor that makes me think, “What am I doing wrong?” It also makes me wonder, “Why don’t our people care more about God’s Word?”

The most wonderful time spent in Tanzania for me – aside from the opening of the diocesan convention, an ordination, a visit to Bagamoyo (an old slave trade town north of Dar es Salaam), visiting numerous sites supported by our synod (Mkuza, Mtoni, Kisarawe) – was with the people. I could tell they were having fun listening to me stumble my way through Swahili. I could tell that they were honestly concerned with the state of the church in America, as well as my own congregation I am called to shepherd. I could tell that the old Swahili proverb I heard a number of times is true – “Let the guests come so that the hosts may be blessed.” That fact that I may have been a blessing to them was and is very humbling. Often times I felt like a huge burden that had to be held by the hand wherever I went. Yet despite all the

Our shared mission is built upon our unity of purpose to proclaim and openly bear witness to Christ as our Lord and Savior. It is in this context that over the years my brother Bishop Thomas Skrenes and other members of the clergy from the NGLS have had the opportunity to preach the Word of God in my Diocese just as several of our pastors and I have shared our reflections on the Scriptures whenever we visited NGLS. We pray together, we share the Holy Communion, we minister to the needy and generally bear witness together. We need to expand this area of ministry through systematic exchange of our pastors, choirs, women and youth groups to mutually enrich our spiritual life as I suggest below.

The partnership is also a material manifestation of our unity in ministering to the physical body of the church, i.e. to the material requirements of the believers. I will cite a few examples.

First are the regular professional exchange visits between the leaders and lay members of different Parishes within ECD and NGLS. Most notable among them are the Medical and Social Services expert teams from NGLS to ECD that have won the hearts and minds of our people as they ministered the love of Jesus through their volunteer work.



Second is the fight against malaria. The NGLS is supporting our fight against the scourge which remains a formidable killer of our people. The lead role played by Luanne Skrenes in this

medical mission is exemplary. Our own medical team and medical personnel from the Government of the Republic of Tanzania work hand in hand with these visiting professionals from NGLS to the glory of God.



Third is the Mtoni Diaconic Lutheran Centre for mentally challenged children. To cope with the high demand for this service, the center also runs a parallel home-based care program to support children who cannot be accommodated at the facility. In response to this and to better serve the community, the ECD has moved on to establish Mtoni Phase II some few kilometers from the city of Dar es Salaam. In all this work, the ECD has enjoyed the accompaniment of the NGLS. The challenge is real but through shared vision and mission we continue to make good progress in building the body of Christ through this joint work.

Fourth is education. Support for education has been high on the agenda of our partnership. Over the years, the ECD has enjoyed the tireless support of the NGLS in the promotion of the education of our children and young adults. The NGLS and the ECD have worked hand in hand in building a sound infrastructure at Kisarawe Lutheran Junior Seminary.

Over the years, my great friend, Bishop Tom Skrenes, has supported our efforts in this area through funding from the NGLS. Pastor Robert Langseth and his wife Deloris have played



churches are being built in Dar es Salaam as the Tanzanian Church is experiencing rapid growth. It is at these congregations that we witness baptisms, take part in ribbon cutting ceremonies, lead devotions, hear superb choirs, are handed chickens as a gift at the offering

auction, and on some occasions join a pastor on home visits to the sick and homebound. These visits help to strengthen our companion congregation partnerships with a personal greeting and a handshake.

It is here in Africa where we've learned that a smile is universal; that no matter the language, we can all pray together. We are reminded that this is a small world as we sing with the Tanzanians, "Blessed Assurance" and "Nearer My God to Thee." We always leave Tanzania feeling like we have been strengthened beyond words by the faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ in the ECD of the ELCT. It is our prayer that the Africans feel that we, too, have shared with them a spiritual gift to make them strong.

God is at work in our companionship. God is guiding these mission projects.

Bwana Asifiwe! Praise the Lord! AMEN!



Luanne Skrenes is a member of the Companion Synod Committee and Immanuel Lutheran Church in Negaunee, Michigan.

tion and provided us with two! In four and a half days, over three hundred patients were screened; 263 with dental cavities and 64 with periodontal disease. The Tanzanian dentists hope to continue serving patients after our departure.

Many smiling faces (later) and lots of thanksgiving to God occurred as we completed these sessions. Our synod dentists brought modern care to the poorest of the poor in Dar es Salaam. Most of these people have never seen a dentist. Adults and children, some Christian, some Muslim, are smiling today because of teeth repaired. This has been a good effort and it continues. Thanks be to God!



While the dental clinic was in session, I met with members of the ECD medical board to strategize and plan for future mission work. There is much work to be done!

In 2015, we also visited Mkuza Girls' Secondary School educating girls ages 12–17 years. Students here are from any denomination

but are 'molded in the Christian faith.' The mission of this school changed in 2011 from the school for women to a school for girls in order to educate and empower women at a younger age. In order to maintain their status as a secondary school, the government required an upgrade to their science lab. While there, I had the privilege of helping them meet this goal by delivering a microscope which was donated by Northern Michigan University. This was accepted with great excitement and appreciation. I was also pleased to inform them that over \$12,000 had been donated to Mkuza from the NGLS in recent years.

While traveling around the diocese, we also visit NGLS-ECD companion congregations, some to attend worship, some to meet the pastors bringing greetings from their NGLS companions and to tour the church buildings. Many very large, cathedral-size

a key role in raising funds for Kisarawe. It is through this work that we were able to build a library, boys' and girls' dormitories, a cafeteria for the school, amongst other projects financed through this partnership.

As I write, work is still in progress to solve one more piece in the Kisarawe puzzle: provision of affordable and secure accommodation for the teaching staff. This is very crucial if we are to attract and retain good teachers and raise teaching standards for the school.

The story of Kisarawe is incomplete without at least a mention of the now resolved age old water problem. In this regard, the NGLS worked with ECD to provide sufficient safe and clean water for the school and its surrounding community. Today there is adequate water to allow school activities to run smoothly throughout the year.

As we reflect on the past twenty-five years, it is also important to look into the future. Going forward I would suggest that we single-mindedly work on consolidating the spiritual unity of our two churches to the fulfillment of the Lord's prayer for us and the glory of God. As leader of the ELCT-ECD, I urge my friend and brother Tom and his Synod to spearhead the exchange of pastors for the mutual benefit of our two churches. Likewise, we of the ECD need to improve our mission and evangelism. As we commemorate twenty-five years of our partnership we need to sit down, reflect on these areas of ministry and together plan our way forward.



I pray that both the ECD and NGLS continue to work together to encourage more youth to participate in partnership work. The youth are our strength and pillar. It is important that young people get more engaged and that they are fully engaged in the partnership work and process since they are the flag bearers who shall have to carry this relationship beyond us.

Equally important is a joint program for women and children. Just like the youth, active women and children participation in partnership activities will greatly enhance our joint prayers, our common strength and our future growth together.

We still have a lot more work to do as a Church body to help disadvantaged children attain good education. The education ministry has always been at the core of the missionary work since time immemorial and we need to strongly focus on it.

I thank my wife, Ericah, and our children, Miriam, Michael and Mercy; members of the clergy, the ECD administration and the entire ECD family who have all been the bedrock of this partnership. Some have been silent participants but their presence and prayers have and will always be greatly appreciated.



The Rt. Rev. Dr. Alex Gehaz Malasusa is Bishop of the ELCT Eastern and Coastal Diocese and Vice President for Africa of the Lutheran World Federation.

The Dental Clinic established by our synod in 2012, with funding from the people of our congregations, completed its first stage of ministry. The dental work effort began about two years prior when I had dinner with the Chair of the Medical Ministry of the diocese, Dr. Amos Mwakilasa.

On a beautiful day in 2012 in Dar es Salaam, the dental clinic staffed by Drs. Jim Hayward and Mike Orhanen (members of NGLS congregations) with Martha Hayward and Ardith Moore assisting, opened for business. Over the course of the week, more than seventy patients had teeth pulled and cavities filled. This work is an example of full Christian partnership with the Northern Great Lakes Synod providing dentists and equipment with dental supplies, the United Evangelical Mission (International Mission Society) provided the building facility, and the Tanzanians helped make it happen. God is at work in this partnership!



Phase two of our dental work took place in 2015 when Dr. Brian Anderson from Trinity, Ishpeming and Sue Albright a dental hygienist from Amery, Wisconsin, who previously lived in the NGLS, joined my sister, Diana Herington, and me to conduct another dental clinic and continue planning for future medical mission work.



Since Dr. Anderson was the only US dentist traveling with this mission, it was important for the Tanzanians to provide at least one dentist to assist. They surpassed this expecta-



In 2004, six women from the Northern Great Lakes Synod (NGLS) went to Tanzania on a 'mission building trip' of sorts. We traveled to Tanzania to 'share a spiritual gift,' to build relationships with the women in our companion synod. This journey was

rooted in the scripture from Paul in his letter to the Romans, the sharing of the faith to make us strong.

On this women-to-women trip, we were honored to present a check of over \$3000.00 to the Mkuza Women's Center (now Mkuza Girls' Secondary School) from the women of our Northern Great Lakes Synod to furnish the dormitory rooms. Mkuza was at that time an ECD boarding 'school' where women learn basic skills like sewing and gardening along with entrepreneurship to help them be better contributing members of society.

About ten years ago, the NGLS began a ministry to help fight malaria in the Eastern and Coastal Diocese. This mosquito-

borne illness kills children and the elderly. Over these years, thousands of dollars have been sent to our companion synod for the purchase of anti-malaria bed netting. A highlight of my trips was when our



sons, my husband and I participated in a malaria netting distribution, knowing our efforts were saving lives.

Walking Side by Side

by Bishop Thomas A. Skrenes

For twenty-five years, the Northern Great Lakes Synod has been involved in a "Companion Synod" ministry with the Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

Well over a hundred persons from this synod have in these years traveled into Tanzania to visit congregations, institutions and people who are a part of the ministry of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese. We have also received well over a hundred Tanzanians who have traveled to our synod. It continues to be a warm, trusting and powerful relationship. The consistent approach has been that we will not make this companionship about money. It continues to be our policy that the Tanzanian Church makes all decisions and invites us to participate in their ministry as best suits their plans.

Our theme has been companionship, "walking side by side" as brothers and sisters in the faith of Jesus Christ. As a mature church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania welcomes us as friends, fellow believers and companions in our walk. My wife, Luanne, and I have been guests of the Church in Tanzania on six occasions since 2001.



Congregations in the Eastern and Coastal Diocese continue to grow. Many are flourishing. The annual report of the diocese tells us that there are eighty-two parishes and an additional 153 sub-parishes in the diocese. A sub-parish is a “preaching point” under the direction of an existing parish. When a sub-parish exceeds 200 members and shows financial viability, it can request parish status in the diocese. Membership in the Eastern and Coastal Diocese at the end of 2013 was 295,409 persons, an increase of more than 14,000 members from 2012. To put that in perspective, the Eastern and Coastal Diocese has more than doubled in size since my first trip to Tanzania in 2001. Further, at the end of 2013, our eighty-two congregations here in the Northern Great Lakes Synod claimed 27,825 members.

It is a wonderful experience to lead worship and to preach at a service of 500 to 1000 people in Tanzania. I had the delight of baptizing infants and children. On one occasion, we confirmed fifty youth and Bishop Malasusa and I distributed communion to nearly a thousand people at a four hour service at Kinyerezi parish.



In the 500 year history of the Lutheran communion, the Rite of Ordination has nearly always been reserved for groups of congregations, in some places, calling themselves dioceses,

Strengthening Faith Through Companionship

by Luanne Skrenes

Romans 1:11 - 12 “I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.”

Rooted in this scripture, I have journeyed six times to our companion synod, the Eastern and Coastal Diocese (ECD) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT). Four of these trips I accompanied my husband, Bishop Thomas Skrenes.

I am often asked, “Why do you keep going back to Tanzania? What benefit is it to you?” My answer is the same every time. Each of these six trips has been different from another, yet there is one common theme. I first visited Tanzania with my husband in 2001, not knowing what to expect; I thought perhaps I would be going there to learn how it is that we can help these poor people. Surprisingly, they gave me more than I could ever begin to offer them! The people of the ECD have a love and passion for Jesus Christ that is contagious! My faith deepens beyond expectations each time I visit our brothers and sisters in Christ in Tanzania.

These visits to the ECD are certainly an example of “welcome, worship, and witness.” The people of the ECD welcome us with their warm, gracious hospitality throughout each stay. We experience the passion, energy and love of Christ in their worship services. Our dental teams and forward planning group for health care along with those who have volunteered at Kisarawe Lutheran Junior Seminary, and others have been a witness to them of serving the underprivileged. The people of the ECD in turn witness to us in their Bible studies, fervent prayer, and including the guidance of our Lord in all they accomplish.

high standards of a learning facility. For this, the school needs to construct more classrooms, dormitories, a kitchen, a dining hall, staff houses, a dispensary and a school fence to safe guard the girls. Other challenges include inadequate water supply to the school and lack of transport facility.

Furthermore, the Diocese leadership welcomes angel supporters who can reach out to support girls who are financially constrained and despite securing a place for education at Mkuza Girls' Secondary School, cannot pay the mandatory tuition fees. Through such assistance, together we can realize the optimization of promoting girls education in Tanzania.



We still trust God to fulfill all of these priorities. We also believe strongly in our partnership with NGLS and that together we can accomplish a lot more for the glory of the Lord.

Reflections of Mkuza Girls' Secondary School by the Headmistress of the School, Lilian Sikawa

synods, districts or conferences. In 2014, Bishop Malasusa and I led worship with sixty clergy of the diocese as we ordained three new pastors into the ministry of Word and Sacrament. During the Rite, we asked the questions and heard the candidates' faithful responses. All of us surrounded the pastors, laying hands on and praying for these men and women as has been done for 2,000 years. It was a great day. In my sermon on that occasion, based on my own ordination text, I invited the new pastors to feed the sheep of God (John 21:15-17) and reminded them that in so many ways they are called to represent Jesus. I said, "Pastors, you may be smart, learned, speak many languages, have money, know all the right people—but that is not what those in your flocks in your care need to hear from you. They want to hear this! Jesus has died, Jesus is risen, Jesus will come again!"



God is at work in our relationship with the Eastern and Coastal Diocese. For twenty-five years, we have been building relationships between congregations and individuals. The strength of our companionship is not based on financial grants or gifts. It is based on the work of the Holy Spirit to weave our churches together. Our dedicated companion committee has worked hard to provide opportunities for mutual ministry and "side by side" work.

Bishop Malasusa remains a trusted friend of our synod. As both the bishop of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese and former Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Bishop Malasusa brings much to our companionship. He has visited our synod on two occasions. Bishop Malasusa is considered the leader of the African Lutheran community. His commitment to unity is a gift to us.

Our future work together as synod and diocese remains one of my priorities. More congregations in our synod need to be encouraged to form companion relationships with diocese congregations. We can do much more! The Tanzanians have so much to teach us! Other ministries are being planned. The Scripture from II Timothy 4:2 reminds us: “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.”

We see the challenges and problems facing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. Grinding poverty affects 90% of the people of the nation and the Church. There is the risk of ascendant radical Islam, the shortage of clergy, the emergence of strong Pentecostalism within their church body, and the decline of financial support from the northern hemisphere churches. There are more struggles. The country’s population is growing faster than the nation can build schools, hospitals and other infrastructure. The urban centers of Tanzania are growing very fast and the power grid and other public utilities struggle to provide basic services.

Yet the Church grows. There is a lively sense of hope in great evidence here. Church statistics speak volumes as worship attendance and membership increase each and every year. There are dynamic mission starts and new outreach opportunities everywhere. Tanzanian Lutherans smile and laugh and are eager to tell us how God is moving in their congregations and in their own lives. The joy of the Gospel is clear!

number of youth led by Rev. Marcia Solberg. Another group of youth led by René Johnson from Finlandia University; Assistant to the Bishop Rev. Katherine Finegan with her husband, Dave, and her brother, Dr. Stephen Volz; Bishop Thomas Skrenes, Pastor Christopher Johnson, Pastor D.J. Rasner and Pastor Dave Hueter; and lastly, the wife of the Bishop, Mrs. Luanne Kallungi Skrenes and her sister, Diana Kallungi Herington.



These visitations have given us a wonderful time of sharing ideas, experiences, the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ, singing together and learning from each other. All groups brought with them different gifts for the school. These include apparatus for science laboratory, footballs, t-shirts and many others.

Above all, we acknowledge receiving of financial support worth US \$10,444.49 from NGLS which has enabled us to finish construction of two new laboratories. This support was very critical to the school and now the girls are enjoying carrying out practical studies using these facilities.

Since its establishment in March of 2011, the school continues to flourish and has enjoyed a number of achievements which are: an increase in the enrollment of students from 4 to 188 students in 2016; an increase in the number of infrastructures: two classrooms, one dormitory, one library, two science laboratories and construction of the chicken house; an increase in the number of learning/teaching materials in a ratio of one to four and lastly, an increase in the number of furniture in proportion to the number of students and workers.

Despite these successes, the school still faces a number of challenges. First of all, the school needs funds to further develop the school infrastructure to uphold the growth and the desired

In order to serve a bigger purpose, the Centre was restructured such that three distinct units were identified: Mkuza Girls' Secondary School, a vocational training center for girls, and thirdly, a nursery and primary school for boys and girls. The Diocese was compelled to establish a girls' secondary school in order to reduce the gap of girls who are not able to access secondary education. The Church is taking center stage in playing an important role within the society of promoting equal opportunity to education for the girls in the country. ECD remains committed to this vision and is building Mkuza Girls' Secondary School step by step with the ultimate goal of making it a center for excellence for girls' education in Tanzania.

The implementation of provision of formal secondary education started in January 2010 where the existing buildings were renovated to suit the requirements of a girls' dormitory, classroom and offices. Thereafter the registration procedures were done and completed in 2011.

The School started in March, 2011 where four girls were enrolled.



To date, 188 girls have been enrolled. In 2014 and 2015, thirty-six girls completed their ordinary level education and passed their final examinations. These girls are now undergoing further education in other institutions.

Since 2013, through the Eastern and Coastal Diocese (ECD) and the Northern Great Lakes Synod (NGLS) partnership, Mkuza Girls' Secondary School started to work closely with the NGLS. A number of visitors from the NGLS have been to the school. To mention a few: a group of students from Finlandia University led by René Johnson; Rev. Robert Langseth and his wife Deloris; a

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has its own serious issues. Any person active in our churches knows the challenges we face. Yet, God can do great things. One pastor told me that perhaps if our problems were bigger in the ELCA we would be growing! Miracles do happen. God is not done with us yet as a Church or as a synod. How can we continue to learn from our Tanzanian sisters and brothers? How can we listen to God calling us forward together? What good things will God do in your congregation? In you?



Bishop Thomas A. Skrenes is Bishop of the Northern Great Lakes Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Reflections on Companion Synod Relationship

by Northern Great Lakes Synod Bishop Emeritus Dale R. Skogman

*“We are regarded as having nothing,
and yet as possessing everything.” 2 Cor. 6:10b*

Within seconds of being elected the second bishop of the Northern Great Lakes Synod, I was informed of the newly formed Companion Synod relationship between the Northern Great Lakes Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Eastern and Coastal Diocese, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT)! ELCA synod representative Richard Dennison ran up to the platform and began enthusiastically telling me about the relationship. Pastor Cy Warmanen intervened saying “Dale should really be listening to the affirmation of the assembly at this moment!”

Thus began what was to be a most gratifying, spiritually stimulating and broadening experience in Christian companionship and relationships. I find it hard, as requested, to share my reflections on a single page and I suspect there will be a lot of redundancy among those of us asked to address the meaning of the companion relationship to us personally!

Truly, in comparison to the affluence of the residents of the USA, Tanzanians might be regarded as materially impoverished and yet possessing everything when it comes to Christian values, exuberance and convictions! As we reflect on the spiritual qualities of our Tanzanian sisters and brothers, certain words are shared by all those who have been in their presence: Powerful prayer, joyous faith, genuine witness, vibrant singing, gracious sharing, generous stewardship and so much more.

As bishop, I was deeply indebted to a host of persons who cultivated our companion synod relationship personally and within the structure of the Companion Synod Committee. A host of persons could and should be acknowledged and thanked, but I think all will agree that Pastor Bob and Deloris Langseth were the cheer leaders who promoted, planned and produced much fruit in our companion relationship.

Partnership Works Between Mkuza Girls’ Secondary School of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese and the Northern Great Lakes Synod

by Lilian Sikawa



Mkuza Girls’ Secondary School (Mkuza Girls) is one of the components of Mkuza Women Education centre (MWEC) which was established in 1990 under the sponsorship of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese Women, Finland Evangelical Lutheran Mission, (FELM) and Lutheran World Federation (LWF).





I remember “Feed my Sheep!” was the theme of a powerful sermon preached by Bishop Thomas Skrenes during the consecration of Alex Malasusa as presiding bishop of the ELCT-ECT at the Azania Front Cathedral. What a fitting message to a young pastor then being sent by the Lord to herd His ELCT flock! I feel like it was only yesterday.

Over the years, one of the Church Elders of Kijitonyama, Dr. Hans Macha and his wife, Violet, have hosted the Skrenes’ at their home. Kijitonyama Parish feels greatly honored that Bishop Malasusa has entrusted us with this special task to host the Bishop’s family.

Equally, as the epitome of my reflection, I will never forget May 2015 when I was so greatly honored and deeply humbled to address the NGLS Synod Assembly as a Keynote Speaker representing my Bishop Dr. Alex Malasusa of our ELCT-ECD. Bishop Dr. Alex Malasusa is the Vice President of the Lutheran World Federation for Africa. At that time, he was also the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. He had some pressing prior commitments in Dar and decided to deputize me as a special envoy.



All honor and glory to the Lord for that undeserved opportunity, which only goes to demonstrate the depth and breadth of this partnership, which has steadily grown and has been lovingly cultivated over the years by our two churches.

Victoria Kisiyombe is a leader at Kijitonyama Lutheran Parish in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Bishop Elinaza and Mama Sendoro visited our synod in May, 1994 and Jo and I, accompanied by Dave and Mary Lou Blomquist visited Tanzania for twenty-five days in 1995. I possess notes outlining initial goals agreed upon by Bishop Sendoro and me early in our relationship:



Bishop Dale Skogman & Bishop Elinaza Sendoro at the 1994 Synod Assembly

- 1) Pray, learn about and support each other.
- 2) Teacher exchanges, a library for Kisarawe, choir visits.
- 3) Companion congregations.
- 4) District/Conference relationships.
- 5) Support for the Mkuza Women’s Center.
- 6) “Pen Pal” relationships with synod youth and Maneramango Bible School students.

Over the years, a vast majority of these things have been accomplished via shipping containers of supplies, financial assistance to Mkuza & Kisarawe, dental clinics, choir tours, pastor exchanges, work crews and many other endeavors.

I am compelled to reflect on how communication technology has greatly facilitated and enhanced our companion relationship! In the “old days” mail truly moved at a snails pace and phone calls were almost impossible. Now we live in an age of instant communication. After Bishop and Mama Malasusa visited in my home, my desk top computer spoke to me in Swahili!

Across the seas, across the church, may our companion relationship continue to flourish until we meet at the gates of heaven!

Bishop Emeritus Dale Skogman served as Bishop of the Northern Great Lakes Synod from 1991 to 1999.

Faith As a Shared Venture

by René Johnson, Finlandia University

Eleven years ago, Finlandia University began to participate in the Northern Great Lakes Synod (NGLS) and Eastern Coastal Diocese (ECD) Companion Synod relationship. While many of the ELCA colleges and universities offer students international experiential learning opportunities, no other university does so in connection with a Companion Synod relationship. The Companion Synod program is rooted in “accompaniment,” which promotes the values of mutuality, inclusivity, vulnerability, empowerment and sustainability. It is these values, in my opinion, that sets Finlandia’s annual Service & Learning in Tanzania experience apart from any other learning abroad opportunities.

Since 2006, sixty-seven Finlandia students and faculty along with sixteen members of NGLS congregations have been enriched by this relationship. Each year, I know I can count on our companions in Tanzania to receive a new batch of students with an expression of Christian hospitality that is enthusiastically inclusive. The staff and students at Kisarawe Lutheran Jr. Seminary demonstrate such gracious generosity with their time, home and life-stories. There is no greater joy for me each trip than to witness their immediate and loving embrace of the Finlandia group. It is a very vulnerable experience for the students – to completely rely on these strangers; to not know the language or rules – but quickly they are made to feel comfortable as they learn to trust in our hosts care and attention and begin to feel like family.

The students also stay with host families of ECD churches. In recent years, we’ve made it routine to stay with Temeke Congregation (which is in a Companion Synod relationship with Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Hancock). The Finlandia students aren’t necessarily from a Lutheran background, but that really

Junior Seminary in the outskirts of Dar es Salaam where they participated at different times in construction activities at the school. These youth volunteered to come to Africa and to the ELCT-ECD, leaving behind the comforts of their homes in the USA. They travelled thousands of kilometers to an unknown world to offer their support.

Through the years, we have been blessed with bilateral exchange visits between the NGLS and the ELCT-ECD. Our two churches share a common love for the Lord. We worship and praise the Lord together, do some projects together and enjoy the Lord’s creations together in our respective countries. My own Parish, Kijitonyama, has played a leading role in these bi-annual exchange visits with Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in Iron Mountain. One such visit also stands out. Ten years ago, Bishop Skrenes, through Bishop Malasusa, invited the ELCT-ECD Kijitonyama Evangelical Choir (Kwaya ya Uinjilisti Kijitonyama) to visit the NGLS and grace the NGLS Assembly with their presence. The choir performed several concerts at different churches within the NGLS. One hit prayer song that touched the hearts of many within the NGLs was *Sema na moyo wangu* (*Speak to my heart*). HE did, thanks in large part to this partnership.



Since then, more than 27,000 women have accessed our lease facilities worth \$17 million. The scheme has created more than 150,000 jobs and impacted both directly and indirectly an estimated 250,000 lives in Tanzania. Women lease equipment like small tractors, corn milling machines, rice polishing machines, sunflower and palm oil pressing machines, irrigation equipment and solar energy generation machines, etc.



Our work has attracted recognition and accolades from the World Bank (2007), the World Economic Forum (2010), Vital Voices founded by Hon. Hillary Clinton (2014) and many other national and international stakeholders (www.selfina.com). It is with deep gratitude, therefore, that I look at the partnership between the NGLS and the ELCT ECD as one of the key drivers of SELFINA's success.

At a personal level, I have enjoyed the privilege of being friends with Bishop Thomas Skrenes and his wife, Luanne. I do not take for granted the rare opportunity I have had to be hosted and be driven around by the Bishop!

I look in awe at the commitment and love shown to me and the ELCT-ECD by Bishop Skrenes, his wife, Luanne, and other members of NGLS. Luanne has tirelessly organized volunteer teams of dentists to offer pro-bono services to the people of Tanzania through our Diocese.

All this thanks to the enduring partnership between the ELCT-ECD and NGLS.

I have fond memories of some brave youth from the NGLS who have left their big footprints at our Kisarawe Lutheran



doesn't matter because the worship they witness and participate in is quite a bit different from any worship experience they may have had. I so appreciate the zeal for worship in the congregations in Tanzania. It is a testament to the joy of the gospel and effect of fellowship in Christ; quite a contrast to a more individualistic expression of faith typical in the States.

My own faith is enriched as a result of the Companion Synod relationship that we enjoy with the Eastern & Coastal Diocese. This is because faith is always a shared venture, plus I could never offer these students as rich a glimpse of perspectives on life and faith from another corner of the world if it weren't for these dear friends. I pity the international experiential learning programs at colleges that stay in guest houses the whole time and ride around in chartered buses. They might get an experience of Tanzania, but not Tanzanians (who they now call friends), and often they have absolutely no interaction with communities of faith. I would argue, however, that to go to that part of the world and not interact with the Christian presence is to not see Tanzania in her entirety. Faith is so interwoven in the daily life and even the landscape. I come back each May renewed in my own faith and in my sense of appreciation for Christian fellowship. I think I can say the same for the Finlandia student participants.

René Johnson is the Director of Servant Leadership and Assistant Professor of Religion at Finlandia University, Hancock Michigan. Before coming to Finlandia in 2005, she taught for 12 years in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania. René is a member of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Hancock, Michigan.

Four Conversions In My Spiritual Growth

by Rev. Robert Langseth

How has our companionship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania impacted my spiritual life? My reply is that God has used our companionship to generate four joyous conversions within me.



Pastor Langseth, Teacher, & Watchman at
Kisarawe Lutheran Secondary School

I.

As an American, I've been influenced by the traditional theme of becoming a strong self-made person with self-sufficiency. That has been washed out of my soul. It has been replaced with a healthy "I'm a God-made man with God sufficiency." My soul was infected with the teenage thought of a youth who came home at 2 a.m. saying to his father, "It's my life, isn't it?" Only to have the father respond, "No! It is not your life! It is God's life. Now get to bed and we'll talk about it tomorrow."

That confrontation occurred the very first day in the Eastern and Coastal Diocese. They had set a Sprite, Orange and Coke bottle in front of me, asked which one I desired and opened the cap on the one to which I pointed. Once opened, I reached and took a sip. I was scolded. "Pastor, we haven't prayed yet!" Similarly, when we were driven to a congregation once the car engine stopped, I reached for the door handle. "Pastor, we haven't thanked God for the safe journey!" I've been converted. God is not just a "force" but the "Source" of my life.

Partnership

by Dr. Victoria Kisyombe

My reflection on the partnership between the ELCT Eastern and Coastal Diocese (ECD) and the Northern Great Lakes Synod (NGLS) is based on my work in the economic empowerment of women, my involvement in Church work, as well as my personal experience living in Tanzania.

I am the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Sero Lease and Finance Limited (SELFINA) whose aim is to empower women economically through lease finance. We started our work in Tanzania in the late 90's but our organization was formally incorporated in 2002.

In 2013, the company benefitted from a \$5,000.00 donation from the Women of the NGLS following a visit to SELFINA's head office and meeting some of the beneficiaries. The team was led by Luanne Skrenes. We all fondly refer to her as *Mama Askofu*, the Bishop's wife.

That donation served as a crucial springboard to leapfrog the company to the next level as more women were now able to access credit and SELFINA was able, in turn, to leverage the revolving funds and attract an overdraft from a local bank. The rest, as they say, is history.



I've been converted to think more deeply about the Scripture texts we read and the meaning of the hymns we sing. This Christmas, the text which impacted me most deeply was "Joy to the World." The hymn enlightens my struggles with where I presently am in my faith plus captures my ruminations about the future.

JOY... not dullness or yawning but confidence and thanksgiving.!!!???
to the WORLD....Not just Christians or believers but the whole universe. !!!???
Let EVERY heart ...prepare HIM room...Not only Christians but Jews, Moslems, atheists. !!!???
And heaven and NATURE sing.....Not just angels but the environment. !!! ???

My four conversions illustrate the leverage inherent in our companionship model. Christ's Church is so much bigger than my individual faith or local congregation. Thank you, Lord, for our twenty-five years of being together in your magnificent mission of loving, caring, bringing joy and changing the world to be part of the Kingdom of God. Fresh excitement awaits our partnership as we journey into the future. Glory be to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!



Pastor Robert and Deloris Langseth have served the companion relationship since its inception. They are members of Faith Lutheran Church in Calumet, Michigan.

II.

Our second evening in Tanzania took us to an outdoor wedding rehearsal dinner. The boundary of the family lawn was surrounded by 300 or more people. After the introductory prayer, the mother of the bride took the microphone and said to the guests and all the invited, "I'm so glad you are marrying a Christian. Daddy and I have been married for twenty-three years and if it was not for Jesus in our lives I'd have killed him."

Their faith is displayed in public. That's my second conversion. The Tanzanians openly celebrate their reliance upon, and strength from, a living God. I've been changed. I'm now more intentional in including God in my daily conversations, in bowing for prayer at soda fountains or restaurants, as well as in my sermons.

Previously I would begin a funeral sermon with the traditional: "John Doe was born on Feb. 3, 1933 ..." Not any more. Rather: "On February 3, 1933, God brought forth from the womb a baby boy, breathed into him the breath of life and John Doe became a living soul..." Note how this change accents that we are not self-made but God-made human beings.

To be more public, I've taken familiar tunes and changed the words for daily living. Example: "Hi-ho, hi-ho, it's off to *school*" we go with Jesus as our Lord and King, Hi-ho-hi-ho." (You can substitute "*play*" or "*Grandma's*", etc.) Another example is "Zippidy do dah, zippidy eh, my oh my, what a wonderful day! Jesus is risen. He's here today. He sends the Spirit to show us God's way."

III.

The Tanzanian's confidence in the Gospel and in the power of love has moved me. There are over 100 different tribes in the nation. For over a century, three major religions (Christian, Moslem and Native) plus several religions less in number have lived side by side. In spite of this diversity, Tanzania has never had a civil war.

I asked a church elder "How do you relate to a Moslem neighbor?" I've never forgotten his answer, "We love them to life!" Our companions don't initially argue with, point fingers at, or tell

others ‘You are going to hell.’ Instead, they invite them to their homes, or to join them in the church choir and let the Holy Spirit move. Their lives are so grounded in Jesus Christ that I John 4:15-21 is practiced daily; namely, “...God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him...perfect love casts out fear...he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen...”



Tension does exist. Moslem radicals from the rich oil countries bring money and pay \$10 to people earning \$1 a day to march in parades against America. A Christian boy foolishly urinated on a Quran, their holy book. The Moslem members came, burned the wooden pulpit and broke all the windows in the church. The only window which was not broken was the fourteen foot tall cross made out of glass blocks. The congregation interpreted that as a sign from God. They agreed not to retaliate. Instead, they invited the leader and members of the mosque to come. They confessed that the boy had done wrong and prayed together for better relationships. I was invited to preach in that church a year later. The burned pulpit and broken windows were still visible. The church was growing in membership because of their open demonstrations of Christ’s love. Their witness has converted me. Our actions of bullying, or shooting people with whom you disagree, and wanting to get even may be the way of the world but it is opposite the way of the Cross.

The seven last words which I grew up with were “We’ve never done it that way before.” Learning from our companions my seven last words are now, “I can do all things through Christ!” (Philippians 4:13)

IV.

My eleven stays in Tanzania have exposed the thinness of my faith and understanding. I have experienced first hand the length, breadth and depth of the Gospel. I have witnessed our companions relying upon the “powerful and marvelous voice of the Lord” (Ps.29:4) at healing services where a leg was lengthened, where a medicine man laid his bones and paraphernalia at the altar in recognition of God’s marvelous actions, where 700 or more gather each week day morning for prayer prior to going to work. Over one-third speak in tongues as their prayer language.

I have seen the power of the Gospel to overcome hatred with love. I have witnessed awesome levels of trust and joy in having Christ at the center of life.

I visited a farm where the “Heifer Project” created a livelihood for a widow and three kids. A colorful Lutheran World Relief blanket was on a maternity bed 70 miles out in the bush country. A Christian owner of a sewing shop takes prostitutes from the street, offers them a job, and turns them into caring mothers. These women, in turn, have asked for Bible studies during their breaks. I’ve seen Christian economists helping create credit unions and coffee cooperatives which pay better interest than banks. My eyes have seen supplies from the Lutheran World Federation warehouse in Dar es Salaam heading toward the refugee camps at the Rwanda border. Deloris and I have sat with Christians on the island of Zanzibar, which is 98% Moslem, and listened to their life changing testimonies of faith triumphing over fear.

Deloris and I attended school where only the teacher had a text and the pupils were doing multiplication on their arm ... using a stick to effect the pigment on their skin because there were no pencils or tablet. They are eager to learn and we watched transformations occur once they had texts and teachers. We heard U.S. Ambassador Brady Anderson exclaim, “If it were not for the Lutheran and Catholic missions to Africa our education and medical status would be horrendous.”