

Report on Tanzania trip from June 9 – 26, 2014
Assistant to the Bishop: Rev. Katherine Finegan

Almost as long as I have served as a pastor in the Northern Great Lakes Synod, I have been aware of our companion synod relationship with the Eastern and Coastal Diocese of Tanzania. I heard Tanzanian choirs sing at Synod Assembly, I saw folks who had visited Tanzania proudly wear their African shirts and skirts at gatherings, I heard the stories of how they had been graciously welcomed and hosted, how the church there was growing so quickly the buildings and the church itself could hardly keep apace.

When I accepted the call to become the Assistant to the Bishop in February of 2012, it seemed to me only a matter of time before it was my turn to “join the club” of Tanzanian visitors. This past June, the generosity of the Synod made such a visit possible. With 15 days on the ground bookended by two days of travel coming and going, I received a full tour. With my husband and brother along, we were given a jam packed schedule. What follows is a summary of my impressions and experiences.

Wednesday June 11: Our first day began with a visit to the church at Kivule. A meeting of the Diocese Leaders was taking place in the still under construction sanctuary. There were perhaps 30 people in attendance.

Impression: It seems that church meetings look pretty much the same whatever country you are in.

Thursday June 12: Today Dave and I attended the Bible Study of All Staff of the Diocese in the Temboni/Western District, (Stephen left a day early to Zanzibar). It took place in another sanctuary under construction. The church was full, with about 400 or so in attendance. As per protocol, guests are expected to sit in the front. The topic of the day was baptism as the gospel reading for Trinity Sunday was Jesus at the Jordan. We were each given a translator to give us the gist of what was being said. Expressed was a concern for the morality of the baptized, what expectations were appropriate, when should baptism be refused. When we introduced ourselves, I contributed a little to the conversation. I talked briefly about the fine line



between preserving the integrity of the baptized life over against shutting down the conversation with refusal.



Our host for this day, and many of our days, was Pastor Stephanie Franz, a German woman who has been serving in Tanzania for the past 6 years. We learned that Tanzanians do not usually have dessert with their meal, and as a German woman, cake was often missed. To remedy this, Stephanie has an Austrian friend who is a member of her German speaking congregation at the Diocese. The

understanding between them is if Stephanie is ever in need of cake, or company, she can come and have both at her friend's house on the campus of the University of Dar es Salaam, as her husband is a teacher there.

Dave and I benefited from this arrangement, and we stopped for cake, coffee, and conversation.

That evening, we went to Ubungu to a meeting of the women leaders of the Diocese (think Synod WELCA or the SWO). (For the first hour, we had to raise our voices to be heard as a Seventh Day Adventist meeting was being held, and a man with a megaphone was, from the sounds of it, scaring his 7 listeners out of hell into heaven. The sound system broadcast his loud, emphatic, and enthusiastic (irritating?) voice to the whole neighborhood).

One of the main topics of conversation for the women leaders was the upcoming gathering of the KKKT women. The plan was to meet at the Mkuza Girl's School. It was reported that there was some concern by the Diocese that the dormitory was still under construction and would not be completed in time. However, the women wanted it at Mkuza to ensure that the Diocese would see to it that the construction on the dormitory would then indeed be completed.



They also chose fabric for their uniform, and considered the program. They expected about 100 women, from across Tanzania, to attend. The meeting lasted about 4 hours.

Impressionable moment: As our meeting came to a close, and we were fed supper, it grew dark. Outside, in the dark courtyard of the church, three choirs gathered for practice. They each took a corner, and their voices filled the night, and the courtyard, and the whole neighborhood. There was no accompaniment, no sheet music, no tuning forks. The director went from group to group, singing their part, and they learned by rote and repetition, in the dark. Also, I noticed that the moon had the same shadows, but they looked different, no doubt because I was looking at the moon at a different time of its cycle than usual.



After the meeting, we made an appearance at the Women's Bible Study that had been taking place in the sanctuary of Ubungu Lutheran Church. Again, we were introduced, and Dave won all kinds of hearts as he told them about his brief stint as a stay at home dad. Add that to my being the Assistant to the Bishop, and you would have thought we had single handedly won some very important battle. There were close to 60 or so women at the Bible Study.

Impression: I was surprised at the strength and fervor of the women's response to the news that I was the Assistant to the Bishop. I don't fully understand their place or status in the culture, but it's clear that they feel underappreciated.

Some of the women sang for us. We prayed together. And we left them to finish their meeting.



Friday June 13: We leave for Zanzibar. Along with Dean George Fupe, we took a teeny tiny plane to fly the twenty minutes to the island. Prayers were said, silently by me, before and during the uneventful flight. We did get an excellent view of the urban sprawl of Dar.

We were picked up at the airport by Pastor Lusungu Mbilinyi, a director of the

Zanzibar Interfaith Centre for Muslim/Christian Relations.

We go to the "Upendo means Love" center, have tea, and wait for my brother, Stephen, to join us. We hear about the Sewing School for women and girls, both Christian and Muslim, hear about the work of the Interfaith Center, and visit the sewing classes. They were pleased to show off some samples of their work.



Friday afternoon in Zanzibar, we went to a "Spice Farm," that is, a collection of growing spice plants that are planted near each other so that tourists such as ourselves can see what is grown in large

amounts on spice farms. This was not a cinnamon plantation or a vanilla farm, but we walked a path through a variety of plants and were shown what each one was. I took many pictures, but neglected to note what was what. So I have lots of pictures of bushes, trees, and grasses, all of which are some special spice, but exactly what spice is anyone's guess.



As we walked, one of our guides fashioned hats, a purse, necklace, and men's ties out of the palm branches. Here we are wearing our gifts.



Friday evening in Zanzibar, we had

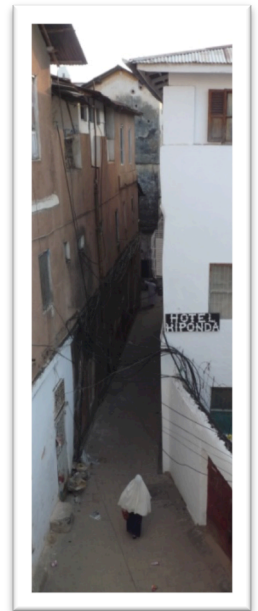
dinner in an open air market, Forodhani Gardens, with vendors eager to sell. We saw sugar cane juice being pressed from cane stalks, and a variety of seafood, "pizzas" and breads. After eating, we walked a short distance to the old Arab Fort. The following day a Film Festival was to begin so a large screen had been erected in the 12th Century (?) amphitheater. As it was the opening day of the FIFA World Cup, we joined the crowd of spectators watching the team from Camaroon play. It was one of those moments,

sitting in an old cobblestone theater, watching football on a large screen, with hundreds of Muslim men and boys (and a few women too I think). Cameroon lost, and we left a little early as a precaution against the crowds. However, there was no problem, and we walked back to our hotel in the dark (very few street lights).

The mosque across the street from our hotel was finishing up Friday school(?) as many little Muslim boys were learning the Koran through recitation and singing songs. They poured out of the building as boys will – running, jumping, skipping, and hooting - happy to be released from religious instruction. They disappeared down the darkened alleyways, or were met by mothers and older siblings waiting to walk them home.

Saturday June 14: The next morning, we walked from our hotel in the Stone City, (no cars allowed) and met up with Dean Fupe and Pastor Mbilinyi at Upendo. They told us that our plans to tour the city and shop Zanzibar were cancelled because early that morning, a bomb had exploded in one of the mosques.

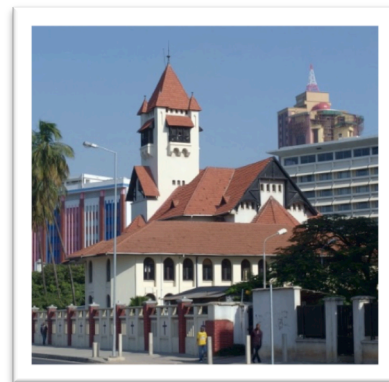
While our hosts didn't expect any trouble, their concern for our safety, and the randomness of any possible violence, made our walking the city unadvisable. Pastor Lusungu spent the next hours trying to change our flight to an earlier possibility. We had tea for awhile, and then did take a short trip (I suspect a scrambled together "plan B") to see the Mwanakwerekwe (the orphan child) Lutheran parish and dispensary. The center building was full of children at Saturday school, learning the Lutheran faith.





As we once again boarded our teeny plane to fly back to Dar, we sat near the front. And moments before the doors closed, the pilot says, “Oops.” And I said, “don’t say oops, Oops is not what you say when you’re just about to take off.” And he smiled and said, “I will not say oops again, Madam.” Too funny.

Sunday June 15 – I preached at the Azania Front Cathedral at 7:30am and 10:30am. Several choirs sang and several offerings were taken. I found the choir’s music to be very moving, but as I looked at the congregation, it seemed to me that this was regular fare for them. And I realized, of course, they hear this every Sunday, many times.



The announcements went on for over 20 minutes.

Since there is no written bulletin, all announcements of course are verbal. When I asked about this, there apparently has been some conversation, as folks are seeking a way to reduce the amount of time spent in announcement reading. In another conversation, I was told of the challenge that not everyone wants to hear the three to seven choir anthems every Sunday, and yet choirs practice to sing, and worship on Sunday is the incentive. As the choir is one of the major draws for congregational participation, they also don’t want to risk losing members who are disappointed if they don’t sing often enough.



At the end of the service, the whole congregation (all 600 or so people) recessed out the back of the church during a hymn. Dean Fupe and I arranged ourselves on a small set of steps in front of a mini-steeple clearly built for this very purpose. The elders for the day auctioned off “in kind” offerings, corn at the first service, honey at the second. Both were paid for and presented to Dave and I as a gift.



Monday June 16 – The morning began early, with a 5:30am pick up. I preached at the Morning Glory worship, again at the Azania Cathedral. This service exists because people must leave their homes very early in order to get to work on time. They arrive at 6:30am or so, and are happy to worship from 7:00 – 7:30am to begin their day. It is an ecumenical service, with charismatics, Catholics, and all manner of Christian folks. The Cathedral is packed to the rafters, close to 800 folks. It is a rockin’ service, one that gets the blood going through the music, the enthusiastic prayers, and the Spirit that blows these folks in every morning, Monday through Friday.



We stop at Mbagala Parish to see the rebuilding after last year's fire and violence from a flare up of Muslim/Christian tension.

We tour the Mtoni Deaconic Center and Dispensary for handicapped and disabled youth. The school only goes up to 17 or 18 years old. They discovered that the students regress when they return home, and their existence is less meaningful. So they are working on establishing a unit for disabled and handicapped adults, arranging meaningful work, and creating a

supportive community environment where these challenged adults can continue to learn and thrive.

Mwalusembe – We arrive late to distribute mosquito nets at the dispensary. Folks have been waiting since 9am that morning, and we arrive at 1:30pm. It is an intense process as 125-150 people have gathered to receive only 50 nets. Tensions rise and fall. The nets are distributed. And I am convinced of two very important things: 1/ We, the ELCA and the Malaria Nets campaign, are making a difference and 2/ we still have a lot of work to do.

The Radio – I am interviewed on the Lutheran owned radio station. Questions tend to focus on my thoughts about why women are not in diocese level positions. My response is to praise the women I have met and say that it is only a matter of time until women in the Tanzanian Lutheran church will have a chance to use their gifts and bless the diocese with their efforts.



Tuesday June 17 – We travel to Mkuza to tour the school and the church. We meet Lilian Benjamin Sikawa and see the new dormitory under frantic construction. I present the headmistress with a Frisbee, and soccer football and a bunch of pens and pencils. The girls are studying for their National exams. What began with 4 girls in 2010 is now a

school of 128, and with the dorm, they hope to have 200 students next term. Their most acute need is a well, since the school is on a hill and pumping is not an option. And within the next year, their science laboratory must be fitted with microscopes and other equipment or they will lose their government accreditation and license.

I was really glad to be able to tell the headmistress, and at



other KKKT meetings, that the women of our Synod had adopted the Mkuza Girl's School as their ministry focus. The news was greeted with joy, and I think relief, as their financial challenges are substantial. Upon my return, however, I realize that this "adoption" by the NGLS women's group

needs more traction. It so far is only a well-intentioned decision. I hope to make the support of the NGLS women of the Mkuza school an actuality.



After touring the school, we met with the ladies of the Mkuza Parish. They were interested in the ministry efforts of our women, "What do you do?" I was asked. Within that conversation, a very articulate woman stood to speak. She was an albino, and she was elegant and eloquent. Later on as we traveled through the city, I noticed posters encouraging compassion for those who have albinism, and listing resources. I learned that albino people can still be killed for their body parts, which some use in various rituals believing that there is

magic in albino skin and bones. The other few albino people I saw in public were always surrounded by a small group of people, leading them, caring for them, and I assume, protecting them.

Wednesday June 18th – We travel out of the city to the Kisarawe Junior Seminary. Pastor Mbilinyi of the Interfaith Centre told me how meaningful his time at Kisarawe was and how important it was to his faith formation. I liked it that the headmaster has a Finlandia pennant right behind his desk. 😊 The new boys' dormitory is days away from completion here. The girls' dorm was nicknamed "Paradise", the boys' new dorm is nicknamed "Heaven". Some impressions: Upkeep and maintenance of older buildings continues to be a challenge. Lack of access to materials, lack of funding for small repairs (or a repairman), or something that gets in the way of addressing problems when they're small instead of waiting until the problem is bigger seem to all contribute.



I presented the student body with two soccer footballs and more student supplies. When we went back to the headmaster's office, he proceeded to empty a file cabinet drawer of computer equipment so

that he could lock the precious soccer balls inside. The gym teacher told Dave that he was thrilled at the gift, since the school needed new soccer balls.



Thursday June 19-20 –

As Dave and Stephen received a tour of the Muhumbili Hospital, I left with Stephanie for Bagamoyo to help lead a retreat for Women Clergy. Of the 15 possible attendees, 12 participated. Some observations:

~Much of our time was spent building trust and sharing stories.



~ I heard from several of the women how much they appreciated this time of conversation. Included in the retreat was a time to tell their call story, and time to meet together with a partner whose name had been pulled from a hat, with a previous prayer that the Holy Spirit partner people together in the most life-giving way. Their conversation had to do with highs and lows (Glorias and Kyries) at home or in their personal lives, and then in ministry.



Also there was a Bible Study, led by a very accomplished pastor and doctoral student hopeful, Pastor Ngoy Leita Mwakilima. She led a Bible Study on the book of Esther, highlighting Esther’s success at having an impact and making change from within the culture, asserting herself even in the subservient position of concubine, and yet saving her people.

When we discussed future hopes, they voiced the desire that a woman would be the Dean one day, and that our companion relationship would be strengthened through a kind of pen pal correspondence with

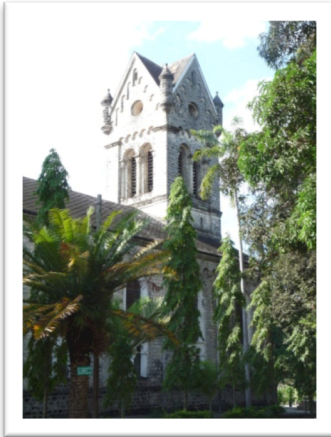
women ministers in our synod.

I had been given some clergy shirts and collars to give away, and at our last meeting, I brought them out. I did not know how many shirts I had. I did not know how many women were going to attend this retreat. Yet, each Tanzanian pastor found a shirt in her size. Only Mama Chua, the British pastor of the English speaking congregation, did not



receive a shirt, but since she was more interested in receiving some English Luther's Small Catechisms, I promised that the next trip would include some for her.

I had also brought with me a collection of Bath & Body Works lotions, hand gel, and shower gel. And these were a big hit. 😊



After the retreat, Stephanie and I met up with Dave and Stephen and we enjoyed an evening in Bagamoyo, and the following day for sightseeing.

However, that evening as I turned on the air conditioner in our room, I heard the power go out in the whole resort. Oops! We managed fine with open windows. Hopefully no one else was hugely inconvenienced.

Saturday June 21 – The four of us go to the Bagamoyo Mission, where slaves were bought in order to be rehabilitated as citizens or returned to their families. We also toured some old ruins of an Arab/Muslim cemetery whose claim to fame was how old they were, and that one of the tombstones clearly reads that a man and a woman, who died the same day, were interred together. Something that is not usually done, since women make the very ground “unclean”.

We also visit an art market, talk to Swedish scientists who are working on a malaria vaccine, are prevented from using the toilet because little bagel sized crabs are scuttling across the floor and hiding behind the toilet bowl.

Sunday June 22 – The original plan had been for me to preach at the Lutheran church in Bagamoyo but the distance to the airport was too far for us to make our plane, so I preached at the English speaking service at Azania Front. It was something of a relief to know that the congregation had enough of a grasp of English that they could understand what I was saying. Our host's son, Richard, attended with us, and that very day, joined this new to him congregation. He enjoyed the smaller size (80 or so in worship), the involvement of the children, and the spirit of community that was not as present in the larger (1000 in worship) congregation that his parents and the rest of his family belonged to. On this particular Sunday, there was a special blessing for graduates of high school and college, and a cake reception followed worship.



Sunday after worship, Dave and I leave for Arusha and the Ngorangora Crater. We are met at the airport by Constantine who brings us to our hotel and will pick us up in the morning. We check out our host's swanky new hotel, right next to our hotel, and receive a tour. From the balcony we observe several wedding processions of cars, honking their horns and a pickup truck

full of a brass band in the back, and also a Confirmation party using the park across the street for pictures.

Monday June 23 – The day dawns drippy, wet and cold. The drive to the crater is about two hours. We see Masai cattle herders and traditional round hut villages along with small houses with corrugated tin roofs and cement brick walls. The cattle herders wear the traditional bright red cloth, but every once in a while, they also wear a hooded parka over it as well. (It's in the low 60's, with a chilly wet wind. It's cold, but is it "parka cold?" Apparently for them, most definitely yes).



As we enter the park and ascend the crater rim, everything is in fog. We begin to have our doubts that we will see anything that day. Some zebras do loom out of the mist, but none will turn their head for the camera.

As we descend into the crater, the edge of the fog becomes more defined. The base of the crater is clear and we get to see a lot: cheetahs, lions, jackals, hippos, different birds, elephants, hyenas, wildebeests, monkeys, ostrich, warthog, vulture, it is a treasure trove of wildlife. The day is spent with our guide in a safari truck. On the way home, he also spots a giraffe. We spend the night in a lovely lodge full of western tourists.

Tuesday June 24 – We fly out of Arusha and are met at the Dar airport by Stephanie. She tells us that my brother has been in an accident. Apparently, on Monday, on his way to the airport for his flight to Uganda, the driver miscalculated a curb and blew the tire. As the driver and Stephen were surveying the damage, another driver plowed into the stopped vehicle. The car smashed into Stephen's leg and bent his knee in an unnatural and damaging angle. Stephanie picked him up and they spent the day getting a first hand view of the Tanzanian health care system. He had a CT scan of smashed knee, bruised but not broken arm, and an MRI too I think, and consulted with an orthopedic surgeon. He had to pay on the spot, and the bill came to less than \$300. His travel plans were delayed, and his knee may still need surgery but thankfully the accident didn't take his life, as it well could have. He continued his journey on Wednesday, flying to Uganda and then Nairobi to visit friends.



Because of the changes to his travel plans, Stephen was able to be a part of our good-byes. That night, we had our final dinner with the Machas and Dave and I presented our gifts: T-shirts for the men with the Michigan seal on them and the prison emblem on the sleeve (we emphasized that this is NOT what the prisoners wore, but had been made special for them), God's Work-Our Hands NGLS t-shirts for the whole family, some jewelry that I had for the girls, and the rest of the Bath and Body Works.

They presented us with two large Masai figurines, kangas, an African shirt and dress, and a framed Masai diorama.



Wednesday June 25 – Our goodbye luncheon takes place at the Diocese Headquarters. I am presented with a lovely wicker bag and more fabric, and Dave is given a shirt. We spend the afternoon doing some last minute shopping, packing, and we fly for home at 11:00pm that night.

Some final thoughts:

- With Moslem attitudes toward women, the Tanzanian Lutheran church will have to be that much more vocal in its support of women and immune to the cultural pull to not honor the gifts of women. However, the more they advance women in the church, the greater distance they have from common conversation with their Muslim neighbors, and perhaps the more potential for further dissension.
- In Arusha, we arrived to a red carpet reception that was in abeyance until the Vice President of Tanzania would show up. But three different tribal groups were dressed in full regalia, lounging on the grass waiting for the VIP to arrive, we weren't him. 😊.
- The lack of toilet tissue, I was prepared for, but not the absence of paper towels, and sometimes soap, in the restrooms. Hands were always air dried. If there is a next time, I might just carry a hand towel in my bag.
- I was surprised by the abundance of people, the crazy roads, the crazier traffic.
- While I had been told of this, it still was a little unnerving to have the women curtsy as they shook my hand.
- The strength of the response to learn that I was the Assistant to the Bishop. Women felt I had struck a blow for the cause. Women would ululate and hold up their fists as if a victory had been won.

- I found that speaking in simpler sentences so that non-English speakers would understand me had an unexpected effect on my own ability to speak English. So not only did I not know Swahili, but my grasp of how to speak English took several steps backward. And my ability to think and articulate my thoughts was also affected. It seems that if one speaks simply, so also does one think simply. My English vocabulary took a hit, however briefly.
- The anti-malaria medication I took, Malarone, is also an appetite suppressant. I had to apologize several times that I wasn't eating much, not because the food wasn't good, but because I had no appetite, which is a completely foreign thing to me.
- And a final word to the wise, know that if you wake up in the morning with a black tongue, it is most likely not that you have contracted some horrible tropical disease, but that you ate a Pepto bismal pill the night before and that's what can happen.