

Greetings to my sponsoring churches! When I wrote to you last month, I had just returned from India and was getting settle back into Arusha and Lent. In the spirit of Lent, let me start with a confession. I have a ghost writer and editor for this monthly newsletter, my sister Jan. I write to her every day and she sorts through those emails and crafts a newsletter from bits and pieces and then sends to you. This month, I'm writing this myself. Jan fell a week ago and broke her wrists. Please keep her in your prayers. With help, I hope she'll even manage to edit and send this newsletter for me.

Ash Wednesday came and I attended the service at Arusha Community Church, where I'd preached the previous Sunday – a sermon on the Transfiguration. My sermon was about the light of Jesus being meant not to blind us (staring into a light bulb) but illuminate (like seeing what that bulb has lit). When we receive the ashes, we hear those words, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” That puts us in our place! And reminds us of our dependence – in John 14:6a Jesus says to us, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

This past month I was on “safari” for almost two weeks. I use the lower case Kiswahili word “safari” which simply means travel/journey. However this safari did put some animals in the road in front of the vehicle and beautiful savannah and open grassy plains all around. Wildebeest and zebra were the ones to block the road and out in the plains, there were literally thousands of them with many wildebeest calves. We also saw a few giraffes, warthogs, impalas, gazelles and maybe a hippo taking a bath in a river we passed.

The purpose of the safari was to visit five hospitals and four Dioceses. I decided to do most of it by traveling in “the Beast” or as my driver Egild prefers, “the Phoenix.” We started out traveling to Jambí Hospital. We stayed in the guesthouse that GM helped renovate with some extra bathrooms. I understand that the house has some other guests – bats. I'm surprised they haven't come to visit me; I have that problem in several places I've lived.

It is another challenge to work on. I had a very nice visit with the Bishop of that Diocese.

My stay was in the usual hotel in Mwanza. That is a nice thing, staying in a place that's familiar. On my trip, I mostly slept in a different bed every night. From Mwanza I flew to Bukoba and then by road to Ndolage. There, I shared the guesthouse with a young couple – dentist and dental student. Had some nice conversations with them and had company at dinner and breakfast time. We had guacamole on toast for breakfast. That was a first and it was nice. Ndolage is working hard on improving and it shows. We hope to get some volunteers there soon and a Pediatric Resident placement there also. The morning I was to leave Bukoba there was first heavy winds and then heavy rain – that lasted about 45 minutes. But then it was done and only heavy clouds remained. My 12-seater plane stayed under the clouds and we had a pretty smooth flight.

In Mwanza I spent some time with our volunteers there. The woman is a pastor and nurse, like me – and like me, went to Lutheran Deaconess in Minneapolis. She started the year I graduated! Her husband is an engineer and they were both warmly welcomes and well utilized. It was also a time to visit Benedetta, the woman who was injured in the bombing at the guesthouse. I'm trying to help her get some specialized surgical care in India. But the surgeon in Mwanza may have some plans of his own – so we are waiting to see what happens.

Good visits in Bunda, Musoma and Karatu – we have lots of opportunities for volunteers. I'll be packing up and going to the US for the month of April, spending Holy Week in my home congregation, Zion Lutheran in Milaca, MN and then hopefully visiting eight synods and three hospitals – traveling to MN, WI, IL, NY, PA, MD, OH and NE. Keep my sister Jan and me in your prayers and I'll do the same.

- John