



Hibiscus



Amaryllis



Frangipani

## **News from ELCA missionary Barbara Robertson serving in Morogoro, Tanzania January 2011**

### **Work Life**



It was my great privilege to spend a morning with a group of young men I fondly refer to my garage boys. Over the years, I have gotten to know quite a few of these young men and have watched them grow and mature. I did an HIV/AIDS seminar before and the older fellows who were present at the last one had been hounding me to have another session for the new boys who have joined the garage. Seventy (as in seven zero) young men were present. The main themes were; have long term life goals, be responsible, get tested. Joseph, the owner of the garage, told me, 'It matters that you come. They have changed because of you.' And I've changed because of them. How honored I am that they should listen to what I have to say.



Since my very first year in Morogoro, I have been part of a team of people chosen to establishing a Primary Health Care (PHC) program in our diocese. I had the great good fortune of going on a study tour for the second time, this trip to Northern Diocese in Moshi at the base of Mount Kilimanjaro. We were familiarized with all the ways in which the church is active in the community, helping to improve basic health and living standards. We (pictures above from left to right) made house to house visits, took a look at a milk processing project, observed a primary school health screening day, met members of that congregation which gathers at Nkwarunga – the site of the first Lutheran Church in Tanzania, saw a bread baking project, and saw how an efficiency wood stove conserves firewood and boils water all at a go. It was a wonderful experience and we hope to replicate some of the programs.



In September of last year, two members of Sammamish Hills Lutheran Church in Washington came on a fact finding trip. I was asked to be their guide while they were in the diocese. I'm always glad when work is fun and I had a lovely time speaking American English for a week. Linda and Peg graciously hosted me for the weekend as well and we had a terrific day at Mikumi Park and a lovely stay at Bagamoyo. Thanks you guys!

October started off with a visit from our program director from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago headquarters, Rev. Jim Gonja. It was good to take time to reflect on my work here, have a chance to talk about joys and challenges, and think about the future. I was very happy to have an opportunity to meet my dear friends, Tom and Rev Sally Roach, once again.



For the past two years, Morogoro Diocese has been waging a grassroots fight against harmful traditional practices – specifically FGM (female circumcision). In the process, we have met with many community leaders. In October, the diocese leaders and department heads made a visit to Tikwa Moreto, the head (laibon) of the Maasai community living in our area. He is very supportive of our work against FGM. At the end of November, we met again with him along with a delegation of ten Maasai women who asked him to take a stronger stand. As a result of that visit, he has agreed to host a gathering of 200 women for a two day meeting in order to make a formal pronouncement – FGM is no longer to be practiced within his area. Miracle of miracles, funds almost immediately materialized for the gather! Now we look forward to mid-February and beyond.

It was my great hope to have our newest oil expeller up and running the first of October. I'm disappointed to report that, as of this writing, it is not in place yet. The building is ready; the machine is ready. The wiring is ready. We just need some electricity to get going! But that is ALWAYS a challenge. One setback we faced in putting our press in place was that the chairperson of the women's group of Kimamba where the press will be installed, died suddenly. Marselina John was only 41. The entire community was shocked at her death. She was the engine of the group and is sorely missed. My colleague, Tabitha Kilatu, and I attended her funeral. What a sad day it was. We have observed a time of mourning and shall now get on with finishing installation as a way of honoring her.

## **Home Life**

We had rain two rains in November. We had a couple good rains in December. We thank God for His blessings! It has been horribly dry and there has been water rationing throughout the town. Some friends have had no water in their taps for more than three weeks. With the rain, there is hope that they shall see more water in the pipes. We have been very fortunate here at home. Though there have been cuts during the day, we have had some water with enough pressure to keep

water in our tanks. Without tanks, we would be in a sorry state. There is still a shortage of water and we are now seeing some power rationing. This may be a challenging year – water and electricity wise.

In December, I had the chance to go on a week-long spiritual retreat. I went to Cape Town, South Africa to the Dominican Retreat Centre. It was a very restorative time. I was blessed to have a wonderful spiritual director who understands well the challenges of cross cultural living. I came back with a little more spring in my step.

We have an English Christmas Eve service here every year - Carols by Candlelight. This year I organized a small choir to sing. It was great fun and nice to be back at the 'podium' after a VERY long hiatus. Extra special thanks to Julia Westby of my home congregation for helping to find music!

### **Other stuff**

On October 31<sup>st</sup>, Tanzania held presidential and parliamentary elections. The elections were very peacefully executed and there has a peaceful transition and handing over of power.

The end of the year is traditionally the time of year for weddings. And so in mid-November I had a chance to take part in the wedding of William Mmari, the eldest son of my dear friend Ruth.



I have been very close with the Mmari family these past five years and they have opened up the circle of their family and make me a part. The bride's family may have scratched their heads a bit wondering how it is that William has an aunt of European descent.

In contrast to our American culture, the wedding is put on by the family of the groom. He and his family do all the planning and pay for the celebration. In the week leading up to the wedding there is a party hosted by bride's family called a Send-Off. At that party, the bride's family formally and publically accepts the groom and his family and gives their blessing to the wedding. I was invited to be a member of the party representing the groom's family at the Send-Off. It was great fun, with lots of laughter, dancing and food. The wedding was equally wonderful. It was so nice to see family and friends and to dance, dance, dance!



### **Prayers**

- Please pray that we find favor with the local electricity authorities and our oil press gets hooked up to electricity – SOON
- That we have the right amount of rain at the right time in order to ensure a good harvest so all may be spared another year of food shortage
- For families raising children in a rapidly changing

- For students and pupils as they start a new school year here in Tanzania
- For Morogoro Diocese as it starts preparations for its General Assembly, held every four years
- For new pastors who were ordained in 2010 that they may be good and faithful leaders

## **Thanksgiving**

- I'm thankful for safe travel – to and from the Mt Kilimanjaro region, numerous trips to Dar-es-Salaam, and to and from South Africa
- I'm thankful for courageous people, especially those in the traditional pastoralist community, who are taking a stand against harmful traditional practices
- I'm thankful for wonderful colleagues who invite me to work side by side with them
- I'm grateful for my family and friends, both here and in the US for their continued support and encouragement

## **PS**

This year I will be in the US for my home assignment, most likely from the end of July to the end of September. I will be available to visit congregations, Bible Study groups, synods, or any other group that would like to hear about life and work in Tanzania and the ELCA.

May God bless and keep you all. May 2011 be a year of health, prosperity, love, joy and peace.

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