

Our Companion Synod Visit to Ulanga Kilombero ~ April 2008

We are home from our visit to our Companion Synod, Ulanga Kilombero. It was a great trip!! Pr. Mark Nelson, Bishop Wells' Assistant, Heidi Cryer, and I were asked by our Synod Council to represent our Synod at the installation of our Companion Synod's new Bishop, Rev. Renard Mtenji which took place on Sunday, April 6th. I was particularly interested in attending as I had met Rev. Mtenji when our last group traveled to Tumaini L.S. in Oct. of 2006. At that time Renard was Director of the Tumaini Bible School and his wife, Rosemary, was a student at Tumaini Secondary School, a woman who chose to attend school after their children had entered school themselves. Renard (now I need to say, "The Bishop") is a quiet young man with a calm spirit and large heart. When our 2006 group was helping build the Staff Duplex, Renard was working with us, carrying bricks from the kiln to the building site and singing along with the rest of us. It was a good reunion.



The installation service took place out of doors with throngs of people in attendance. Several Bishops from other Diocese in Tanzania, dressed in ceremonial robes, attended and all brought greetings and words of advice for UK's new bishop. Pr. Mark Nelson brought greetings and a gift on behalf of Bishop Wells and all of us. There was much singing and dancing – in fact, the ceremony lasted more than four hours but there was never a dull moment.

We met others there whom many of you know – Philorian Mpendaye, who was a Mwangaza Exchange Teacher in our Synod in 2002 and Aida Mkwenya who was our liaison person on the 2006 trip. Pr. Mark met Daniel Mwandikile who visited our Synod some years back and had been a guest in Pr. Mark's home at that time. Of course we met Retiring Bishop Abel Mwambungu and his wife, Ndimmyake, and Ezekiel Mwambungu who was at Grace Lutheran in Wenatchee some years back, and his wife, Genarose. And there were others with whom we reunited.

The plan for the next day was to travel the long road between Ifakara, the Diocese Headquarters, and Malinyi where Tumaini School and the Lugala Hospital are located. This road is not good in the best of times and April is right in the middle of the rainy season. Need I say more??? Abdallah, our Muslim driver, had warned us from the very start of the trip that we may not be able to make it to Malinyi because of the muddy, muddy roads. That Monday morning it was raining again, but we decided to give it a try anyway as it was important to all of us that we be able to visit Tumaini School and Lugala Hospital. Pr. Mark and Heidi had never previously visited but had heard much about the school and the hospital that our synod has been accompanying for many years and they really wanted to see it. Heidi, an Associate in Ministry in Kennewick, was particularly eager to visit as she is planning to use her sabbatical time to teach at the Tumaini Bible School beginning Jan. of 2009 and thought this was a valuable opportunity to prepare herself for this experience.

So – after discussion and prayer - we decided that, if we were to be rational people, we would not attempt the trip. After all, we may arrive safely, but what if it rains while we are there? Would we be able to return in time for our flight back to the U.S.??? However, none of us were satisfied with that rational thinking, so we compromised. We would begin the trip and, if necessary, turn back. Our journey began. We were happy to be accompanied by Philorian who reassured us that all would be well. Whenever our driver, Abdallah, said, "Attention, please!!", we knew that we had to hold tightly to

our seats as we would be making our way through an extra challenging mud hole.

All went smoothly at first. We even reached the Kilombero River, paid the ferry fee for four persons and one vehicle with driver, and reached the other side of the river. After a few more kilometers down the road which were interspersed with numerous “Attention, Please!!” requests by Abdallah, we decided we had better stop and make a definite decision. Should we turn around then and there?? ...or should we try to make it all the way??? There was a silence. No one wanted to make that decision. Then finally, dear Abdallah, who had been so cautiously negative about the idea of going to Malinyi since our departure from Dar es Salaam, shouted “TWENDE!!!” which in Swahili means, “LET’S GO!!!” So the decision was made, and we were off to Malinyi (to Tumaini School and Lugala Hospital).

Dr. Ponnighaus, the German doctor at Lugala greeted us with a “what are you doing here?..don’t you know it’s the middle of the rainy season??” and then graciously showed us the hospital and thanked us for the x-ray machine, solar panels and many other items we had supplied for them. He emphasized the need for us to assist with meeting the costs for training a Tanzanian doctor at the Kilimanjaro Medical Center – the cost being \$6000/yr. Dr. Ponnighaus will be leaving Lugala at the end of this year and, as of yet, there is no replacement for him – a situation that is inconceivable to imagine.

At last we arrive at Tumaini L.S. The L.S. stands for Lutheran Seminary because Tumaini L.S. consists of Tumaini Secondary School – enrollment is now 360 students; and Tumaini Bible School with an enrollment of 17 persons training to be evangelists. These Bible School students may or may not have obtained a high school education before enrolling in the Bible School. Some are content with this as their aim is to serve as an evangelist in their home village where only Swahili is needed. Others, who dream of becoming an ordained pastor, realize that they first need the secondary education before being able to think about a university and/or seminary education.

So how do we from EWa/Idaho fit into this scenario? First of all, we remember that we are companions to the people of Ulanga Kilombero. It is our purpose to “accompany” our companions in whatever ventures they deem to be priorities. And what is priority no.1 at Tumaini Secondary School at this time? The Tumaini Managerial Committee thanked us over and over for the help we gave them in 2006 with the construction of a “duplex” to house two staff families at Tumaini. Now, they say that their priority is to build a Dining/Assembly Hall. There has never been a place for the students to eat their two meals a day other than taking their food to the classroom or dormitory or eating out-of-doors when weather permits. And a Dining Hall could also be used for a much needed Assembly/Meeting room to meet numerous needs.

The staff at Tumaini has carefully researched this project. They have drawn building plans, and have listed and priced all items and services necessary to complete the project. They have provided us with these plans and the detailed budget which totals 47,968,450 Tanzanian Shillings (TzSh) which translates into \$42,000. This is more than twice the budget of the staff duplex project of 2006 so the question is, “will we be able to raise this amount”??? We could not promise our companions at Tumaini. We could only say, “Tutajaribu” which means “we will try”... we will try raise that \$42,000 somehow.

Another priority is continuing to provide scholarships, especially for the girls. The cost of tuition has increased this year. Tuition is now \$500 per student per year. When a family can only afford to educate one child, they usually select a son as that is the traditional thing to do. However, they acknowledge that, when you educate a girl, you educate an entire family...and a community. That is why many congregations, Sunday schools, youth groups and women’s groups in our Synod have chosen to raise scholarship funds for girls.

We talked with Irene Matimbwi who is one of the scholarship recipients and asked her about her plans after completing Form Four at Tumaini. She has definite plans. After graduating from Form Four at Tumaini, she hopes to go to another school to complete Forms Five and Six after which, if she passes all exams, she will be eligible to enter the University where she plans to study sociology. Why sociology??. we asked. Irene's reply... "the women of Africa have been in a low place for a long time...I wish to study sociology so I can help the women of Africa rise to a much higher place." Perhaps this sounds like a lofty goal. But if you could have seen the sincere expression on Irene's face and heard the determination in her voice when she said this, you would have been able to feel the depth of her sincerity as we did. And Irene is only one of many who depend on us for continued support for their education. Our Synodical Women's Group of the ELCA has been supporting Girls' Scholarships for some years. It is hoped that this will continue to be a strong emphasis.

After visiting Tumaini School and Lugala Hospital, we returned to Ifakara, the UK Diocese Headquarters. Bishop Mtenji and his wife invited us to their house for dinner. We were honored to receive this invitation. The next morning we met with Bishop Mtenji and the Diocese Development Committee at the Diocese Office. It was a good time exchange ideas and to listen to our companions...and then it was time to return home and to share with you what we had learned and experienced. It is hoped that you, in turn, will share much of this with your congregations.

All of what I have written above is true and important..... But let us remember that... more important than money – more important than a dining hall or an assembly hall, even more important than scholarships.. is the Companion Relationship we have with our partners. They pray for us often... they have told us that. Let us continue to pray for them and to walk with them.. to accompany them on our journey together.

Let us remember that the Companion Synod relationship exists for the purpose of 1) Strengthening one another for life and mission within the body of Christ; 2) Offering us the privilege of participating in the life of another church through prayer, study, communication and exchange of persons and resources; and 3) Opening our eyes to the global challenge that Christ offers us today; and Calling us to deepen our commitment and discipleship as individual persons and as a community of faith.

A reminder: To contribute to Tumaini School, write check to "Eastern WA-ID Synod of the ELCA" and designate it for "Education"; to contribute to the Lugala Hospital, designate your check for "Medical". Send these contributions to: Eastern WA-ID Synod of the ELCA, 314 Spruce St., Ste. A, Spokane, WA 99201.

Scholarships for Girls can also be sent to the Synod Office but we recommend that they be sent through our Synodical Women of the ELCA: Write your check to "Women of the ELCA" and designate for "Scholarships for Girls". Send to: Genie Trigsted, Treas., Eastern WA-ID Women of the ELCA, 111 W. 19th Ave., Lewiston, ID 83501. Asante sana!!!!

by Marj Nishek, Chair, Eastern WA-ID Companion Synod Task Force