

Bishop's House, PO Box Private Bag, Mtandi, Masasi, Tanzania
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Christmas 2019

Our dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

*“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.
For there is born to you this day in the City of David, a Saviour, who is Christ
the Lord.”*
(St Luke 2.10 + 11 NKJV)

It is with joy, we greet you this Christmas 2019!

We do thank and praise our Almighty God, giving Him all the Glory for this past year. We have seen much of His Love and Protection, His Mercy and His Grace among our people in Masasi. We are thankful to Him for the peace and unity in our Diocese amongst the priests and the congregations through the many challenges and difficulties we face. They are there for us to see and to receive.

Since my Consecration in 2014 we have been working towards our Five Year Development Plan for Pastoral Care and Social Services. We rejoice as these five years near completion that God is doing His miraculous in the hearts of many people, in many ways and in many places in our Diocese. I bring you news of our Diocese and our people from this year past.

Pastoral care: now in 2019 we see the many ways that God has blessed us. God has given us strength to serve, to minister to many congregations; to give the Sacraments, to conduct seminars and conferences, to bring trainings and to hold open-air meetings. There have been many baptisms and confirmations through the whole Diocese.

The number of congregations and the communicants have both increased, rising from 35,000 in 2014 to 55,000 at present. In many places and parishes, there are new and bigger churches being built - replacing the smaller mud brick buildings - to accommodate the increased number of people. There are over forty (40) churches in different stages of completion but the pressing challenges that all congregations face is the cost of the roofing sheets, the average need for each church being two hundred and fifty (250) corrugated iron sheets.

Parishes are also caring much for their priests as many are currently building new residential houses for them too. As for me, I have also travelled and encouraged the parishioners on the importance of building decent houses for the purpose of creating a conducive living environment and improving the health of the clergy.

Apart from working in my Diocese, I was also asked by a number of the Dioceses in our Province and managed to lead seminars and conferences for priests and for their wives; this has included the Dioceses of Dar-es-Salaam, Western Tanganyika, Tanga, Tabora, Newala, Kibondo, Rift Valley and Southern Highlands. It is my privilege too to serve the Church on numerous committees for the House of Bishops, Christian Social Service Commission (CSSC), and Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT).

Veronica too is serving our Province as Deputy Chair of the Mothers' Union. Mama Joyce Liundi, who is the Mothers' Union Secretary of Masasi Diocese for many years, has been elected as ACC Standing Committee Member. Those of you who have stayed at St Anne's will also know Sr Paulina; at the beginning of this year she celebrated 25 years since taking her final vows at Mailisita. Thanks be to God for her commitment and services.

Canon Geoffrey Monjesa was given a special award by the PWRDF this year for twenty years of faithful service to the Diocese of Masasi and his commitment in changing communities' lives in the Anglican church of Tanzania. I received this award for him in October and it was a privilege to give him this honour on my return from Canada. Congratulations to Canon Geoffrey for being such a faithful servant!

Social Services: We offer our sincere thanks and deep appreciation to the people and Government of Canada; their contributions through the Primate's World Relief Development Fund (PWRDF) have been very supportive in improving the health of pregnant women, babies, children under five and the general livelihoods of their families and community members in rural areas in Tunduru District through a 4-year health project entitled "All Mothers and Children Count (AMCC). The lives of thousands of people in seventy three (73) villages are being transformed by the generosity and the prayers of many people from across the nation of Canada. Our gratitude is very great.

We are also very thankful to Compassion International Tanzania for their generosity towards many children in Lindi and Mnazi Mmoja in the provision of education, clothes and shoes. Families and their children are being given love, hope and a future through this organization.

We, in our Diocese, are sincerely thankful to many other people and organizations who continue to give us their blessings in various ways: the Friends of Masasi and Newala, Minchinhampton Parish Church, St Francis Potomac, the Diocese of Montreal, African Palms (UK/USA) and the Diocese of Hereford are amongst our encouragers and supporters.

Our visitors in 2019: have included:

- **PWRDF:** several groups of representatives from Canada on their regular trips to see the work in progress in Tunduru.

- **Hereford Diocese:** Bishop Richard, his wife Kay, Alison Fawcett and Prebendary Brian Chave brought much encouragement and strengthened the Covenant Partnership between our two Dioceses.
- **St John's Olney:** a group from the USA led by Fr Henry McQueen visited us for the commissioning of the group of the eight people who had studied for a year at the Bible School in Bunda, Mara Diocese, NW Tanzania. These studies will equip them to serve their parishes well. A further six of these women have returned to Bunda for two more years of theological study.
- **SOMA (Sharing of Ministries Abroad):** a team from UK and South Africa led two conferences over two weeks for priests and catechists from the Dioceses of Newala and Masasi. We thank God for the spiritual encouragement, the teaching and the fellowship of the team led by Rev Matthew Grayshon, Matt Lawrence, Ellen Tungwarara (SA), Revd Rob Jobling (SA) and our own Lay Canon Jonathan Rendall.
- **African Palms USA and Members of St John's Olney** visited us to see more of the people and villages where the Palms are grown and made, together with some of the projects that have been funded through the sale of the Easter palm crosses.
- **Stephen Arbery:** a Trustee of the Friends of Masasi and Newala visited us in October as he was working with the Blind Unit at Masasi Primary School.
- **Simon Stubbings and Peter Thorrington:** these two friends have shown the desire of holding our hands and being ready to walk and serve together.

We are so thankful to you all, our friends. We also do appreciate the fellowship and friendship of so many others who love and pray for us in Masasi and for our nation of Tanzania. Next year 2020 we have a General Election: please pray for us at this time of political campaigning, of increased political activity and debate about the future of our nation.

Education: Rondo Junior Seminary: The Government's new educational regulations and the economic transformation are still giving us both joy and challenges. This is especially true for Rondo Junior Seminary and St Catherine's Girls' School Namasakata, as it is for all other fee-paying schools in Tanzania owned by private and faith-based organizations including Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Pentecostal churches, indeed all of us. While Rondo continues to gain very good results in the Form 4 exams, we are challenged by the reality of the free secondary education for all children policy. All fee-paying schools across the nation are experiencing falling numbers of children, resulting in falling of incomes.

The Rondo Theological College: although the plan of the southern zone Bishops was to open the College as a Zonal Theological Centre by the end of

December 2019, it has not opened yet but we are praying, planning and preparing for something to happen soon.

At St Catherine's Secondary School for Girls, Namasakta there are now six classrooms and two dormitories built which yet need the roofing sheets; we hope to build three teachers' houses next year. There is also a fee needed to be paid to the Government in order to register the school.

The Bible School at Kwitonji: Bishop Richard (Hereford) opened the School in May and the first intake of students was in September. Captain Catherine Lagunda is the Principal with responsibility for our first 15 catechist students. Our dream is now for all catechists in our Diocese to be trained and equipped to serve their parishes in the acc. Our big challenge here is to gather the resources we need for the smooth running of the School.

We give God thanks that twenty five youths from our parishes around Masasi Town have been motivated to attend Bible teachings and prayers every Saturdays; and willingly they are paying their own money – with other contributions - to cover training costs. It is my pleasure to teach at the School when I can and also to serve these youths on those Saturdays.

People in Education and training:

- **Fr Phares Lihewe** (the Former Rector at Rondo Junior Seminary) will be completing his Theological studies and will be awarded a degree in 2020. As Fr Phares attends Bishop Gaul College in Harare, he is in a very difficult situation because of the political and economic challenges in Zimbabwe, but he has managed to do well in his studies over the past eighteen months. Further financial support is needed to enable him to complete his studies.
- **Vincent Masimosya**, who I ordained deacon at Mkomaindo on Sunday, 7th December, is currently studying at the Uganda Christian University in Kampala for his theology degree. He already has a degree in Education and is a qualified teacher. Our thanks are extended to Hereford Diocese for sponsoring his studies in Kampala.
- **George Mgaza** who is sponsored by African Palms (UK) has just completed his degree in Population and Development Planning at St John's University in Dodoma. We have much work for him in our Diocese!
- **Baraka Mlowola** who has been sponsored by Minchinhampton Parish has completed his studies and is now Clinical Officer at Mtandi Dispensary. We are so thankful for his experience, his skills and his vocation to medicine.

My visits: I have been given wonderful opportunities to visit many places this year in our own nation but also to witness the ministry and work of the Anglican Communion in other nations too:

- **Rwanda:** in March I was at an African Bishops conference where Bishops from many nations were gathered for fellowship and conversations, teaching and training from experienced Bishops and theologians.
- **USA and Canada:** It was a real joy and pleasure to visit friends in the USA, Canada in September and October.
 - My first three weeks were at the **Anglican Leadership Institute** in Massachusetts, directed by Peter More, where bishops and priests from many nations gathered for training in leadership. This was a blessed and rich learning experience for me.
 - I then travelled to **Olney** where I was hosted by Fr Henry and the parish of St John's. We in Masasi are most grateful for the support given to the women attending theological training at Bunda Bible School, whose studies are being funded also by African Palms (USA). The Diocese also received funding from the same organization (African Palms) for drilling of boreholes in two villages. Access to safe and potable water has improved the knowledge and perception of the community on water, sanitation, and hygiene practices. Most of the community members are aware that boiling water is important as they were educated and they know that even water from a borehole or piped water supply can be contaminated and should be boiled to kill germs. With such communities having access to clean water and knowledge on safe water, our gratitude is very great.
 - **St Francis Potomac** then in turn, welcomed me and I much enjoyed the fellowship of the Rector, Fr Mark and his staff while staying with Fred and Karen. The generous congregation here have funded some further work at Namasakata, St Catherine's Secondary School and it was great to be there for the Patronal Festival of St Francis.
 - **Montreal Diocese:** Bishop Mary and her husband Mark, kindly hosted me for two weeks, during which time I saw many things of the work of our Partnership Diocese in Canada through a fruitful and busy schedule. During this time I also visited the PWRDF HQ in Toronto where I met representatives and volunteers from each Diocese across the nation and I very much appreciated the very rare opportunity that I was given to share with them the results of the wonderful work they are supporting in our Diocese, particularly in the rural areas of Tunduru/Masasi districts.

During this long trip I would like to extend my gratitude and many thanks to Mama Punitha Westall and Bishop Michael, her husband, for their support and encouragement. Thank you very much.

We are so thankful for all our visitors to Masasi; and to those people who have welcomed and hosted me in their own homes and in their Dioceses. We do thank you and pray for you. Your welcomes, your support, your partnerships and your encouragements are valued much by us all. Please come and visit us: “Karibu Masasi”, “Welcome to Masasi”!

Once again, we do thank God for His great faithfulness and kindness to us, the Almasi family:

- My mother Mary is recovering slowly from the asthma that has been a challenge to her this year. She continues to live at our family home in Sindano.
- Faraja graduated this year from Mzumbe University in Morogoro with his first degree in Public Health Systems; he is now seeking sponsorship for a second degree.
- Hugh, after a very successful secondary education has just begun his first year at Dodoma University studying International Relationships.
- Furaha is awaiting her results in January or February having graduated from Form 4; she will then pursue her studies for her advanced level (A level).
- Veronica is hoping to go to Nairobi in January for a one semester course to prepare herself for our visit to the UK in July and August for the 2020 Lambeth Conference. We shall also be visiting Hereford Diocese, Stapleford, Minchinhampton and we look forward to meeting many friends at the two Masasi Days (London and Minchinhampton) or somewhere on our travels.

Our main diocesan project for next year: at their meeting last May the Diocesan Synod decided that due to the very bad condition and deterioration of the Diocesan Bishop’s house it is a priority that a new house be constructed. Each congregation is to be asked to contribute funds so that we can build a new one. The house where Veronica and I now live was built with mud bricks during the time of our Bishop Trevor Huddleston (1960-1968). Surely, it has lasted very well and the repairs of five years ago gave it some extra years! I do ask your and their prayers for this.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, your love and faithfulness to us is our great joy and delight. We do thank you and honour you before Almighty God; we give Him our sincere thanks and heartfelt praise for His many blessings, for

your prayers, your partnerships and your fellowship in the Gospel released to us. All the glory is to God Himself.

Across the whole of the Diocese, we pray the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of the Father and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you, your families, your Churches and with all those for whom you pray this Christmas and throughout the New Year 2020.

May God bless you and encourage you in your faith and love for Him this Christmas time as you celebrate “His inexpressible Gift” at this nativity season.

Sincerely, and with my love in Christ.

Your friend and brother,

+James

Rt Revd Dr James Almasi
Bishop of Masasi, Tanzania