

Habari za leo – *which is Swahili for* - What's the news?

This year I visited Tanzania again, for a month during September and October. The Sisters and all our friends in the Diocese of Masasi are well and enjoying life in their usual way, content with the little they have. Perhaps we would also be happier with less clutter!! Although things are moving forward very quickly in their attempt to catch up with the West, some things don't work as intended. For example, in trying to get a visa for my visit, which can only be done online now, I received not only mine but also one for a lady from Brazil!!

The Tanzanian Government is really clamping down on all sorts of things. For example, all plastic bags are banned, and in the fight against bribery and corruption, all financial transactions, including foreign exchange, must be accompanied by a receipt, similar to a credit card receipt in the UK but on watermarked paper and without a receipt they are regarded as illegal. US dollars, Euros and pounds sterling can only be exchanged in a bank. Other currencies are only handled in one of the few authorised exchange bureaux in Dar Es Salaam, and they offer very poor rates.

What now affects NGO's most, especially the charity work of churches, is the Government advice to use the new facilities they have provided, such as the secondary schools they have built in most districts and the dispensaries in almost all villages. This has a knock-on effect on the activities engaged in by the Diocese and the Sisters. People in the rural areas have little money due to the poor harvest and although some of them may prefer to use a medical or educational facility with a Christian ethos and have the spiritual support of the Sisters, they are unable to pay any small charge involved and as a result have to use the Government facilities.

There are big infrastructure projects everywhere, such as stretches of new roads often more than fifty miles long, new railway lines partly elevated, new airports and the revitalised national airline 'Tanzania Air' (nicknamed "Air Magafuli" after the President). Much of it is financed by China, although a large project has recently been rejected as the Government has woken up to the fact that the Chinese have ulterior motives in helping Tanzania. The President, who is already canvassing for his re-election next year, is well liked by the poor but not by the rich, presumably because he has reduced corruption so dramatically.

Water is still a big problem in many areas, not only because the population has doubled in the last 25 years, but also because climate change is bringing less rain. Since much of the electricity in Tanzania is generated by hydro-electric power, as the water level in rivers and dams drops there is often no electricity, and this was the case in Masasi on most days while I was there. Solar panels help, but when there is no direct sun there is little power.

It is good that the Diocesan training scheme for the catechists is now going well. The teaching programme is covering not only bible study, but also other subjects such as liturgy, Church history and leadership, etc. The Centre provides the students with dormitories and all other essential facilities and the training is provided by experienced priests from the Diocese as well as guest lecturers. Talking to some of them it became

clear how important this project is as some of the catechists have only a very basic knowledge of their faith.

Quite a few of the Sisters are also studying, in colleges and secondary schools, as the need for further education is really the key to their future. Much of their land in Masasi has been taken away for future housing and the status of their land has been changed from 'agricultural' to 'residential'. This means that their reliance on agriculture is reduced, not only as a result of the effects of climate change, but also by the loss of land. More of them will have to work in public institutions like schools, hospitals and offices, which will be a great opportunity for mission as well as bringing in much needed income. The girls' hostel and the nursery school in Masasi already provide opportunities to spread the Gospel and show that the Sisters are active in the community, and not living in isolation in a convent.

This year I visited eight of the Sisters' Houses, going as far as Liuli at Lake Nyasa. That meant travelling over 1,500 miles, mostly by bus, which was fine as on some of the visits a group of eight Swiss people accompanied me. They wanted to see the work of the Sisters before going on to Northern Mozambique to support churches there that had suffered badly after the two cyclones earlier this year.

Coming to one of the Sisters' Houses I was given a little baby girl to hold while they fed another one. The twins were born in June. The mother died within days and nobody wanted these lovely little ones, so the Sisters took them in and look after them now.

One day I went with the Sisters from the House in Dar Es Salaam to their farm, two to three hours away. All the Sisters farms are now far from their Houses due to the tremendous growth of the population and the consequential spread of the built up residential areas. We drove through puddles as large as ponds, with water coming over the bonnet several times. On this trip a priest came with us. The Sisters asked the people to come together under a canvas cover held up with sticks while the rain came down. Four children and one adult were baptised, and we celebrated this with a communion service afterwards.

It is always so reassuring and moving to experience how the Christian Faith is spread through the work of the Sisters, together with many other dedicated people. May the Christian Church continue to grow at a fast rate.

We pray that God will bless the CMM Sisters as they carry on their important work for many years to come.

Dirk Juttner

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