

Report of the Iringa Committee

Working in cooperation with our companions in the Iringa Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (DIRA), the Iringa Committee has continued to make significant progress on our common goals. We are glad to report that the structural changes implemented at the 2013 Synod Assembly are bearing fruit and that the Bega Kwa Bega companion synod relationship (BKB) is as robust and strong as ever.

Guided by our 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, highlights of the last year include:

Define Core Work and Build the Administrative Capacity to Carry It Out

Both the number of travelers received in Iringa and the volume of projects our congregations engaged in exceeded expectations. We assisted DIRA leadership in welcoming 177 Minnesotans to Iringa in 2016 and currently have 153 travelers on the books for 2017. Our congregations have assisted with the construction of a primary school and the roofing of many church buildings, purchased motorcycles and medicines, and supported the education of more than 700 students. As a synod, we worked with DIRA leaders to construct science labs at Lutangilo Secondary School and expanded our scholarship program to include secondary students from non-partnered DIRA congregations. Administratively, the addition of a year-round volunteer in Iringa has ensured more timely and accurate reporting on these and other projects.

Expand Congregational Involvement

The Iringa Committee recognizes that not all congregations in the Saint Paul Area Synod have the capacity to travel to Iringa regularly and has therefore initiated both the BKB Ambassador Program and Synod-Wide Vision Trips. BKB Ambassadors travel on behalf of US congregations in an effort to increase communication and a sense of connection between congregations. In 2016, two teams of volunteers visited sixteen congregations in Iringa. Another ten are expected to receive ambassador visits in 2017. The October 2016 Vision Trip brought together ten travelers from seven different congregations on a shared journey that allowed them to save on costs while exposing them to the breadth of this companion synod relationship. The next Vision Trip is tentatively slated for 2018.

Develop Volunteer Leadership

BKB continues to provide a fertile training ground for leaders in the Saint Paul Area Synod and the ELCA at large. This May, as part of the synod's Young Adults Initiative, four young adults from three different congregations are participating in our inaugural 'BKB Youth/Young Adult Seminar' and will spend two weeks with their peers in Iringa. Together, they will discuss and learn about Lutheran identity, vocation, and what it means to be leaders in a church and world that are always re-forming. In September Julia Hubbard will be completing two years of service on our behalf in Iringa. Working in collaboration with ELCA Global Mission, a new long-term shared-placement volunteer has been identified. A recent graduate of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, April Trout comes to us from the Lower Susquehanna Synod with twenty-eight years of experience in labor and delivery

nursing as well as a term of service in Tanzania with the Peace Corps. This will be her first call as a rostered Minister of Word and Service.

Assess and Develop Long Range Funding

The Iringa Committee continues to be careful stewards of the resources that move through the BKB system. The administrative fees remained fixed at 12.5% and, when paired with synodical support and careful budgeting, have ensured operational stability and enabled us to consider strategic investments in the relationship and its initiatives. On the agenda for 2017 is the finalization of an endowment fund to ensure long-term support.

Clarify and Strengthen Relationships with Affiliates & Other Stakeholders

The Iringa Committee is grateful for the network of development organizations and initiatives that are affiliated with BKB and the work that they pursue with DIRA. From micro-finance and health care to reforestation and radio, these groups not only enhance the lives of our companions, they also provide opportunities for individuals in Minnesota (many of whom have no formal connection with the Church) to meaningfully engage this relationship with their gifts, skills, and technical expertise.

The last year has seen significant change among our companions in Iringa as Bishop Dr. Owdenberg Mdegella officially retired and the Rev. Blastone Gaville was elected to that office. We expect Bishop-elect Gaville to be consecrated and installed during worship on Sunday, June 25th. In the mean time, we ask you to keep him, Dean-elect Himidi Sagga, their families, and DIRA's leadership in your prayers during this period of transition.

As always, we give thanks for the opportunity to serve on your behalf and to accompany you, the people of the Saint Paul Area Synod, on this journey that we all share.

Kirsten Levorson, Chair of the Iringa Committee

The Rev. Peter Harrits, Director of Bega Kwa Bega and Assistant to the Bishop