

Pastor Ann Frerks story link from the People in Mission site

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 of us from our Synod traveled there last September to work together and learn from one another. What an honor God has given us to walk together sharing our joys and sorrows, our challenges and hopes, but 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 Ifakara, and the home of Bishop Abel Mwambungu. Although it was very late, the Bishop welcomed us into his home. At his request, we told a little about ourselves and when we were finished he asked if he could offer a prayer. 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 attended 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, the adults were 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 and it is 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, for these Lutherans use their entire body in praising God. For example, 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 we could see many people. They were jumping up and down. Then we heard music, amazing music that filled the night. It seems the students had been waiting two hours for us! We stepped off the bus into warm embraces and 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 stated. 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.

At present 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 modern 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 side by side 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 in order to study at Tumaini and many will go out in Christ's name, with no guaranteed income. They are an inspiration to us all.

We visited the Lugala Hospital, a 135 bed facility. It is staffed by only two doctors who work tirelessly to alleviate pain and suffering. Last year 1300 babies were delivered there. Sometimes the maternity ward is so full, mothers sleep two to a bed. There are many needs ranging 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 on our trip. Before we knew it, it was time to bid farewell to our friends. Once again there was dancing and singing, hugs and tears. We were back on the bus, on the bumpy road, but our spirits were high. We reached Ifakara, where we bid farewell to Aida Mkwenya 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."

Aida 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 have represented the EWA/ID 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!**