

## Diocese of Meru Visit 2023

We departed from O'Hare, Chicago, on Tuesday, August 29, arriving at Kilimanjaro International on Wednesday night, August 30.

When I presented my visa document I was told that the first number of my passport number was incorrect so I would need to buy another visa - \$100!!

We were greeted by about 6 people from Patanumbe Parish who sang to us and prayed with us. Off to the Rest House.

Thursday morning our driver, Jacob, took us to the bank to exchange our money and then on the diocese office to greet the bishop and staff. After waiting for quite some time for the bishop to arrive, Pastor Ndelekwa Pallangyo, Assistant to the Bishop, said that we would have the meeting without the bishop.

After the meeting and tea the diocese treasurer showed us the new building, pointing out who is renting which storefronts.

After our meeting Jacob took us to Ngoaranga Hospital to meet with Dr. Kiwesa and Frank Godwin from the hospital and Dr. Bariki from the Gilchrist Foundation. We carried with us 2 surgical boots and 128 comfort dolls made by the ladies at Vernon Lutheran Church.

On Friday we spent the day with Felix and Nnko, our coffee project manager. We visited several coffee farmers and 1 processing center.

Saturday, September 2 we traveled to Patanumbe Parish where we were met by several parishioners and the choir. After lunch we were taken to our host home. On Sunday we worshipped at Loseti Sub-Parish. Loseti is a Maasai parish. Godfrey Vavae is their evangelist. He took us up the hill where the mother church used to sit. After lunch at Loseti we travelled to Songonbele to see their new well & the foundations for their new toilets. On to Makiba for a choir festival. In all we visited 5 of the 6 sub-parishes.

On Monday morning there was a partnership meeting & then on to Valeska for lunch & a Hope Seed Initiative meeting. We departed for Mariki's after the meeting.

The entire week was spent at the Mariki's visiting Hope Seed Initiative groups. What a joy it is to see first hand the work of the NGO. The goat recipients warmed our hearts, made us smile, showed us the love God in so many ways.

On September 9 we spent the day visiting with friends of Mariki's in Arusha. It was a beautiful day.

September 10 was worship at Duluti parish where the Western District Choir Festival was to be held. At least 6 choirs participated in worship. The festival followed at noon with 16 choirs participating.

Late that afternoon we were on the road again to the home of Pastors Wilfred & Christina Kaaya. It was so good to see them again. Their 16 year old daughter, Rogathe, was home so we were able to visit with her too.

On Monday the Kaaya's took us to the home of Naomi Nnko where we stayed until we returned to the Rest House late in the afternoon of September 13. Naomi took us to her parish, Imbasseny (partner parish with Christ the King, Delafield & Our Savior's, Hartland) where we met the evangelist and saw the construction going on in preparation for the diocese choir festival on October 8. We were also able to meet Naomi's mother, her uncle, and her daughter. We also visited Naomi's coffee plantation. We were able to meet with several members of the parish after dinner on one of the nights.

On Wednesday afternoon we returned to the Rest House to prepare for our trip home. We left Kilimanjaro on Thursday night, returning to Chicago on Friday afternoon. No problems with any of our airline flights.

The diocese Rest House is very nice. Newly painted with new bed linens and new food options. Flora is a wonderful host and the food she prepared was delicious and healthy.

Once area of concern that I must share is the cost of staying at the Rest House. On the document that we received from the diocese it states that one person in a room is \$50 and two people in a room are \$60. That is incorrect. We were charged \$120 per night for lodging. Flora gave us an invoice, which we had to return to her so she could turn it in at the diocese office. I was in total shock when I saw that we were charged \$701 for four night's lodging, 10 meals, and one bottle of water. Because the entire invoice didn't register with me it appears that we were charged for 5 night's lodging but because I don't have an invoice I have no proof. If you are planning to stay at the Rest House you need to document everything.

This was very likely our last trip to the diocese. The amount of work planning the trip, the expense, the long air flights, and the rough terrain all contribute to this decision. While we will dearly miss our friends in the diocese we have to consider so many parts of the trip when making this decision.

Blessings to those of you who are still able to travel to the diocese and enjoy the company of our brothers and sisters so far away.

*Tom & Sue Johnson*