



Easter Greetings for Tanzania Pen Pals: How 'Accompaniment' Works

February 23-24, 2008

Members of Bethesda Lutheran Church are sending Easter greetings to "pen pals" in Tanzania. Gerald Klonglan, who leads the Bethesda Tanzania Ministry Team, explains the idea of "accompaniment" and how it fits in with the ELCA and our work in Tanzania.

One goal of Bethesda's Global Mission Ministry is our companionship with Shighatini Lutheran Parish in Tanzania. Bethesda is very fortunate to be a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The ELCA has a strong commitment to fulfill Jesus' command to "go into the world."

When the ELCA was created in 1988 it emphasized a significant new twist on what "going into the world" means for the church. The world had changed. We were in a new era of globalization. So rather than primarily sending pastors into the world we would now have our Lutheran church members from all walks of life and all ages going into the world: educators, health professionals, homemakers, electricians, builders and so on.

Bethesda is one of over 11,000 ELCA congregations charged with this responsibility.

To help members of Lutheran Congregations to implement this "going into the world," one of the first things the ELCA did was to establish formal ties with approximately 90 national Lutheran Church bodies around the world. The goal was to build relationships with fellow Lutherans so we could walk side by side to carry out Christ's work on earth.

The concept used to capture this idea is accompaniment. Accompaniment describes the way our church walks with and works with Christian communities in other countries. "Together" we participate in God's Mission on earth: we pray with each other, we equip each other, we make decisions together, and we share and learn from each other. Together we are transformed for the sake of God's mission on earth.

A second action by the ELCA in 1988 was to require each of its 65 new synods to establish a formal tie with at least one synod or diocese in another country.

A third action was to create the expectation that each synod would encourage each of its congregations to develop a companionship with a parish in the synod's companion diocese.

Here is how these three steps have been implemented for Bethesda:

- **First**, the ELCA developed a formal agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT).
- **Second**, The Southeastern Iowa Synod was assigned to be a companion with the Pare Diocese of the ELCT. (The SEIA Synod is one of 20 ELCA synods partnered with a diocese in Tanzania. There are a lot of Lutherans in Tanzania, primarily because Germans had colonized the Tanzania Region from the 1840s to 1920.)

- **Third**, the Southeastern Iowa Synod has been encouraging each of its 150 congregations to develop a companion relationship with one of the 50 parishes of the Pare Diocese. To date 29 SEIA Synod congregations have covenants with Parishes in the Pare Diocese.

In the year 2000, our Bethesda Lutheran Church Council voted to establish a relationship with the Shighatini Lutheran Parish. In that year Pastor Wayne Niemenen was the first Bethesda member to journey to Shighatini.

In 2003 Bethesda Leadership signed a formal covenant of partnership with Shighatini Parish. Also in 2003 the Bethesda Church Council created the Bethesda Tanzania Ministry Team to facilitate the implementation of the Shighatini/Bethesda Covenant.

Since the signing of the covenant, Bethesda has had 27 individuals journey to Shighatini, and 8 Shighatini Parish members have visited Bethesda.

The major goal of our Bethesda/Shighatini companionship is to build personal, one-to-one relationships between our families and theirs: *For us to walk side by side in building God's Kingdom on earth.*

Just one year ago Shighatini Pastor Walter Msangi and his wife, Christine, visited Bethesda during the Easter season. Over 250 Bethesda members interacted with Walter and Christine in "one on one" or small group situations.

Today each of us can initiate or expand a personal relationship with a Shighatini family by mailing them an Easter greeting. This year Shighatini parish members really need an Easter greeting of hope. The rains expected in the short rainy season of November and December did not come. No corn, which is all used for human consumption, will be harvested this month. Corn prices have doubled since July. Times are really tough.

If you would like to write to a Shighatini family, check the tables in the Commons where 22 family pictures and bios are on display. Please take this opportunity to get to know Christian brothers and sisters from Shighatini Lutheran Parish and for them to get to know you!

Also in the Commons is a new Shighatini/Bethesda poster that features many of the settings in which we have built relationships: church worship, Sunday school, primary and secondary schools, blanket making, women's Binti Mama programs, agriculture, health programs and others.

In closing, I would like to share a special prayer that focuses on doing Jesus' work together from our new red ELCA Book of Worship. This prayer is for "The Mission of the Church."

Draw your church together, O God, into one great company of disciples,

together following our teacher Jesus Christ into every walk of life,

together serving in Christ's mission to the world

and together witnessing to your love wherever you will send us;

for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

NOTE: Funding to implement the Shighatini relationship comes from the Christian Service and Mission Board's regular budget, special offering campaigns and unsolicited individual contributions.