



# The gift of companionship

We have much to learn and share with our brothers and sisters in Tanzania

By Heidi Cryer

PHILORIAN MPENDYE



In July, workers started building the dining and assembly hall at Tumaini Lutheran Seminary in Tanzania.

**E**arly last year, I spent three months as a short-term teacher at the Tumaini Lutheran Seminary in Tanzania. The school is in the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, the companion synod of the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod.

Tumaini Lutheran Seminary is in a small village a long way down a rut-filled dirt road. The seminary is actually two schools: a secondary school and a Bible school. In Tanzania, the word “seminary” simply refers to a school that includes a religious curriculum. So the seminary is not a university that prepares clergy, but a secondary school and a Bible school that prepares evangelists. The school began in the 1960s as a camp, then became a Bible school. In the 1980s it began accepting secondary students. The school currently has 25 Bible students and 250 secondary students.

Working side-by-side with teachers, students and staff at the school gave me a wonderful new perspective on life. It was an experience that was humbling and challenging as well as invigorating and empowering.

This is my (slightly edited) blog posting from Feb. 22, 2009:

*It is Sunday morning. Church would normally be starting in half an hour, but it is raining. Not real hard, yet. It rains frequently from February through April and during December and January as well. For*

*five months of the year, it might rain on a Sunday morning. “So what,” we might say in America. But here at Tumaini, it means postponing worship. Church is held outside in the shade of a big tree because nowhere indoors is big enough for everyone to gather.*

*Rain also means other changes. Breakfast this morning (the only day it is provided free-of-charge for students) has to be done differently. Usually the students gather, put their bowls on the ground and wait for a leader to fill their bowls with rice and beans. When it’s not raining, each person takes their meal to eat in the dormitory courtyard or under a tree. But in the rain, you can’t put bowls on the ground. So the meal is postponed or served from the small kitchen, which takes a very long time. The students get wet while getting their meal and have to find an indoor spot, such as a classroom, to eat in.*

*Cleanup after the meal means washing dishes from a hose stuck out of a hole in the brick wall of the kitchen. The hose has been moved several times since I’ve been here. A trench drains the water.*

*Last night the students had entertainment night, a talent show at which they sing or perform a skit. The students had great fun. I went down for a while to watch. But, of course, it is outside. The lighting is poor and rain cancels the show before its conclusion.*

*Often morning prayer services get cut short or canceled because of the rain.*

*Last week the students gathered for*

Cryer is an associate in ministry at Lord of Life Lutheran in Kennewick, Wash.

Continued on page D

## Stretching ourselves as a synod

New staff position helps our churches become more mission-oriented

The Rev. Helga Jansons



**T**he world needs more than fabulous singing, potlucks and fellowship. People are looking for hope. They need a relationship with

the God who is central to our lives

Many of us have been Lutherans for such a long time that we don't recognize what we have to offer. This isn't the time to take ourselves for granted. Instead it's the time to rediscover who we are. What are the guiding principles in our lives as Christians and as the Lutheran church? What are our strengths and assets? Asking these questions can help us discern what God needs us to do in our respective contexts.

I like things as they are. I like tradition and the good ol' days—safe, secure and the same. I like being in the church and letting the people come. But Jesus leads me on a different path. After saying "Come follow me," he said, "Go and make disciples." Jesus' disciples were on the go. We don't know much about their time in worship services. We do know that they followed Jesus by walking among the people. They said and did things they had never done before.

*Jansons started in her role as director of evangelical mission in November. You can reach her at 509-380-7122, [helga.jansons@elca.org](mailto:helga.jansons@elca.org) or [helga.jansons@ewaidsynod.org](mailto:helga.jansons@ewaidsynod.org).*

We have a challenge before us. Do we stay safe and secure in our buildings and keep things the same? If so, how can we hope for new life? We say we want to pass the faith to the next generations. Are we reaching them? Are we doing all it takes? There is no room for timidity. It's better that we make mistakes than to try nothing new. Scary? Yes, but if transformation comes from God, we can hold onto God. God will guide us in how to share our faith among those who don't know Jesus. As people of the resurrection promise of new and eternal life, we are to be open to God's call to us now.

I am your new director for evangelical mission in the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod. There is nothing I would rather do than help our church see how wonderful it is and encourage people to be more missional.

Even though I've been a pastor for 17 years, I've had and am still having a conversion experience. I'm in the throes of understanding what it really means to be missional—to reach out and connect with others and with the community.

Sometimes missional means having conversations about faith and at other times it means listening with curiosity to others.

Through some twists and turns in my faith journey, I have discovered the unique gifts that the Lutheran church offers. In the past few years I have worshiped in 30 different churches and have observed how they do things. I've served as an interim in a growing, young, evangelical church

and have paid attention to what attracts young people.

The way we live out our Christian calling is linked to loving our neighbor, sharing the faith that gives us hope and generous living.

This is a critical time in the life of the church. The ELCA is providing all congregations and clusters access to resources that will support them to reach out into the community, become more missional and grow. Each synod will have a director for evangelical mission on staff through ELCA Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission. The synod directors are paid through the offerings we send to the ELCA. Directors are accountable both to the synod and the ELCA churchwide unit. Most synod directors are also responsible for providing stewardship resources and education.

The purpose statement of Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission is to engage leaders in the formation of evangelizing congregations that make disciples for Jesus Christ and equip people who use their gifts for God's reign in the church and in the world.

My responsibilities are to:

- Pray for the synod, congregations and pastors. (If I'm directly working with you, know that I am praying for you by name.)
- Develop leaders
- Engage leaders who are participating or would like to participate in synodical mission tables. These are teams that plan for new and renewed evangelizing congregations, mission support/stewardship education and missional strategies.

- Be on the lookout for people who would like to become mission developers or redevelopers. (I may nudge some of you!)
- Equip congregations to re-root in the community and to implement evangelical outreach and stewardship by using demographic resources.
- Encourage and begin ministry among ethnic communities and the poor.
- Support communities who would like to use the emergent church model or other creative ministry and worship practices.
- Assist new church starts and ministries in writing profiles and applying for funds.
- Connect churches with resources such as Natural Church Development coaches and Transformational Ministry training.
- Facilitate discipleship, faith practices and spiritual renewal formation.
- Promote stewardship education and create opportunities such as Consecration Sunday and the Stewardship Key Leader Program.
- Create networks and connect people with each other as I discover their interests and gifts.

My prayer to God is “use me.” Here’s how you might do that. Invite me to do a presentation, preach or lead a workshop. I’m available to pastors, lay leaders, congregations and clusters. Engage me as the “outsider” who can challenge your church and encourage you, as well as to empower you and equip you. By hearing your stories I may also be able to help you discern what God might be up to in your church and community.

I live in Kennewick, Wash., with my husband, Kirk, and boys, Erik and Lukas. I will work from home and travel to meet you in your congregations. I hope to serve God’s church in our synod well. □

# Entrust our time to God’s loving care



God’s beloved people, I’m always fascinated with the challenge of producing an article that won’t appear for three months. As I

write, on Dec. 8, 2009, it is 5 degrees outside (remember?) and we are still two weeks from the Winter Solstice and the official beginning of winter. By the time you read this article we’ll be entering the final weeks of Lent and adjusting our clocks again on March 15, the Ides of March.

There is so much that will happen between now and March and it sets the mind to wonder and wander over that territory: Christmas shopping records will be recorded, football championships will be decided and March Madness will be upon us. We’re all praying the economy will improve and that the spring housing market will be robust. By March, we’ll know what our resolutions will be at synod assembly and we’ll have a slate of nominees to be voting members at the 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. More than anything we will be living out the days of March having entrusted them, today, to God’s keeping.

And so the question for you, dear reader, is this: How shall I entrust the days ahead to God’s loving care?

This will be a different question if you are experiencing an incurable disease. This will be a hard question for those in prison. Today’s Advent word is from Zephaniah and he counsels that “the day of the Lord is at hand.” It always is, isn’t it? It is always the day of the Lord because for some this is their last day on Earth. There is no more time. So Zephaniah counsels a singular focus on God and challenges the indolence and indifference that always draw us into complacency.

Today let us confirm that time is valuable and that time itself is the arena for our faithfulness or unfaithfulness.

In a few weeks we will once again experience the profound meaning of Holy Week. Is it possible to recover that time by a singular focus on our salvation? As Jesus experienced resurrection he introduced new meaning to time, time we now call “proleptic” time. This fancy term means we live today from a reality of the future already declared true for us. That truth is this: Every moment of your life is God’s time and God has time for you, both a present and a future. But it’s God’s time, not ours. What God has chosen to do is to redeem your time and make it valuable. Even from mid-December I can see that much, and it makes today and tomorrow sacred time. There is no time to waste.

Peace be with you,  
*Martin Wells, bishop*

# Eastern Washington-Idaho

*Continued from page A*

*morning talk. Suddenly they were all running away! Biting ants had infested their usual meeting spot, so the students had to find another place to gather.*

*These are some of the reasons why the project to build the dining and assembly hall is so important.*

*Church services, morning prayer, morning talk, graduation, national exam testing, entertainment, other ceremonies and meal-time will occur in the building. The kitchen will be equipped with proper sinks for cleanup.*

*The dining and assembly hall project has been the top priority of the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese. While the education offered at Tumaini is excellent, some parents are reluctant to send their children to a school without an indoor place for the students to eat and meet.*

*While I have been writing, the rain has increased and it is now a downpour! I wonder when we will get to begin worship?*

*Postscript: We held church an hour late this morning while it was still raining. We worshiped in one of the 20-by-25-foot classrooms—it was so full of chairs that any fire marshal in the U.S. would have fainted! Plus, there were more students standing four-deep in a hallway. Luckily Pastor Ezekiel Mwumbungu was the preacher and his voice is big because in the middle of the sermon it started pouring and rain on metal roofs is LOUD!*

Since writing this blog, the plans for the dining and assembly hall have been completely redesigned. Because the building will be much larger than the others on campus, it is being constructed with modern methods. Construction began in July.



HEIDI CRYER

**Students clean up after a meal outdoors at Tumaini school.**

Without support from the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod, it never would have happened.

## **Both partners benefit**

When the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America began the companion synod program in 1990, the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod was paired with the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. The goal of the companion synod program is that both partners benefit. Each offers prayer, study, communication, advocacy and financial support. And members in each country experience cultures and worship different from their own.

Since Robert Keller, then-bishop of the synod, first visited the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese in 1992, the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod's relationship with our companion has grown. It now includes visits from our Tanzanian brothers and sisters to the U.S., as well as several synod groups and individuals spending time in the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese.

The Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod has nurtured its relationship with the diocese by supporting education (Tumaini Lutheran Seminary), health (Lugala Hospital) and a travel

fund that provides for visits between the synod and diocese.

Financial support is only part of the companion synod relationship.

As companions, we accompany one another. We each have gifts we share. We learn from one another. Our brothers and sisters in the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese of Tanzania can teach us about hospitality, worship, the love of Christ, respect for our elders and about community. But we also have resources that we can share. One of those is our wealth. We can help build a safe place for students at Tumaini to eat and worship where they need not worry about rain or ants or darkness.

The dining and assembly hall project is nearing completion, but it is a significant undertaking. It will be a beautiful place for students to gather long into the future.

There still is an opportunity for you to be a part of this project. As always, please be sure to keep our sisters and brothers of Tanzania in prayer.

If you would like to make a contribution, please mark it "Tumaini Dining/Assembly Hall" and send it to: Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod, 314 S. Spruce Street, Suite A, Spokane, WA 99201-5823. □