

Tanzania Mission Team Report #2

This report comes to you from Marla, with a little help from Marissa and Justin.

Sunday morning many of us were awakened to the 5 AM sound of the Muslim call to prayer. Iringa is a religiously diverse city with a Hindu temple, Muslim mosque, and Lutheran cathedral all next to one another.

Many of us had cold showers or no showers because of plumbing that didn't work or showers were cleverly designed with the hot water switch in the hall. Karen Smith warned us about that but not everyone remembered in time.

As we gathered to leave for church neighborhood children came out to greet us. They loved petting Marissa's long blond hair. John Kvasniska got into a spontaneous game of kickball with the kids using a homemade rag ball. Many members of our team began trying out some simple Swahili phrases to the delight of the little kids. When we arrived at the Lutheran Cathedral we were greeted by another crowd of children and the fun interactions continued. These kids loved to have their pictures taken and then look at the photo on the digital screen so we have many pictures of them.



There are a lot of Minnesotan Lutherans in Iringa right now. We passed the team from Prince of Peace Lutheran in Burnsville leaving the early service as we were arriving for the late service. A group from Salem Lutheran in St. Paul attended the same worship service we did. Pastor Ken Comoro, former pastor of our sister congregation at Lukani, served as our interpreter for the 2+ hour service. Pastor Jim gave a brief welcome and we each introduced ourselves – in Swahili!!

For years I have heard from St. Stephens' mission teams about a favorite lunch spot – Hasty Tasty. Sunday noon we had a chance to sample its storied fare – it did not disappoint. Yum!

As Jim mentioned in our first report there had been a mix up in our lodging accommodations and the team was split up on Saturday evening. Sunday that was resolved so that the rest of the team got to join the Kvasniskas at the Bega Kwa Bega apartments. These are the apartments that staff such as Don and Eunice Fultz stay at when they are in town – very nice. So we traded in our Spartan dormitory rooms for a comfortable apartment that fits US middle class living standards and is a real luxury in Tanzania. Justin says we are being spoiled and not getting a "real" experience of life in Africa in our cushy accommodations, but that will come soon enough when we travel to Lukani.

Betsy's Swahili has come in very handy. She has been able to communicate with our driver who doesn't speak English, negotiate money exchanges, purchase cell phone sim cards, and negotiate the purchase of covered buckets to bring to Lukani. Good work, Betsy! Those three years of Swahili lessons have paid off.

We have had delicious meals, lovingly made at the Lutheran Center. Sunday evening was roasted chicken with rice, vegetables, and orange crepes for dessert. Monday we had eggs and omelets made to order and fresh tropical fruit. Our chef Harrison Chavalla has a very smooth accent and announces each course with a voice that sounds like that of a late night radio jazz broadcaster.

Each evening we have closed the night with devotions. We have felt the prayer support of those back home who are participating in the same devotions each day. Thank you prayer partners.



Monday morning was spent at Tumaini University. The group from Prince of Peace joined us for a tour of that facility that has been significantly the result of donations from St. Paul Area Synod churches. Several of the buildings bear the names of St. Paul Synod congregations such as King of Kings in Woodbury and Easter Lutheran in Eagan. This university began in 1995 with 250 students who were primarily studying

theology. In 15 years it has grown to 3,000 students who study a variety of graduate and undergraduate programs such as business, law, and education. The facilities are very nice – it feels like a college campus in the United States – African style.

One thing that we weren't prepared for is Tanzanian construction practices. We saw a new science building in the making. None of us could believe the many branches that were being used to hold it up would support the weight of the building – but many brave souls got a first-hand view from the top of this rickety construction project. They told us that all of the nice looking completed buildings looked like that during construction as well, so there's hope for this one too.



As part of my seminary work I'm doing an interview project, speaking with people in both Minnesota and Tanzania about the impact that the partnership with the St. Paul Area Synod has had on the lives and faith of people in both places. Tumaini University was a great place to connect with people to interview so the team left me at Tumaini to do my interviews as they took off for other activities in the afternoon. Marissa will pick it up from here telling you of their afternoon adventures. For my part, the interviews were fruitful. The work of this partnership is making a difference in many tangible ways – improving education, infrastructure, and health services all the while being filled with a sense of oneness in God's love. Several people told me that the church buildings that have been constructed in villages through the support of St. Paul Area congregations have served an evangelism function, attracting more people to become members of their churches and to become Christians because they

can see that good things are happening through the building projects. Now, here's Marissa and Justin.....

Mostly Marissa. Justin's falling asleep. But anyway, while my mom was doing her interviews, The Woodruffs, The Kvasniskas, Betsy, our driver, a guide, and I had quite the adventure on a rock. And I don't mean just any rock, I mean like a 150 ft. tall boulder halfway up the side of a small mountain. Our driver, Doto, parked the bus at the foot of the boulder and we climbed up a series of steep trails and crevices to the top of Gangilonga Rock. Pretty shortly after we



started our ascent, we encountered an unexpected sight. Jonathan, who as some of you probably know, is a little bit of a jokester, was in the front and as he was making his way around a corner he turned around and said, "Ah, cows!" No one believed him until there was a cow coming straight at me since I was the next in our little parade. We all quickly moved or leapt to the sides of the trail to let a parade of probably about 8-10 cows

(nobody was counting because we were all diving) followed by a small boy half-walking, half-sliding down the rest of the hill. Our guide, Brighton, just passed it off as a normal occurrence and we continued on our way, still a little shaken from the cow incident. We finally arrived at the base of the actual rock and maneuvered our way up a narrow crevice to the top. The view was breathtaking. We could see all of Iringa from there and were able to pick out our apartments. After about a half-hour long photo shoot, we headed back down to the bus.



After our rock adventure, we were all a little tired and ready for some food. We headed to a place in downtown Iringa called Neema Crafts for lunch. Most of us didn't really know what it was, but it was recommended. We discovered shortly after our arrival that all of the waiters are deaf. After we were seated, a white woman with a British accent asked if we would like to go on a tour while we waited for our food. She took us downstairs to a little gift shop selling all kinds of handmade crafts. She explained that Neema's mission is to find employment and create a community for disabled people in the Iringa area. In many third world cultures, when a person becomes disabled, their family leaves them to die because they would just become a burden. She showed us three work areas that Neema has built for



the disabled people that they employ; one where they weave tablecloths, placemats, and other things like that, a second was a room filled with sewing machines, and the last was for paper crafts and jewelry. These items are sold around Iringa and the money is used to pay their disabled workers salary and half of their medical bills. Neema has been expanding exponentially since its birth in 2002 and is continuing to grow, now employing over 100 disabled

workers. After this tour I think we were all able to better appreciate our meals. There was a small sign language dictionary on the back of the menu and as we left, we all said “Asanti Sana”(which means “thank you”) to our waiters in sign language.

Well, I think that is all of the important events before we meet back up with my mom, so I’ll let her take it from here. Kwahari! (insert Justin snore as a goodbye).

For dinner we feasted at Lulu’s – a little restaurant that made a big buffet just for us. I think it is the first time Jonathan has really been full since we got here – growing boys seem to have bottomless pits, but I think we filled him up this time. Brighton joined us. He is from Lukani, has been sponsored in his schooling by Ken and Karen Smith, and is now a student at Tumaini University studying business and marketing. Randy, he was happy to get your name and email address as a Marketing Manager he may be in contact with to correspond about this profession.



Despite the nice accommodations and good food that we are enjoying, the level of poverty is painfully clear. Driving around we see homes that are tiny huts with tattered rags hanging in the open holes that serve as windows. It gets COLD at night here. When the sun goes down we pull out our fleece jackets and bundle up and go inside as soon as possible. It is hard to imagine

never being able to go into a warm, solidly constructed house. We see merchants going to great lengths to sell us their wears – coming up to our bus and trying to sell to us through the windows, setting out displays of goods in the dirt outside a restaurant where we are eating hoping that we will buy something, trying to tempt us with lower and lower prices, approaching us and telling us of their stories of how they are trying to support themselves through selling these goods. It is pulls at the heart strings. We see little children running



around everywhere, seemingly unattended to by any adults. In some cases young children (maybe five years old) are caring for their even younger siblings. The few times that we have had to use the “squat toilets” which are nothing more than a hole in the ground, we found ourselves longing for the luxury of an outhouse. As we have walked the sidewalks and traveled the roads cement just ends at places and changes to dirt and rocks and very uneven surfaces with deep open sewage trenches along side. Every time we come back to our nice accommodations at Bega Kwa Bega we walk through a gate that is guarded 24/7 keeping out all of those who would want



what we have such easy access to. Why should we be so blessed while so many are in such need?

At our devotions Monday evening John and Solveig reflected on the pervasive poverty. As Americans we come to a place like this and think we have all of the answers of how to fix things and make them better. We need to approach it with humility. Some of the things that we might think we want for the people of Tanzania could lead them in the direction of materialism that has become so pervasive in America and away from the important things in life – like deep focus on relationships – that give them such great joy. Nevertheless fixing those rutted roads and incredibly uneven sidewalks couldn't hurt!

We concluded our evening in song, adding a few new tunes to our repertoire in preparation for going to Lukani later this week where we expect to sing several times.

All's well here. We are greatly blessed. Thanks for keeping us in your prayers. We will have much to share when we get home.