

Letters from Overseas

Ron and Linda Locke Write from Tanzania

June 2010

Greetings from Dodoma, Tanzania. We arrived in Dodoma, via Dar es Salaam, on May 28, 2010, and were warmly welcomed at a dinner by the General Secretary and 10 staff members from the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT). We were each given a piece of material that was wrapped around us to “Africanize” us.



The following week we attended a three-day conference where the CCT hosted 80 bishops from the different dioceses in Tanzania. Some of the CCT staff acted as translators for us, as it was conducted in Kiswahili. A great deal of information was passed on and we were introduced to the group.

A couple of days were spent moving into our house and getting used to the office routine at the CCT Church House, and then we were off to Morogoro where we had two days to tour and discuss the CCT-Morogoro Women’s, Training Centre. It is a great facility, which was inaugurated in 1979 by the CCT with funding support from the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (IODC) Netherlands. It had a larger hall and two more housing units built in 2003. It is used to bring women in from the surrounding villages, for about two weeks, for courses on how to better their lives. We participated in a brainstorming session with the centre’s director, Ruth Shija, to develop a course to reduce occurrences of female genital mutilation aimed at birthing assistants who do this procedure. We drew up a rough budget and will help develop a course outline at a future meeting. The second day, we met the chaplain at the Sokoine University of Agriculture and had a tour of the CCT chapel on the campus.

Two days home and we were off to Kibaya with the CCT Women Development, Children, and Gender Programme Officer, Mary Shuma, for a seminar on gender-based violence presented to 40 teachers from remote villages. The schools were closed this week, so teachers were free to come for the full four days of the seminar. It was quite an awakening to hear the horrific stories they told about the violence against women and girls in their communities. However, it was very heart-warming to see the teachers’ enthusiasm and dedication. They have a very important job and hopefully by reaching the children through education on their rights and gender equality, changes can be made in the future. Note: Teachers in Tanzania are paid 100,000 Tanzanian Shillings a month, or approximately CDN\$70.50.



While having dinner with one of our colleagues, Clotilda Ndezi, who works in the CCT HIV/AIDS department, we learned about an AIDS-affected family who are in need of help. The father died and relatives sold their home and possessions, leaving the mother, who is handicapped and HIV-positive, with four children. They live in a mud house loaned to them by a kind neighbour. The oldest son, Mzigo, goes to school and is doing very well in his studies, considering the time he has available. He and his brother carry water for their neighbours in order to bring some money in for the family to live on. Mzigo suggested that if they owned some land, they could raise some goats and chickens and have a garden to earn money. Justin Nyamoga, the Programme Officer for CCT's HIV/AIDS Department, along with Clotilda, is striving to find ways to help this and other AIDS-affected families in Tanzania.

During the same dinner, Clotilda's husband, Dr. Tim Ndezi, described his job to us. He heads up the Centre for Community Initiatives (CCI), whose mandate is to improve the living conditions in slum or shanty neighbourhoods in Tanzania. When Ron served in Afghanistan, he partnered on a project with a charitable organization from Canada called "Light Up the World" (LUTW) headed by its founder, Dr. David Irvine-Halliday. LUTW's goal is to bring reliable lighting to regions in the world not served by an electrical grid or where the cost is prohibitive to the local population. We are going to try and connect the two groups to see if they can collaborate to provide solar-powered LED lights in CCI's improved homes. Imagine the possibilities if CCI, LUTW, and CCT's HIV/AIDS department came together to provide solutions to housing for impoverished AIDS victims!

Besides this, Ron heads up the Information and Communication Department at CCT and is brushing up on Web design in order to manage the CCT website while Linda works in the financial department at CCT.

Ron & Linda Locke are United Church of Canada overseas personnel serving with the Christian Council of Tanzania. The work of this ecumenical partner and the work of overseas personnel are made possible through your gifts to The United Church of Canada's Mission and Service Fund.

