WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

In this, the third gathering of Tanzania companion synod members, facilitators Rev. Kevin Jacobson, Rev. Benyum Kassahun, Dr. Mark Jacobson, and Regional Representative Daudi Msseemmaa discussed not only the current coronavirus situation in Tanzania, but also the recent changes to the structure of the ELCA, and its relation to our partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania.

Bishop Michael Girlinghouse, chair of the companion synod consultation committee opened the gathering with prayer. With the previously proposed 2022 Tanzanian consultation currently on hold, those gathered reflected on the 2018 consultation, and discussed ways we can continue to accompany our Tanzanian partners until we can be together in person again.

REV. KEVIN JACOBSON

2017-2019 Manager of relationships for East and Southern Africa
2019-2020 Interim director, then director for Mission Formation Team
November 2020-Present Program director for relationships, Africa, Asia and the Pacific

While Kevin was not as hands on with companion synod relationships during his time as director for Mission Formation, he is excited to serve in his new role as Program Director for Relationships, and is available to assist ELCA synods in their communication and ongoing partnership with ELCT dioceses.

REV. BENYAM KASSAHUN

January 2020-Present Director for Africa Desk

Benyam shared five priority areas, not only for Tanzania, but for the entire continent, as developed by the Africa Desk.

**PRIORITY 1**
THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Many African colleges are facing financial struggles, leaving the main reputable theological program at Makumira University near Arusha. How can we make this program accessible for the rest of the continent?

**PRIORITY 2**
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Large numbers of African church leaders are retiring, causing a need for cultivation of a younger generation of leaders.
Social and Political Context
- The president has continued to raise concerns about the safety of imported masks, as well as possible vaccines.
- Most people are hesitant to challenge any information that follows the government narrative.
- It is risky to share information or talk openly about an increasing deaths.
- Catholic leadership recently released information about the loss of clergy due to COVID.
- In January, leadership from the Catholic Church, Islamic Council, and Protestant denominations met to discuss ways to speak truthfully about the pandemic in their faith communities.

ELCA Response
- Your prayers and solidarity for your companions are greatly felt.
- Regular Diakonia and Mission in Ministry grants are more important than ever.
- Many scholarships and funded programs that weren't designed with COVID in mind are having great effects on the church and on the Tanzanian people during this pandemic.
DR. MARK JACOBSON ON COVID IN TANZANIA

Senior Health Consultant for Heath and Justice, Africa

- Those with COVID symptoms are said to have "pneumonia kali" or "very bad pneumonia"
- Denial of the virus is ongoing. Official numbers have not been released since April of 2020.
- Catholic and Lutheran bishops have released statements encouraging their churches to take precautions to protect themselves.
- Social distancing is mostly nonexistent as it is difficult to achieve.
- Surrounding countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan have applied for and have already started receiving COVAX vaccines.
- At this time, Tanzania has not applied to receive any doses of the vaccine.

WHAT OTHER BARRIERS DO WE FACE?
- The relationship between individual dioceses and the central ELCT office
- The relationship between the ELCT and the current government administration
- The roles that LCMS and ILC play in our ELCT communities

HOW CAN WE TALK ABOUT COVID WITH OUR COMPANIONS?
- Cite international news articles when asking questions related to the COVID situation
- Let your companions lead the discussion.

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO REQUESTS FROM COMPANIONS?
- Always ask for a proposal from your companion diocese.
- Feel free to let Benyam or Kevin know about the support you are giving and reach out if you have any questions or concerns.

ARE THE NEEDS FROM THE 2018 CONSULTATION BEING MET?
- Partially. Efforts are being made to partner the six new dioceses with ELCA synods as well as with the Mwangaza Education Center.

WHEN WILL THE NEXT CONSULTATION BE?
- In 2019, a committee of 7 ELCA church leaders, led by Bishop Michael Girlinghouse, and 7 ELCT church leaders was formed to plan the next companion event.
- At this time, the date of the next consultation is still unknown.
- Travel to Tanzania is not advised.
- When planning does begin, the first step will be to talk with our ELCT partners and assess interest.