

## Now About Tanzania...

*But we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us. (Romans 5)*



Bishop Harold Usgaard

The people of our companion synod, the Central Diocese, personify that text. The rains have still not come...there is no food. And with no food, there is no money. Many in the church have not received pay for months. Electricity and running water remain scarce. AIDS has now passed malaria as the most feared, lowering the life expectancy by 10 years. And worthwhile projects like Iambi Hospital and the Lutheran Institute at Kiomboi struggle to remain viable in the midst of shortages and conflict.

Yet in the midst of suffering, there is endurance and character...and so much hope. It is a hope born of suffering, tempered strong and lasting. They are survivors, but more...they are winners. One who has traveled in Tanzania suggested that those of our congregations in the midst of conflict and struggle would do well to visit there, to learn of real difficulties, and to observe faith lived in the midst of it. To travel there is physically and emotionally exhausting, and yet one returns filled with hope...the hope they offer.

*We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. (II Cor 8)*

Tanzanians are among the most gracious and giving people I have met. It matters not that they have so little...what they have they give to you. Families that barely live on beans kill their last chicken or goat for the guest. Folks who have walked miles in bare feet just to be with you, offer gifts of material and wealth they cannot afford themselves.

Their new bishop, Eliuphoo Sima, offered the secret as he explained that the only word you need to know in Tanzania is "asante"... "thank you." We know that. Our theology of stewardship is grounded in that word. But the Tanzanians live it. And so during their worship, everyone

from the youngest to the eldest comes forward with an offering. It might be a coin, a hen or 3 eggs. It might be a squash. But everyone brings their offering of thanks.

*In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith...being more precious than gold, that, though perishable, is tested by fire...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (I Peter 1)*

It is their praise of God that is remembered long after the return home. It is worship that reveals the basis of their hope and thankfulness. Africans sing like none others, and Tanzanians are no exception. Some of the songs are created from the Gospel for the day, while others include words of welcome for visitors from America. The congregation is filled with any number of choirs...with a few homemade guitars and keyboards making an appearance. The harmony is breathtaking.

The church buildings are not impressive by most standards. Oh, the cathedral in Singida has doors and windows, but in many places the building is "open air." which is good for the children sitting in the windows and the throng pushing from the outside. If there are benches, they may be wooden or even clay. And when the people come, they come to stay for hours.

Yes, here one is quickly reminded that the church is the people. And you begin to understand where their depth of faith and hope is found. It is in worship that they are grounded, and there is a recognizable sense of sadness when it is time to leave. Oh what we miss when we are not gathered as the body of Christ in praise and thanksgiving. Don't skimp on worship. Here God molds and shapes, and makes us strong.

Now about Tanzania...how much we have to learn.

Shalom,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Huck". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Harold Usgaard  
Bishop

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makes us strong.**

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