



Eastern Washington-Idaho

God is good

Group travels to Tanzania to strengthen ties with companion synod

Text by Ann Frerks □ Photos by Marj Nishek

God is good, **all the time.** All the time, **God is good.**

This call and response refrain resounded each day as we gathered with our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Ulanga—Kilombero Diocese in Tanzania. Thirteen from our synod traveled there last September to work with and learn from one another. What an honor God has given us to walk together sharing our joys and sorrows, our challenges and hopes, and, most importantly, our common faith in Jesus Christ.

God is good! We arrived safely in Dar es Salaam and were greeted by two glowing faces shouting *Karibu! Karibu!* (Welcome).

From the moment we stepped off of the plane until our trip was over, Aida Mkwenya and Philorian Mpendaye, both tireless workers in the promotion of health and education in the diocese, accompanied us. They were our teachers, translators, guides and friends.

After leaving Dar es Salaam our first stop was the home of Bishop Abel Mwambungu in Ifakara. Although it was very late, the bishop welcomed us. He thanked God for bringing us safely to our destination and for the friendship that has continued to develop between us. Then he walked us out into the starlit night and bid us a restful sleep.

The next morning we worshiped in Ifakara. It was Children's Sunday, and the benches were full. From the youngest to the oldest, groups of children sat on one side of the church, with adults on the other.

Children are children wherever you go. Some were wiggling, some were giggling, and some had to be separated. And parents are

parents wherever you go. Some were crying tears of joy, some were grinning with pride, and some were giving the "look" to a misbehaving child.

Worship in Tanzania is not limited to one hour. The sermon can be very long. It's not unusual for the collection plate to be sent around more than once, depending on the needs of the community.

But the most striking thing about worship is the joy—the movement, the singing, the dancing among these Lutherans who use their entire bodies in praising God.

When the children came up one by one to recite their Bible verse, their feet were moving, their hands waving and their voices shouting. The same was true with the adults. A rhythmic shuffling of feet set the rhythm preparing the worshipers to join in. A single voice began the chorus. Then the choir joined in. Soon the whole congregation was up, their feet moving and singing the refrain with a harmony as natural as breathing.

And when worship was over, they went out with joy for God is good, **all the time.** All the time, **God is good.**

The road to Malinyi was narrow and bumpy, once again causing us to be late. As we drove up to Tumaini Lutheran Secondary School the sun was setting, but in the distance



The Rev. Moses, Margie Fiedler and the Rev. Ann Frerks prepare to serve communion under the trees at Tumaini School.

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we could see many people. They were jumping up and down. Then we heard music, amazing music that filled the night.

We stepped off the bus into warm embraces as the students enfolded us into the procession that led us to the guest quarters. That was the beginning of a week of gracious hospitality thanks to Headmaster William Ngullo and the staff of Tumaini Secondary School and Bible School.

“Education is freedom,” teacher Philorian Mpendaye said. And education comes in many forms at Tumaini.

There are the formal classroom studies that include mathematics, science, history and language. But education is not limited to within the walls of the classroom.

There are a variety of learning experiences at this school. Students take part in caring for creation by keeping the grounds clean. They tend to the crops and animals that provide food for the table. They assist in the building projects, making and hauling bricks. They help out in the kitchen, preparing meals.

No wonder they take such pride and ownership in their school. Students consider secondary education a great privilege, and they apply

themselves diligently to the tasks set before them.

There are 400 students at Tumaini. They are literally outgrowing the school. Dormitories are crowded. There is no building large enough to hold an assembly. There is no dining room for the students. Food storage is limited for there is no refrigeration.

Construction and repair of buildings is hampered by lack of equipment. The water pumps are solar powered and only available during the day, yielding only four hours of electricity per day. Classrooms are barely adequate. There is no student library. Still there is joy and singing every day.

There was joy working on the duplex for teachers. Adequate housing for teachers is important for maintaining a good teaching staff.

Because Tumaini is a boarding school, on-site supervision is needed. The project was completed in time for the dedication, which took place on graduation day. We joined the celebration, singing and dancing in procession along with proud families and exuberant teachers.

Tumaini Bible School on the same campus educates men and women who feel called to be evangelists. These students will go out and

preach the word of God to those who have not heard. Many of them have left their families to study at Tumaini. Many will go out in Christ’s name, with no guaranteed income.

We visited the Lugala Hospital, a 135-bed facility that is staffed by only two doctors who work tirelessly to alleviate pain and suffering.

Last year 1,300 babies were delivered there.

Wayne Nishek and Rebecca Smith work with the students and local carpenters on a duplex for Tumaini teachers. The trusses have been hoisted to the top of the walls; next come the roofing sheets.

Sometimes the maternity ward is so full, mothers sleep two to a bed. Many needs range from more doctors to improvements of the physical plant to supplies and equipment. By our standards, the hospital seems ill-equipped, but for the people of Malinyi and the surrounding areas, it is a place of hope.

Time went by too fast. Before we knew it, we bid farewell to our friends. Once again there was dancing and singing, hugs and tears.

We reached Ifakara, where we bid farewell to Aida Mkwanya who had been with us from the beginning. As the doors of the bus opened at her exit, we all voiced our gratitude for all she had done for us.

Aida smiled. There were tears in her eyes. She looked at us and said, “We give thanks to God, for it is God who has brought us together.”

She would not have us leave without reminding us of the source of our companionship. How important that was for us to hear, for we often take credit for what belongs to God.

We who represented the EWAIID Synod will hold in our hearts the memories of these wonderful people, their hospitality, their generosity.

And hopefully we will never forget that God is good, **all the time**. All the time, **God is good!** □

Ann Frerks is pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran in Cheney, Wash.



Tumaini students break out in singing and dancing.

Many paths to follow for congregational mission

God's beloved people,

Elsewhere in this supplement (page 31D) you'll find my invitation to an event with Richard Bliese, president of Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. The largest of our seminaries, Luther is the school from which the majority of our synod's pastors have graduated.

Each year our synod makes a gift to this school so it can continue to train pastors. Each year our synod supports seminarians so their debt on graduation still permits them to serve small congregations.

Besides his work as a school administrator, Bliese is one of our teachers of mission—encouraging us to think with imagination and curiosity about the world before us and how God is at work to encourage us, bless us and appeal to those who do not know such love.

We're hearing many such voices these days as we commit ourselves and the ministries of the synod toward mission. My goal is to get each of our ministry sites up and attentive to the call of God, and then be eager to choose from among the many different paths available for mission.

Bliese will talk about evangelism from a Lutheran perspective and offer a path through this "mission matrix." Some congregations will choose this path.

Others may follow Natural Church Development (NCD), a patient process of building missional capacity with each program year. Our synod has encouraged the training of more than 10 NCD "coaches," and they are now available to work with congregations in mission.

Other congregations are following a model of "transformation" toward new ministry and have received training from our church-wide experts. Many are reading "Reclaiming the Great Commission" and using its insights for growth.

I hope you see from this listing that there is no thought of trying to mold each congregation to cookie-cutter standardization. In fact it is the unique gifts of your congregation, your people, your site, your age and your partnerships that will determine a way forward.

All of this is joyful work, don't you think? We're finally responding to the call of Jesus to be his disciples and follow him.

God be with you for the adventure!
Bishop Martin Wells



The companion synod program

The companion synod relationship exists to strengthen one another for life and mission within the body of Christ. It offers us the privilege of participating in the life of another church through prayer, study, communication and exchanges of people and resources. It opens our eyes to the global challenge that Christ offers us and calls us to deepen our commitment and discipleship as individuals and as a community of faith.

Donations

To help the Tumaini Lutheran School or the Lugala Hospital, send donations to the synod office at 314 Spruce St., Spokane, WA 99201. Please designate whether the funds are for education or medical support.

Video

To see video from the trip, go to www.youtube.com and search for "marjnishek."



Pastor follows the call to mission

By Elizabeth Luiten

The Rev. Jillian Ross, an ELCA pastor called to minister to the people of Yakima County's Lower Valley, sees the Great Commission lived out each day.

"When I came to the valley five years ago, there was no ministry," Ross said. "I traveled to all of the towns in the valley and determined Wapato was a good site. My first year, I knocked on doors of businesses, schools, community projects and homes—introducing myself."

"This valley is 90 miles long, 60 miles wide with eight or nine towns," Ross said. "I thought the church was crazy to call me here and that God was



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE REV. JILLIAN ROSS

laughing at the folly of such an ambitious plan. Once I stopped trying to be goal oriented, I started meeting God's goal for this mission: to love."

Slowly, the people came to know and trust Ross. She found an important connection to the people through

Crista enjoys a swim outing with the Rev. Jillian Ross of Yakima Valley Hispanic Outreach Ministry.

the children. Four summers ago, she offered to take children to the local pool once a week. The tradition continued, and some weeks there are 70 children who gather to swim, eat and play together.

From this group, Ross started a youth group that met weekly. "The kids were my best teachers," she said. "I swam with them, laughed with them and ate pizza with them.

"Soon they read the Bible with me, prayed with me and looked for me. Their lives are hard, yet their spirits are strong and hopeful. They give me hope."

"I am also known as *La Maestra*," Ross said. "Two nights a week I teach English for adults. The program is secular, yet the love of Christ is alive and well as 50 people come together and marvel at our ability to make language sing.

"Mission is not simply charity and giving, it is about creating the love of Christ through interdependence, sharing of resources and a respect for cultural differences.

"It is about being blown open by the open hearts of others, to be present in joy and sorrow, to share food always, to read the Bible, to pray, to sing, to dance, to respect and love people and to advocate for justice."

Ross said she has found that all God calls her to do is "heed carefully the call to 'Go Forth.'"

"When I came here, God's spirit was waiting to move people," she said. "Now the people are moving with God." □

Elizabeth Luiten is a family and youth ministry director at Immanuel Lutheran in Moses Lake, Wash.

Bishop Wells

Sorting out the Great Commission muddle

We've thrown lots of information your way in the last year. Some of you may be confused about what the synod's Great Commission effort means for your congregation. Here's an opportunity to sort it out.

On June 3 in Boise, June 4 in the Tri-Cities and June 5 in Spokane, Richard Bliese, president of Luther Seminary, will offer a way to think about the array of choices each congregation faces in becoming Great Commission and Great Commandment missionary outpost.

Do you remember the first time you encountered a two-dimensional graph? Some factors occupy the vertical dimension and others the horizontal? Together they form a powerful way to think about the interaction of different elements of a puzzle.

Think this way: We have at least four Lutheran, confessional touchstones that guide us in thinking about mission. In addition, we are already the church—this is our identity. From

our identity we do certain things—this is our ministry. Finally, we are a certain kind of organization—this is "how" we do ministry. When these three factors of our local situation are related to the confessional principles that make us Lutheran, well then, we have a "matrix" that describes the *whole* of our ministry together.

If each congregation fills in the 12 "blanks" that make up this matrix, each will have a picture of its present ministry. It is from this picture that we can begin to make choices about the challenges of ministry in our day.

I hope you will join us for these exciting evenings with Bliese. We'll learn a great deal about ourselves and have a basis to thinking about our next steps in becoming missional congregations.

Please save the dates for an evening of hors d'oeuvres and program with Bliese. □