



## Strengthening relationships, strengthening churches

By Bishop Rodger Prois

In early August, I traveled to Tanzania to attend a gathering of bishops from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) and ELCA. During opening worship, Bishop Brian Maas, Nebraska Synod, shared his thoughts on Ecclesiastes 4:9-12: *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

He noted that companion relationships have the qualities where both parties' benefit and they can be more effective in their individual ministries and their joint work. Two are better than one. The ELCA website states: "[Companion] relationships are rooted in 'accompaniment,' which promotes the values of mutuality, inclusivity, vulnerability, empowerment and sustainability. Through the program, companion churches and ELCA synods nurture and strengthen one another for life and ministry through prayer, study, communication, exchange of visitors and sharing of resources."

I've come to understand our companion relationships with the ELCT Southern Diocese (ELCT-SD) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile to be mutually beneficial and the third strand, the Spirit, is openly visible. The Tanzanian and Chilean churches have logistical issues due to distance and infrastructure, vastly different church structures and few resources. Despite these obvious differences, we have a lot to learn from them about evangelism and hospitality to the stranger.

The ELCT is the second largest Lutheran body in the world and continues to grow. Bishop Isaya Mengele of the ELCT-SD said its primary purpose is to preach the gospel and be conduits for the Spirit in bringing people to belief in Jesus Christ. They have several parishes with multiple preach-

ing points served by evangelists. I'm envisioning our synodically authorized ministers filling the needs of congregations with a similar intent, visiting people and bringing the good news.

The Chilean church is intent on being the hands, feet, voices and hearts of Jesus in a culture that bears the marks of a brutal dictator who left office in 1990. His government continues with new faces but old systems. The church is helping immigrants and newcomers because they are convicted by Jesus' commandments to serve the neighbor. I pray their example can help us understand what it means to be "welcoming congregations."

A key component of our companionship is congregational connections. More than 30 Western Iowa Synod (WIS) congregations have partners in Tanzania or Chile, some both. Those partnerships are based on agreements that call for prayer for one another, sharing of resources and gifts, two-way visits and an annual celebration of their partnership. We learned in recent trips to Tanzania and Chile that more congregations from those church bodies desire companions. For more information on the benefits and process of having a companion, contact Cindy Wells, director for global mission, at [cindy.wells@wisynod.org](mailto:cindy.wells@wisynod.org).

Our companion relationships are helpful and healthy for our synod. We are forced to consider what Christian life is like in cultures vastly different from ours and see how we can let the joy of serving motivate us and keep us hopeful.

Your fellow servant,  
+Bishop Rodger



Bishop Rodger Prois

## Walking together—hatua kwa hatua (step by step)

By Rev. Mike and Shelby Kroona

### Hospital

The Ilumbela Hospital in Tanzania has been undergoing change. Two years ago when we visited, the pediatric ward was being upgraded with funds from UNICEF—a positive change. The nursing school enrollment was steady with students.

Yet we also learned of many other less positive changes. When we visited, the surgical ward was closed for unknown reasons. The hospital was short of supplies and equipment. The administrator shared that Germany would be sending fewer doctors in the future. We visited with Dr. Jason only to learn of his tragic death a few months later. Sister Atu, the connection between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and the hospital, had announced her upcoming retirement. Much was in transition.

The lack of medical supplies prompted the in-gathering of supplies at the 2017 Western Iowa Synod Assembly. Nearly all of the supplies collected were shipped to the hospital. In addition, six oxygenators were purchased and shipped as well.

One of the frustrations is the lack of communication. Best we can tell, the need is still great for supplies and equipment. A request for a portable ultrasound has been left unfilled due to all these changes.

### Well drilling

A shining star in the work we do together is our well drilling project. Gadi and his team do an amazing job drilling wells, preparing the wellhead, and maintaining the wells in service. In 2017 the team drilled nine wells. The cost is roughly \$2,000 per well. The 2018 season is off to a great start with plans to drill 11 wells.

A significant accomplishment during this drilling season was the well at Chunya. This was the third attempt to reach water and took place in June. Prior attempts had struck rock large enough that the drill couldn't get through. The second attempt was made using a diamond tipped drill that



Hospital supplies collected at the synod assembly in 2017.

was burnt out in the attempt. The third attempt this year was outsourced to a drilling rig with a pneumatic drill, a significant step up in size. This drill was able to make it through the rock and at a depth of 390 feet struck water. It's a very deep well. Because it was outsourced, the cost of this well was significantly higher, but it was covered by contributions from Trinity Lutheran Church in Linn Grove.

Wells provide villages with clean, safe water, which has a positive impact on the health of all who live nearby. The well also impacts the lives of the community in many other ways. First, it cuts down or eliminates the time spent by the women to get water for cleaning, cooking and bathing in their

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home. This change allows women and young girls the chance to go to school instead of spending their time walking to and from a water source.

Second, wells provide economic boosts to the community as people travel to the well. Trade and commerce provide markets for food and other products, as well as business opportunities for people in the area. Wells impact the health, education and economics of the community. They are a wonderful investment in the lives of women, children and men in these communities.

Our walk, *hatua kwa hatua* (step by step), with our brothers and sisters in Tanzania enables them to drill these wells and create these hubs of life-giving opportunity. ♣



Members of Chunya congregation and an unfinished wellhead.

**Mike and Shelly Kroona** are members of Trinity Lutheran Church, Webster City, where he serves as pastor.

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## Chilean youth experiences Western Iowa

By Sebastian Muñoz

Hello! My name is Sebastian Muñoz, and I had the pleasure of visiting and being part of the activities of the 2017 Western Iowa Synod Assembly in Sioux City.

First, I wanted to give thanks to Cindy Wells, the synod's director for global mission. She helped me in the days I was there, and she was very kind to me. We even had a conversation in Spanish! Thanks to her, I had the opportunity to know and learn more about the word of the Lord.

I was there three days. I could say that my experience was beautiful; my whole trip was the best; I met people who made my trip better; and I made many friends who were interested in knowing me



Sebastian Muñoz and David Hickman, member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Cherokee, at the Western Iowa Synod Assembly.

and I also in them. And I realized that we are not so different, because we were all there with the same objective—know about the word of God.

We might have different traditions, customs and languages, but I had many things in common with many of the people I met, and that made me feel very good. The whole trip made me change—in values, in my spirit and also in my way of thinking. I learned a lot about everything, and I saw how people had a spiritual linkage with God, and then I also had it.

I learned that there will always be people by your side when you are living bad moments, and that God will always be with you. In Immanuel Lutheran Church, Forest City, I felt at home. I created a linkage with many people who changed me as a person. I could talk to them as if I had known them all my life. I was also staying there, with the Lehmanns, and I can say that I had the great opportunity to meet them and share my life with them and with

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## In Tanzania, education is liberation

By Jan Rosdail-Aegerter

In 2004, the dream of opening a residential school for girls in the Southern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania became a reality when an abandoned rice plantation came up for sale. The Western Iowa Women's Organization raised over \$25,000 to help purchase the property, and in March 2006 the Igumbilo Lutheran Girls' Secondary School opened with 83 students. By 2009, the first class of 53 girls had graduated and total enrollment had grown to 349. Today, enrollment is at 384 students, of which approximately 50 are Masaai girls, orphans or those who are financially vulnerable. These students would not have an opportunity to attend the school without scholarship support.

Historically, through gifts from the Western Iowa Synodical Women's Organization and other donors, \$2,000 monthly was provided to ensure these girls could afford to attend. Scholarships allow girls from the nearby Masaai village to do something their mothers never have dreamed of—get an education. Attending Igumbilo keeps these girls off the streets and free from danger while learning valuable skills. Today, that fund is nearly depleted, limiting the educational opportu-

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the whole church. There I met the best people. I shared everything about myself, my city, my language and traditions. And I felt good doing that because I wanted them to know other cultures and I wanted them to be interested in that and in me.

Many things changed in me after the trip—my way of thinking, my spirit and my values. And everything I learned helped me a lot. I could see how they lived at the other end of the continent, about their culture and language. And all that changed me as a person, in all areas. All this experience will help me in the future to open new paths that can change my life.

Thanks very much for everything. God bless you. ✠

nities of countless students. Bishop Isaya Mengele of the diocese and Bishop Rodger Prois are committed to building the scholarship fund as a top priority for our companionship.

How do the students at Igumbilo compare to those of other schools? Igumbilo girls test very well and on recent exams ranked No. 1 in the district and No. 23 in the nation. The quality of education far surpasses that of many government-operated schools.

As the school attracts more students, there are many needs. The campus continues to expand to include construction of two additional science laboratories and the partially completed library with computer lab. Increased enrollments create a need for a larger dining hall to provide inside eating, especially during the rainy season. Another necessity is the installation of a solar-powered backup for the water supply. Currently, electricity is unstable, leaving the campus without water for days at a time. These improvements are essential for the school to continue to provide high quality education.

If you are interested in how you can support the mission of Igumbilo, contact the Western Iowa Synod office (712-732-4968).

*Educating a girl is to educate a family, educating a family is to educate a community, educating a community is to build a nation (a common Tanzanian motto). ✠*



Mealtime at Igumbilo.

**Jan Rosdail-Aegerter** is a retired special education teacher from Christ Lutheran Church, Jefferson. She is a member of the Companion Synod Network.