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**GOD'S WORK: OUR HANDS!**  
**Dental Mission and**  
**The 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of**  
**Lutheranism in Tanzania**  
**July-August 2012**



## **RELATIONSHIP**

For over twenty 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. Every Evangelical Lutheran Church in America synod has a companion relationship with a Lutheran church in the developing world. All the twenty dioceses of the Tanzanian Church relate to twenty synods of our Church body.

Well over a hundred persons from this synod have in these past two decades 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. Our congregations and the synod provide financial support of Tanzanians who visit us. We also provide financial resources for some areas of Tanzanian Church life. However, the consistent approach has been that we will not make this companionship relationship about money. The temptation for us Americans is to direct the ministry of the Tanzanian Church since we do control some financial resources. 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. This summer’s trip to Tanzania is the fifth time my wife Luanne and I have been guests of the Church there. It continues to be a privilege to walk with them.

## **LUTHERAN PRESENCE IN TANZANIA**

One of the reasons for our visit to Tanzania this summer was to help commemorate the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ministry of Lutheranism in the Tanzania area. In 1887 German imperial powers brought their army and culture into East Africa as the Europeans scrambled for colonies. They brought with them Lutheran and Roman Catholic missionaries. Within a few years two cathedral style churches were built a few blocks from each other on the Dar es Salaam Harbor. These church buildings are still there and are used as the cathedrals of the Lutheran Diocese and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese.



Lutheran Christianity has prospered in Tanzania. In 1963 shortly before Tanzanian independence, the Lutheran Churches of different European ethnic and African tribal backgrounds united into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. Today the ELCT continues to grow. In 2012 the ELCT has more than 5.8 million members, which is larger than the ELCA. Tanzania is home to one of the largest Lutheran Churches in the world. Since I first went to Tanzania in 2001, the Lutheran Church there has nearly doubled in size.

The polity of the Tanzanian Church is more hierarchical than American Lutheranism. Property of all congregations is owned by the diocese. There are no congregational meetings. Instead, self-perpetuating councils of elders (some with as many as forty people serving) are responsible for the business of the congregation. The Pastor chairs the council. General income received in offerings from the congregation is shared with the diocese. Twenty-eight percent of this income is sent to do the work of the diocese, two percent to the national church body and seventy percent retained by the congregation for its local ministry.

In our partner synod, the Eastern and Coastal Diocese, there are a significant number of large congregations. I preached one Sunday at Mbezi Beach Church where there were about 1500 people in worship, most of them below the age of forty. The larger congregations like Mbezi Beach have two worship services on Sunday morning, each lasting more than 2 hours. Good worship for the Tanzania Church includes a great deal of music as most congregations have at least three choirs.



## DENTAL CLINIC NEWS

While in Tanzania the Dental Clinic established by our synod dentists and with funding from the people of the synod completed its first stage of ministry. The dental work effort began about two years ago when Luanne Skrenes had dinner with the Chair of the Medical Ministry of the diocese, Dr. Amos Wakilasa. Together they planned this work. Without Luanne's vision, her attention to detail and her energy, this dental ministry would not have happened.

On a beautiful winter day in Dar es Salaam (80 degrees and sunny) the dental clinic staffed by Dr. Jim and Martha Hayward and Dr. Mike Orhanen with Ardith Frisk assisting, opened for business. A dedication service with Bishop Alex Malasusa began the day. The local television and newspapers covered the story. The patients had teeth



pulled and cavities filled. In my remarks to the dedication crowd, I commented that this work is an example of Christian partnership. Our Northern Great Lakes Synod sent dentists and equipment with dental supplies, the United Evangelical Mission (German Churches) provided the building facility, and the Tanzanians helped make it happen. God is at work!

Many smiling faces, more than seventy patients later, and lots of thanksgiving to God occurred as we completed this session. Our synod dentists brought modern care to the poorest of the poor in Dar es Salaam.



The Dental Clinic will continue thanks to the equipment purchased by our Synod's members. Two trained Tanzanian technicians will continue to use the drills and chairs, compressors and technical equipment which we contributed to the clinic now owned by the Lutheran diocese here. Much work can and will be done in the days ahead. I spoke with a man who at the age of 65 saw a dentist for the first time in his life thanks to our ministry. A woman with a very bad tooth found relief, and even with a very numbed up mouth told me "Asanti sana" or "deep thanks." Children from the community, some Christian, some Muslim, are smiling today because of teeth repaired. This has been a good effort and it continues. Thanks be to God!

## OUR SCHOOL AT KISARAWAWE

On Monday, August 6<sup>th</sup>, many in our group visited Kisarawe Lutheran Junior Seminary near Dar es Salaam. This junior and senior high school is known to many of you since for nearly twenty years our synod has contributed to its progress. And what progress they are making! On the site of the first German Lutheran mission house in Tanzania, Kisarawe today provides education for 700 students in more than a dozen buildings. I am impressed with the quality of the teachers now numbering thirty. Some will remember Godfrey, a teacher who lived for a semester in the Ishpeming, Michigan area, and who worked in the public schools in the Ishpeming area-NICE District. Today he is the senior teacher at Kisarawe and sends his greetings to all who knew him when he was in the United States.

The Kisarawe Lutheran School is ranked in the top 10% of all Secondary schools in Tanzania, both public and private. In some academic areas the school ranks in the top 5% as measured by the national examination scores. There are fifty-six Lutheran secondary schools in Tanzania with Kisarawe ranking eighth in the national test results. This is an important credential and tells us how important our synod support has been over the past fifteen years. The headmaster of the school, Ntarishwa Mkongo, deserves credit for his leadership. Bishop Malasusa considers the school to be an important ministry of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese and is personally dedicated to its success.

Our United States foreign aid grants received by the Northern Great Lakes Synod for the benefit of the Kisarawe School have been spent on the library, the dining hall, water projects, and girls' dormitory. Several dozen people from Upper Michigan and northeastern Wisconsin have traveled to Tanzania and worked on the building of these projects. All facilities are being used and have greatly improved the ministry of the school. Considerable work still needs to be done to make these new buildings totally usable. While water is now available on the campus, it is still not plentiful since the local government allows the school to receive it on just two days a week. The excellent showers and bathrooms are not being fully utilized because of water availability and pressure issues. Food is still being cooked out of doors in an old kitchen because it is cheaper to use than the new one. Further, maintenance and upkeep of the buildings is an issue that must be resolved if the school is to succeed.



The people of the diocese are grateful to our synod and to Pastor Robert Langseth for making all of this happen in the name of Jesus. Pastor Jim Duehring who was with us on the Tanzania trip (a former math teacher) was very impressed by the difficult mathematic equations written on the chalk boards in one classroom. "This is advanced work!" he said.

Today three ELCT pastors serve on the Kisarawe staff. One of those serving is Rev. David Mushi, Assistant Headmaster who is a graduate of the seminary at Makumira and a recipient of one of our synod scholarships. We should be delighted that there are thirty pastors in the Eastern and Coastal Diocese who are graduates of Kisarawe, several of whom have received support from our Northern Great Lakes Synod. Our synod's twenty years of work at Kisarawe is helping to form the pastoral leaders so desperately needed by a growing Tanzanian Church. The needs of the Kisarawe School, besides improved equipment and classrooms, include an expanded clinic that could serve the local community as well as the school.

Before we left the campus, the whole student body was called together. Standing in front of them we brought greetings from our Church. I asked God to bless the ministry of the teachers, staff and the work of the students as they build their lives and the future of the Church and their nation.

## ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY ON ZANZIBAR



During our time in Tanzania we journeyed to Zanzibar, an island in the Indian Ocean. Zanzibar is known for its beautiful sunsets, its spice farms (cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon etc) and its 98% Muslim population. In many ways Zanzibar feels more like an Arab location than part of a Sub-Saharan African nation.

The Lutheran community has about 1200 people on the Zanzibar island and our group from the Synod divided up and attended worship at three churches on Sunday. I preached at the largest congregation where about 500 people were present at the two services. Pastor Norman Peterson and Pastor Jim Duehring also preached at local parishes.



Islamic Zanzibar has presented challenges for the Christians there. Bishop Malasusa and the Roman Catholic Archbishop Pengo have been instrumental in reducing the level of anxiety there between Christians and Muslims. While relations have been tense in the past, our Lutheran pastors are quite optimistic about the future as moderate Muslim leaders seem to be gaining strength. I am very impressed about the work that is being done in Zanzibar as very committed lay persons and clergy are leaders in the congregations. And yes--the sunsets are beautiful!

## SIX HOURS WITH FIFTEEN TANZANIAN SEMINARIANS

It was my privilege to spend most of one day in early August with fifteen graduate seminarians in Dar es Salaam. These twelve men and three women were to be ordained on September 2nd and are now assigned to parishes within the Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. What a joyful time. It was an honor to talk with them. Our day seminar was directed by Bishop Alex Malasusa who spoke with these new pastors about life in the ordained ministry. The bishop spoke in straight forward language about the work of the parish.

The issues facing pastors in Tanzania are similar to those for our clergy in the Northern Great Lakes Synod. We spoke of the need to pray constantly; we shared our advice on self care and we talked of the importance of our spouses as we seek to do this work. We also talked openly about the temptations that pastors have in this ministry, the possibility of sin. Yet we shared how God works to build up the Church of Jesus. It was obvious to me that these fifteen people have good gifts for ministry and are ready to go as the newest pastors in this African Lutheran Church.

## **A SMALL CHURCH WITH VISION**

The island of Mafia in the Indian Ocean is a small and almost forgotten place in the world. Even Tanzanians do not visit this dusty little place. The airport has only a single dirt runway. Sixty thousand people, many without electricity or roads of any type, make their living serving the tourists from Europe who come to the island to scuba dive on the beautiful coral reefs. On the island of Mafia is a small Lutheran congregation. Only sixty people attend church there on Sunday. It has 80 members and is the only Lutheran presence in this Muslim island culture.

It was my pleasure to travel with Bishop Alex Malasusa, to a 24 hour retreat on the island. There on Mafia we met resilient Christians with a vision. They have very little in terms of assets or material wealth. Yet they have the Gospel and they have a vision of what God will do in their future. All of the Lutherans there have moved from the mainland Tanzania. All of them have family in Dar es Salaam or in other cities in Tanzania. Yet they have made Mafia their home and they want their church to grow. They love this island.

Somehow, the congregation has put together enough money to buy a plot of 8 acres on the beach. The land is undeveloped but they are praying about the possibilities. Should they build a retreat center? Should they build a clinic? Should they build a school? For now, they own the property and they are praying that God will tell them what to do and how to pay for whatever project the Church of Jesus Christ needs. They want to strengthen the congregation, they want to build God's kingdom. They want to grow!

I think of the smaller congregations in our Northern Great Lakes Synod. What kind of vision do we have? What are we praying for? These very poor Mafia folks, smack in the middle of the ocean, are testament to me that God will build the Church and God will give us a vision. Perhaps we need to just ask for a sense of direction and mission. Pray for vision!

## **BISHOP ALEX MALSUSA----IN THE UNITED STATES 2013**

It will be our privilege to host Bishop Alex Malasusa and his wife Ericah in our country next spring. Tentative plans include his visit to our Northern Great Lakes Synod Assembly in May. After he is with us in Marquette, he may attend an Ohio gathering of synods that relate to dioceses in Tanzania. He then will travel to our partner synod, Delaware-Maryland for their 2013 Assembly where I will do a Bible Study and Bishop Malasusa will preach at an Assembly Eucharist. The Delaware-Maryland synod also has an active Tanzanian companion diocese.

## A CHURCH WITH BIG ISSUES----YET THE CHURCH GROWS!



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!

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has its own serious issues. Any person active in our churches knows the challenges we face with an aging membership and financial struggles. On social issues we are not of one mind. 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?

Thomas A. Skrenes, Bishop  
September 7, 2012