

The Latest News from our Companion Synod - Ulanga Kilombero and Specifically from the Tumaini Secondary School

Approximately one year ago 13 persons from the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod of the ELCA were making final preparations for the Companion Synod Trip to Tumaini School located in the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese of Tanzania. We had just sent the \$17,500 to the school's account that was the amount that many congregations, Sunday schools, youth groups and individuals from our Synod had collected in preparation for this trip. This amount coincidentally exactly matched the amount budgeted by the School's Management Committee. So we were ready to go - except for the details ... like getting the necessary inoculations, buying mosquito nets for our beds, stocking up on mosquito repellent, buying working gloves (as we thought we would be actually making the bricks); applying for visitor visas to Tanzania, purchasing airline tickets and travelers' insurance, making hotel reservations, hiring a bus for in-country travel - there seemed to be a long "to do" list but at last we were off on our intended task, to experience a slice of life with our companions in Tanzania.

Since returning from that incredible experience, we have attempted to share our thoughts and observations with many from our Synod. Thanks to you who have invited individuals from our group to share our story with you. We continue to be available to those who wish to hear more.

In response to many from our Synod who have asked what they can do to play their part in this relationship, we answer by saying that "because we have seen how genuinely Headmaster Ngullo and the other staff care about the school and the students, we have come to respect their judgment regarding identifying the priorities of Tumaini Secondary School." We recommend to congregations who wish to join this companionship, that contributions be designated to either "Education" - for the school; or to "Medical" - for the Lugala Hospital; thus allowing our companions to make the final decisions regarding project priorities. After getting to know the situation close up, we feel that our companions deserve the trust we put in them to do what is best for their people.

It is interesting that the Management Committee at Tumaini has never directly asked us for funds but, upon scrutinizing the 2007 school budget attached to a yearly report, we have discovered that they are counting on our synod for financial help of \$34,000. We have said we were their companions and they are living in that relationship. Just recently we sent \$10,000 to the school, funds gathered from various congregations during the 2007 year. And what is happening with that money? Philorian Mpendaye, one of Tumaini's teachers, sent photos of their most recent efforts. You guessed it - they are making more bricks, this time it may be to build a dining hall (they had always eaten out of doors before) or a library (many books have been donated but there has not been an organized way of storing and accessing them). Then again they may choose to develop an internet system for better communication and long-distance training of teachers. They said that the decision will be made at their Management Committee Meeting that is soon to take place. We will let you know what they decide will be their priority. \$7,500 of the budgeted \$34,000 is designated for scholarships. The Women of the ELCA of our Synod have accepted the challenge of raising \$3,800 of this amount for Girls' Scholarships. We are grateful for their efforts. However, others are also hoping for scholarships as it cost \$380 to send one student to school for the year - not much by our standards, but a huge amount for most Tanzanian families.

SO - we still have lots of work to do to accompany our companions in their challenge of educating their youth. However, one glimpse of a smiling, appreciative student face is all the encouragement we need to expend a little more effort towards gathering support for our companions in Tanzania.

Those wishing to join in can make a check payable to Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod of the ELCA; designate the check for "Education" or "Medical" and mail to: Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod, 314 S. Spruce Street, Suite A, Spokane, WA 99201-5823. And remember to pray for our companions' efforts as they, in turn, extend their thanks, love and prayer to us.

~ Marj Nishek
Member, Companion Synod Task Force
Global Mission Committee