

Global companions

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We intend that no one should blame us about the generous gift that we are administering, for we intend to do what is right not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of others (2 Corinthians 8:20-21).

I would guess that you cannot be a member of our Northern Great Lakes Synod (NGLS) long before you become aware of our companion synod relationship with the Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the Lutheran Church in Tanzania. For more than 25 years, our synod has gathered in ministry with Lutherans across the ocean. And amazing things have been accomplished.

I remember my first synod assembly and seeing about 15 people or so wearing African print shirts. I didn't know why they were wearing them. It seemed they belonged to some club that shared some secret joy, and their colorful shirts and dresses were an outside manifestation of it. Of course, as the assembly progressed, I learned about our relationship with Tanzania as well. The Tanzanians impressed me, as their commitment to this ministry and their passion for making a difference in their country stood out from the crowd just like the colors of their African clothes.

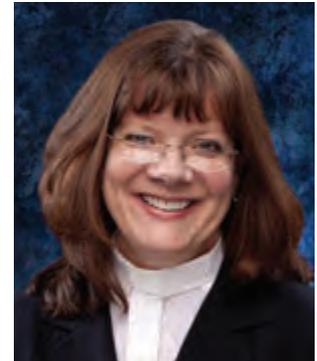


Bishop Katherine Finegan and her husband, David, enjoy a visit with students in Tanzania.



The bishop turns on a faucet and is happy to see water. Synod Women of the ELCA groups have supported this water project.

Last August, I was invited to attend a bishops' summit, a gathering of all the ELCA synods and all the Tanzanian dioceses that are currently in companion relationships, plus some additional ministry partners such as Global Health Ministries, local missionaries, schoolteachers, pastors and more. Everyone came together in Tanzania to review and assess how our partners have been a blessing to both parties, what our hopes are for the future, and how our partnerships can be strengthened for future ministry possibilities. While it would be difficult to enumerate all that was said, I will give you a few points that I think are worth considering further.



Bishop Katherine Finegan

The blessings of this partnership for companion synod congregations

NGLS congregations are blessed with:

- A greater awareness of the global church.
- New friendships with people who are not shy about their faith. Their openness, sincerity and unabashed joy in the Lord is inspiring.
- The incredible, enthusiastic and generous hospitality of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.
- The deep gratitude of the Tanzanians for how our support is positively impacting ministry efforts and the lives of people.
- The ability to make real and lasting improvements because our financial support goes a long way.

The Tanzanian congregations are blessed with:

- Again, a greater awareness of the global church.

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Mission and ministry experiences shared in Negaunee

For over 20 years, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Negaunee, has had a companion relationship with the Yombo Parish of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Letters, cards and, more recently, emails and WhatsApp Messenger conversations have been exchanged. The greatest blessings are the face-to-face visits. Recent years have seen many from Immanuel making the trip to Tanzania for pastoral, dental and teaching missions, sometimes venturing from sub-zero temperatures to heat approaching 100 degrees.

Two weeks in September have seen the journey of the Rev. Michael Locko (Yombo's present pastor), Teddy Mwakilembe, Bonaventura Mwaipaja, Hubert and Angela Kiata, and the Rev. Suma Mwakisyala (former pastor and daughter of Yombo, now serving Amani and Majohe sub-parishes) from Dar es Salaam, a city of over 4 million people, to the Upper Peninsula's shopping mecca of Negaunee (along with Ishpeming and Marquette).

Cultural differences have been many, but similarities in mission and ministry have been the greater blessing. Tours of places like Finlandia University, Fortune Lake Bible Camp, and the Warming Center for Marquette County's homeless, as well as participating in ministry settings such as worship, Bible studies and pastoral visits connected deeply with our Tanzanian companions and opened both sides to new approaches to being church.

Late-night conversations over food and wine among pastors have empowered new appreciation for God's grace in Jesus amid universal human challenges and renewed zeal in mutual prayer support. We are blessed to walk with our Yombo sisters and brothers. We have much to learn from them in sharing Jesus! May God continue to bless all through our ongoing relationship. Praise the Lord! *Bwana asifiwe!* Amen!

Submitted by the Rev. Steven Solberg.



The Rev. Steve Solberg (left) and church leaders from Tanzania plant a tree together as a symbol of unity, and to nurture the relationship that they share. A tree was planted in Tanzania previously.



Communion is shared at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Negaunee.



Church leaders from Yombo enjoy social time with Northern Great Lakes Synod members at Tom and Luanne Skrenes' home. The visitors from Tanzania prepared a meal there, using Luanne Skrenes' spices.

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Laundry day, without students having to take the time from studies to walk and carry water!

God is at work everywhere, but in different ways—learning and teaching, the encouragement of varied experiences.

- The joys of new relationships and the exchange of stories.
- The blessings of shared resources, where a few of our dollars make a huge difference in Tanzanian lives.

For the NGLS congregations, and for who we are as a synod altogether, our companion relationship has provided the opportunity to be a blessing, even as we have been blessed, and often in ways that we did not expect.

Before the summit, I spent a few days visiting several ministries of the Tanzanian church that many NGLS folks care deeply about. I spent some time at the Mkuza Girls' School, which has been the offering focus for our synod women's organization for some time. Cluster meetings gathered offerings and more to help support Mkuza's efforts to drill a well and install pumps to provide water on the school grounds.

I was happy to turn on the faucet and have water come out! And it was laundry day besides. No longer do the girls have to take turns walking for water. Now everyone has more time to study.

I visited the Kisarawe Junior Theological Seminary, which houses the Dale Skogman Library and was on the receiving end of mission trips to build school buildings and facilities. More than a few young people have discerned the call to ordained ministry here, even when classes were held under the trees, shaded from the afternoon sun.

I don't know what the future holds for the NGLS or the Tanzanian church, but I believe there is value in continuing and strengthening this rela-

tionship. While there is no doubt that our financial support makes all the difference, what is also valued are the friendships, and the deepening of our faith as we share with each other and celebrate that the Spirit of Christ is alive and well and active in our churches, in our people and in our work together.

Jim Duehring, NGLS assistant to the bishop, will visit our companion synod next summer. If your congregation is interested in strengthening a companion relationship, scholarships are available to help make a trip possible for your pastor or a congregational representative to visit a new or existing companion congregation. If you're nervous about the culture shock that is inherent in international travel, know that an orientation will be given. We give thanks for Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA, which has generated some funds for this purpose. Please call the synod office if you are interested (517-321-5066).

At the synod assembly, I asked those folks in African shirts why this relationship mattered to them. They found it difficult to articulate an answer. The emotions ran too deep, the impact on their lives and their faith was so amazing and multifaceted that words failed them. And yet, that alone speaks volumes.

A companion congregation relationship may not be a passion of your congregation. But I thank God that as a synod, we all benefit from the relationships that have been forged by those who do have a passion for this ministry. We all can't do everything, but we are all blessed by those who support the work of Christ, whatever form that takes.

Yours in Christ,
Bishop Katherine Finegan



A gift is presented.

Temeke visitors experience the Upper Peninsula

Nine church elders from the Temeke Congregation in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, were the guests of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church and Finlandia University, both in Hancock, Sept. 4-21. Gloria Dei has had a companion partner relationship with Temeke since 2000.

Beginning in 2006, Finlandia University's "Service and Learning in Tanzania" course, a three-week experience every May, has brought 83 students to Tanzania. Some of the Temeke elders have hosted these students over the years, as well as young people from the Northern Great Lakes Synod (NGLS), who were part of a 2017 companion synod experience co-led by the Rev. D.J. Rasner of Gloria Dei and his wife, Amanda.

The Temeke guests stayed in host homes provided by families from Gloria Dei and Finlandia. The schedule was a combination of experiencing the area's tourist sites as well as interacting with people in the community.

The Temeke group spoke at schools and with the Hancock Rotary, participated in Finlandia classes,

prepared a Tanzanian meal for the Gloria Dei community, and helped move stone and the home of an individual whose house was ravished by the Father's Day flood of Houghton County. They experienced many local traditions, such as eating pasties, kayaking and a sauna.

The visit was capped off with a dinner at Gloria



Worshippers come together at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Hancock, for a final prayer of thanksgiving and blessing upon their guests as they prepared for their journey back to Tanzania.



Temeke visitors gather at Finlandia University, Hancock.

Dei that included about 60 people, made up of the congregation council, host families, and Finlandia students and faculty who had been participants in the Service and Learning in Tanzania experience from as far back as 2006. They gathered to offer words of appreciation for the Temeke friends and their partnership.

The aim was to make sure the Temeke friends felt at home, and all indications are that we thoroughly accomplished that goal.

Before leaving for Tanzania, they spent time at Fortune Lake Bible Camp and met with synod Bishop Katherine Finnegan in Marquette. **L**

Synod calendar

Dec. 24-25: Synod office closed

Jan. 1: Synod office closed

Jan. 14: Senior Day at Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp, Crystal Falls, 10-2 Central Time

Jan. 18-19: Synod Council Meeting

Feb. 1-3: Clergy Spouse Retreat, Country Inn and Suites, Iron Mountain

Feb. 10-11: Leadership Support Event Ramada, Marinette