

“BE PREPARED IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON”

Bishop’s Tanzania Mission November-December 2014

It was a fast paced and spirit filled two weeks. The 2014 Bishop’s visit to the Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania began on November 25th and was completed on December 9th. Our delegation included me and Pastor David Hueter (Zion, Manistique/Bethany, Isabella), Pastor Christopher Johnson (Christ the King, Escanaba) and Pastor D.J. Rasner (Gloria Dei, Hancock). The purpose of the trip was to deepen our relationship as a synod with the Eastern and Coastal Diocese as well as to connect the three parish pastors with their companion congregations in Dar es Salaam. We feel we have exceeded our goals in this successful mission.

Convention-Eastern and Coastal Diocese

It was my pleasure to give the keynote address for the 32nd bi-annual convention of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. The conventions of the diocese are held every other year, usually in late November and early December in even numbered years. My keynote message/sermon on December 1 was on the theme of the convention from 2 Timothy 4:2: “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.”



The conventions of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese are in many ways organized like our synod assemblies. All pastors of the diocese are delegates as are representatives (usually two lay persons) from each of the congregations. There were about 300 delegates present and voting. In comparison, our Northern Great Lakes Synod has about 250 voting members. The diocese used the campus of the Kisarawe Lutheran Junior Seminary for the event. The dining hall which was built by our synod with a grant from United States Foreign Aid under our synod sponsorship was used for the main plenary meetings. A food tent outside the dining hall provided meals to all in attendance. Delegates of the convention either returned home each night and commuted for the day sessions or stayed at the newly built boys and girls dormitories for overnight accommodations.



At the convention there was time for worship, education and fellowship. There was also opportunity for ministry partners of the diocese to give greetings and informational announcements. Worship was central to the life of the convention with congregational choirs and special musical groups. Bishop Alex Malasusa chaired all sessions of the diocese convention. Sitting at the head table with him were the Assistant Bishop Pastor George Fupe, the Diocese General Secretary Richard Mariki and the Diocese Treasurer Comelord Swai. All of these officers are full-time employees of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese.

Pastor David Hueter gave a rousing opening Eucharist sermon. His attention to the theme and his passionate call for the gospel to be shared in the Advent season made for a powerful message. Pastor Hueter preached a clear message of grace while calling the church in Tanzania forward. His work was greatly appreciated by the diocese as evidenced by the number of times his sermon was referenced by the bishop and others during the three day convention.



The business of the diocese is handled very differently in Tanzania than what we experience in our synod. There were no procedural or policy resolutions received by the Eastern and Coastal Diocese Convention. Small groups were employed to generate ideas and to express concerns on a number of ministry areas. The convention agenda included these groups which looked at areas of church life. They made



recommendations. The areas explored by these groups included: “Bishop’s Report, Finance, Keynote Speakers, and Bishop’s Agenda.” These groups met largely outside. My observation of these groups would be that they are extremely serious about their task of making recommendations. In the plenary session, reports were heard from these groups. They were briefly discussed by the whole convention and then sent to the Diocese General Council for review and action. Budgets were not adopted. Instead the Diocese General Council, which is appointed by the diocese senior leadership (bishop and general secretary), makes the final decisions for the diocese.

One recommendation passed on to the Eastern and Coastal Diocese General Council was the formation of a department in the diocese that would assist Christian education in the congregations. One “break out” group discussed the worship life of the congregation. The consensus of that group and later of the whole convention was that sermons in congregational worship need to be longer. Indeed sermons should be longer than the Sunday worship announcements!



Delegates did vote on the chairs of the three program committees of the diocese. Nominees were selected by the Diocese General Council and submitted to the convention for election. An action requiring assent by the delegates was the election of the Assistant Bishop. A friend of this synod and a visitor to our synod assembly, Pastor George Fupe had served in the position of assistant bishop for ten years. Two years ago he met the constitutional limit of eight years in that office. However the bishop waived that provision at that time. He was allowed to continue to serve. This year the bishop recommended three candidates to the council. The bishop's preference was Pastor Mteule Lwiza to be the assistant bishop. That selection was ratified without debate by the diocese 250 to 25. Bishop Malasusa is very pleased that he has Pastor



Lwiza on his staff. He takes office immediately. Pastor Fupe will be assigned to one of the diocese congregations as pastor though that future role has not yet been determined.

The main speaker of the convention was a Christian economist, Christopher Mwakasege, who spoke continuously for more than two hours. I admired the endurance of the delegates who sat attentively in ninety degree heat without as much as a bathroom break. Mwakasege spoke on the economy of Tanzania and the church's responsibility in the development of the nation.

His major points as translated to me were:

- +Tanzania is one of the ten poorest countries in the world yet has the third largest gold mining potential of any nation. Resources are abundant in Tanzania yet extreme poverty exists in the country.
- +The national Tanzanian currency is being depreciated and inflation is a threat to the accumulation of capital.
- +Eighty percent of the population is still working in agriculture and thus commodity price shocks are a constant threat to growth.
- +With a fast growing urban population there still is no significant planning ethic in the nation.
- +Lack of capacity for storage and shipment of agriculture products threatens growth.
- +Financial institutions are unknown and unused by 80% of the population. Saving for the future (development of financial capital) is virtually unknown. "We do not save because there is no vision for what that saving will bring."
- +Tourism is under developed. For example there are insufficient hotels in Arusha and other safari locations.
- +Corruption both on a private and governmental basis threatens credibility and trust.
- +Half of the population of the nation is under age of sixteen. Sixty-five percent of the Tanzanian population is under the age of twenty four. There are huge economic dependency issues. Unemployment/underemployment remains at the heart of the Tanzanian problem.
- +Foreign assistance from the western nations is good for a time but will strangle a nation if it continues too long.

Mr. Mwakasege spoke of the Church's response to all of this. He suggested:

- +A vision for the future needs to be lifted up by the church. "Without vision the people perish. The role of the Christian leader is to protect the vision of God."
- +The church needs an institutional "Think Tank" who can advise the church and government on development.

The Secondary School at Kisarawe



I have never seen the buildings at the Kisarawe Lutheran Junior Seminary look better! Our synod has been instrumental in the construction of the library, the dining hall, and two dormitories. The diocese worked hard to make the buildings and school grounds look their best for the diocese convention and the 400+ people that would be present for the event. Walls were painted, grass cut and repairs were made on the facilities. Maintenance of existing buildings continues to be a challenge, yet these buildings seemed to be maintained well. The diocese used the dining hall for the general plenary meetings of the convention. There were about 350 people organized around chairs and tables in the hall.

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The kitchen in the dining hall building which was not being used for a time seems now to be employed fully. The large stove ranges have been replaced with a smaller gas fired stove. The headmaster at Kisarawe seems satisfied with the dining hall. There is another electrical oven in use in the kitchen space.



The USAID/synod built dormitories are completed and fully functioning. The girls' dormitory, named in Pastor Robert Langseth's honor, and the recently completed boys dormitory, now called the Bishop Thomas Skrenes dormitory, are very important buildings on the Kisarawe campus. The bathrooms are working even as the water pressure is often low. Some days the water systems work better than on other days. Another boys dormitory has been built consisting of rooms around an open courtyard. The construction project was paid for by the diocese and named in Bishop Malasusa's honor. A water well has also been constructed. The new buildings and the well were dedicated on the first morning of the convention.



In conversation with Treasurer Comelord Swai and Pastor Robert Langseth, it was agreed by all of us that a new grant would be applied for in 2015 even as our 2014 grant was denied by USAID (American Foreign Aid). Mr. Swai thinks that the grant we applied for was denied because it was too expensive. He will be working with Pastor Langseth to further review the denied grant and to make plans for the 2015 grant due this spring.

We were unable to access the Bishop Dale Skogman Library since it was locked and not in use during the school vacation when the diocese convention occurred. This was the first building project of our synod.



Mtoni Deaonic Center/Clinic



An important part of the work of the church is providing social services to the community. A network of clinics and dispensaries exist to support this work. The diocese has now named a new medical director after more than a year of searching. He will take office in mid-January 2015 and will supervise the work of all of the clinics of the diocese.

We visited both the Mtoni Deaonic Center for developmentally disabled children and the Mtoni Medical Clinic. They both are located within a few hundred yards of each other in a largely Muslim area of Dar es Salaam. In Tanzania there are very few places for developmentally disabled to learn. Most disabled children are confined to their homes and are not educated. This center is one of only a few in the entire nation and is considered by the government as a model school for the nation's future. Mtoni Deaonic Center serves eighty children in the residential week day program.



Children attend until they reach adulthood. The institution also has teachers who visit the homes of other developmentally disabled children who are not enrolled in the school or who are too young yet to become students. The diocese is considering developing a program for adult “graduates” of the center so that they will not regress with their skill development. When we were there we met two Norwegian college students who were doing a service semester in Tanzania at the Mtoni Center. The Scandinavian and German

Churches are very involved in this ministry.

The Mtoni Medical Clinic is the only medical facility in this Dar es Salaam neighborhood of 58,000 people. We were told that fifty to one hundred patients come to the clinic daily. When we were there several young mothers with babies were present. Malaria is the main reason for the visits to the clinic. The clinic also does inoculations for childhood diseases. We saw the office where mothers and babies come to receive the necessary immunizations and we also saw the one freezer where the medicines are stored. The regular pharmacy and lab of the clinic are very modestly stocked with supplies. The clinic has an ultra sound machine but no one knowledgeable in its operation.





The staff of the clinic seemed earnest but turnover of trained medical people is a constant problem. The diocese cannot compete with other organizations or even the government that offers better compensation to the trained staff. There is a nurse-midwife at Mtoni but a resident doctor is being sought so that the clinic can open a maternal area for the delivery of babies. We were told the city government wants the diocese to provide a birthing center as soon as possible. The house where this maternal service will occur is nearly ready. Our synod has assisted in this effort.

We also visited the Mtoni Dental Clinic where our synod dentists and assistants have served and where we placed almost \$20,000 of dental equipment in 2012. The dental chairs are intact, and the dental equipment is locked in a closet. The air conditioners were not running. The sinks did not seem to be functioning. Some dental work continues to happen. Of the two dental clinicians, one has left for employment with the government.



The diocese brings a dental technician along with an eye technician and a medical officer to the parishes in its effort to provide screenings for parishioners on selected Sundays. It was reported to us that about thirty-six of these visits have been made with over 180 people examined. The screenings started out as free to the patient but now a small fee is charged to reimburse some of the clinic expense. The Assistant General Secretary for Social Services, Robert Charles, promised me that a complete inventory of all dental equipment would be completed early in 2015 so that our synod plans can be made for another dental mission in the summer of 2015.

Mkuza Girls' Secondary School

The Mkuza Girls School is a new ministry of the diocese. This year 177 girls in Forms 1-4 live at this beautiful growing campus outside of Dar es Salaam. The girls have a rigorous and very disciplined life. Chapel services are required twice a day and the morning begins for these girls at 5:00 a.m. and concludes by 10:00 p.m. When we were at the school the girls were tending to their personal laundry using water and rocks to clean their clothing. The women's groups of the diocese have taken responsibility for partial funding of the school. New office and classroom space has been built. It is very attractive.





The new dormitory was built by the women of the diocese. Its cost about \$90,000, of which half was paid in cash by offerings from the women of the diocese and half is owed and promised to be paid by the women’s organization. Our synod has contributed about \$10,600 to date for the school. This funding will be used to assist in the building of science classrooms and laboratories. Our Synod Women’s Organization partners with the school and continues to raise money for this effort.

Tumani University-Dar Es Salaam

Providing college education continues to be an important part of the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. The Tumani University (TUDARCO) has moved its location to Coca Cola Road in Dar es Salaam. This branch of the national Lutheran University has about 2,000 students and 94 employees. They are soon to complete a major building project. And what a project it is! The ten story building will house most of the university programs and administration. Early in 2015, the facility should be occupied. We toured the \$5 million project (built by a Chinese construction firm) visiting every floor including the roof. This new tower is supposed to be the first stage in a multi-year building program. The major programs of this branch of Tumani are business and education. We were impressed with the administrators of the school who seemed to have long experience in both education and in the ministries of the church.



Church Life



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. And further, at the end of 2013, our eighty-two congregations here in the Northern Great Lakes Synod claimed 27,825 members.

In honest conversation the pastors of one of the largest diocese congregations told me, “We are building all of these big churches. Most now seat 1000 people and more. Will we fill them in 10 to 15 years?” There is some anxiety about the growth of the church and how to deepen the faithfulness of the membership. The church in Tanzania struggles with other Christian organizations that preach a “prosperity Gospel,” which claims that God will bless a person with riches if they are more faithful and more giving to the church. In economically poor Tanzania this economic corruption of the Gospel has been attractive. Generally in Africa there has been a Pentecostal surge in all the Christian churches. This movement that focuses on faith healing and the gifts of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) has been divisive. The diocese seems to be managing these issues well. With fast membership growth also comes considerable financial issues. According to Diocese Treasurer Comelord Swai, the largest 15-20 congregations are supporting themselves financially with surpluses. The rest are in some degree struggling.



It is a wonderful experience to lead worship and to preach at a service of more than 1000 people as I did on my last Sunday in Tanzania. I had the delight of baptizing eleven infants and small children. We also confirmed fifty youth and Bishop Malasusa and I distributed communion to nearly a thousand persons at the four hour service at Kinzerije 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, synods, districts or conferences. 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 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!”

The Future

God is at work in our relationship with the Eastern and Coastal Diocese. Our Northern Great Lakes Synod Companion Committee will need to look at the next steps in our relationship. For twenty 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 Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Bishop Malasusa brings much to our companionship. He has visited our synod on two occasions. He has promised to visit us again in 2015 as schedules allow. Bishop Malasusa is considered the leader of the African Lutheran community. It is no secret that his reconciling voice continues to be important as the decisions our ELCA has made in regards to human sexuality have not been without controversy amongst our African sisters and brothers. His commitment to unity is a gift to us.



Our future work together as synod and diocese remain one of my priorities. Plans are already afoot for another dental mission in 2015. At least one congregation (Messiah, Marquette) is planning a summer 2015 trip. Pastor Robert Langseth, tireless in his efforts, is formulating a new U.S. Foreign Aid grant application for next spring. A youth trip may occur in 2016. 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 work on!



+Thomas A. Skrenes
Bishop
January 23, 2015

“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 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!”

Pastor David Hueter
Zion, Manistique and
Bethany Isabella Michigan

“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

“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 is 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 work that it took to entertain, despite the 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 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



Bishop Alex Malasusa Remarks 2014

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

December 8th-- Luther House

Good evening. It is my privilege this evening to offer a few reflections about Bishop Skrenes and his team. It is an honor to say a few words on this day of thanksgiving. A day to thank servants of the Living God for giving their life to Jesus and by doing so sharing their life with us. As we gather with you Bishop Skrenes, together with Pastor David Hueter, Pastor D.J. Rasner and Pastor Christopher Johnson, it is my joy and privilege to address you. After all the joy, excitement and intensity of these days of your most historic visit, we now cherish this moment of prayerful reflection with you.

This conference room holds a precious place in our history. It is a place where we meet for devotions as well as meet to say farewell to our friends. This moment with you is in a kind of 'Upper Room'. Here, in your guidance and blessing, we seek the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for our mission.

During our general assembly you blessed us by the powerful preaching. You were bold enough to speak about how to spread the good news of Jesus Christ in all seasons. Time and again, you have spoken of the importance of the contribution of the Christian faith in our society. We can already sense a new openness to this question, and to the role of faith communities, in the hearts and willingness of so many people. We will pursue and build on these opportunities for the common good of all.

You have urged in the installations of our priests to be faithful to their ministry and we bishops to be fathers to our priests. This we will strive to do. You have meditated with us on the 'unity between Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, the Eucharistic sacrifice which he has given to his Church and his eternal priesthood' in which we participate in daily living. Your words point to our baptismal calling 'to bring the reconciling power of his sacrifice to the world in which we live.

Dear Bishop, you gave us new hearts for the tasks ahead, especially in the wonderful gift of social services, it is a blessing model for us to follow. We have named one student hall of residence after your name. Indeed it is your effort and contribution. By doing so, we recognize and appreciate the work of fostering vocations and forming men and women to be the future generations of professionals in our church and nation. This is a work to which we are deeply committed and I know you will leave with great joy reflecting the position and standard of seminary.

Dear Bishop at this visit you have contributed richly to our history and to the shaping of our future. You lift our hearts and reinvigorate us for our ministry especially in the example you give to us with your openness of heart, keenness of mind and gentle eloquence of expression in your unfailing witness to the mystery of Christ.

And so, Dear Bishop and your colleagues, on behalf of my church, I pledge our love and prayers for your vital and rich ministry in the Church. May Almighty God bless you and inspire you in your service of love.