

Jacobson Newsletter

April 2020

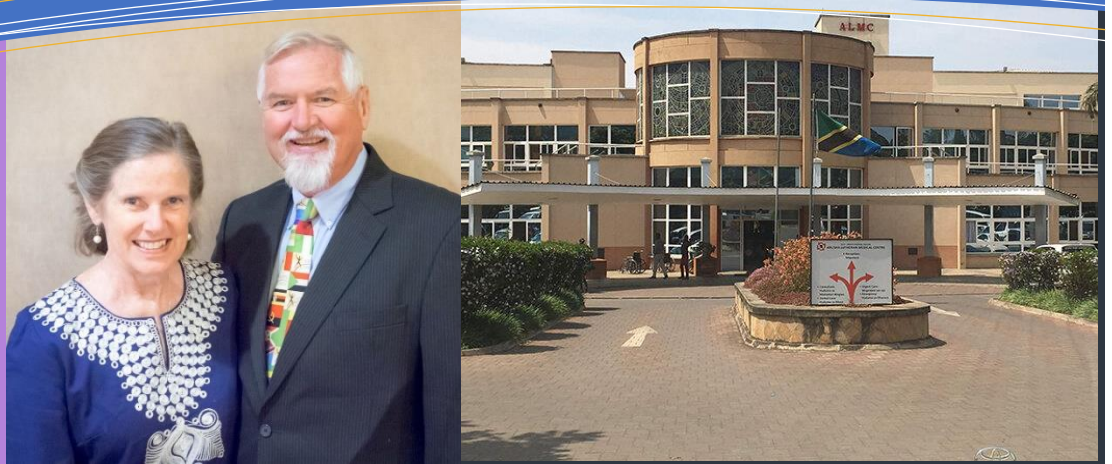
COVID19 at ALMC

Tanzania has 20 cases and 1 death as of today. ALMC is on alert and has instituted new measures for handwashing, reducing the flow of relatives in the hospital and being sure that staff are practicing protective measures.

Yet, we from the west, worry that there is not the same sense of urgency that we feel. More needs to be done! We realize that if the virus behaves like it has in the rest of the world, it will infect over half of the population and cause hundreds of thousands of deaths.

And yet, for many in the Tanzanian culture, there is often a sense of resignation. Perhaps it is a sense of resignation born from familiarity with disaster from genocide to famine to HIV to daily carnage on the roads.

As I contemplate the impact of COVID in Africa, I wonder if Africans might better survive this newest catastrophe better than we in the west. Their familiarity with not being in control has deepened their faith and reliance on God while the we in the west are being devastated, not only by a virus, but the realization that we are not in control of our own destinies.



Our Lives in the Times of COVID19

Well, physically, we are currently sheltering-in at our home in Minnesota. Our hearts are split apart between the pain and suffering in both our homes, Tanzania and Minnesota.

Our year has been hectic indeed and compounded now by this pandemic. We were in Tanzania for much of January to mid March. We were scheduled to return to Minnesota on Palm Sunday to do some speaking, volunteering, and getting ready for our daughter's wedding in May, which has now been postponed.

As the pandemic grew from isolation in China to become a true pandemic in March, our work and plans changed drastically in Tanzania. Plans for a fistula camp in our Lutheran work in Juba, South Sudan were cancelled. A long planned Pediatric conference being put on in Arusha was next to fall. Our Cancer Care Symposium at Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre soon followed. The countries surrounding Tanzania started closing borders and airlines were cancelling flights. So we move our departure up two weeks and caught one of the last flights out of Arusha for the US.

Back in Minnesota, we are like many of you, sheltering-in. But for us, it is particularly difficult as we want to be in solidarity with our team in Arusha and also feel we needed to be back in the US for family and health reasons. Our days are surprisingly full as Mark continues to be working with the team in Arusha as well as consulting with others working in Africa. Together, we are intentional about exercise, being kind to one another, and learning to be social through virtual gatherings and worship.

Our children are well. Sarah and Stéphane have postponed their wedding and working from home in cape town. Laura and James are working at home in New York City and Katherine with us here in Minnesota. All our daughters are in public health roles contributing to the struggle against COVID19.

Reconciliation Lutheran Primary Health Care Clinic

The RLPHCC is now gearing up to respond to the COVID pandemic. It is hard to imagine the impact to come upon the Referendum area where we serve, where the population is densely packed, and there are no government services for health, water, or electricity. How might we possibly respond as more and more people are infected and desperate for care? We alone have few resources to address an epidemic and the government is likely to be limited in its response. But yet we will try to serve.

We had planned for a week of fistula surgery the end of March which was sadly cancelled as the pandemic gradually shut down international travel.

We are still trying to complete the construction of a small maternity unit attached to the clinic. Before COVID, we had seen and are planning to respond to the needs of mothers needing to deliver safely at our clinic. Gratefully this continues for as long as permitted by the authorities in South Sudan. One day, we will indeed fully serve the women and children of Referendum.



Renovated Dining Hall



Classroom Renovations

"While optimism makes us live as if someday soon things will get better for us, hope frees us from the need to predict the future and allows us to live in the present with deep trust that God will never leave us alone." Henri Nouwen

Ministries, Construction, and Consults

For the half year BC (Before Covid), we were both engaged in many wonderful ministries and service in Tanzania and the US. Linda has been working on getting accredited as a sexual assault volunteer advocate to serve here in St. Paul. She's completed a rigorous course in preparation and now awaits the outcome of her background checks.

Mark's been busy at ALMC with work on long term expansion plans, the construction of the School of Nursing campus, and keeping the Hospice and Palliative Care Program alive and funded with wonderful partners mainly based in Denver. Consulting has taken him to Bangladesh with Lutheran Health Care Bangladesh, back to Juba a couple of times for our clinic there, and more recently to Rwanda to consult with Alight (formerly called American Refugee Committee) on introducing Emergency Medicine in an organized way into three camps as well as trying to establish palliative care in these camps in which the population has gradually aged and now are dying during the long sojourn of waiting to travel home.

COVID19

I think that Africans have much to teach those of us in the West about remaining hopeful and depending on God even as catastrophe seems to be about to overwhelm us.

Finding ourselves in this unprecedented threat to our common physical, mental, and economic health, we like you are staying home. For Mark, being able to help as a health advisor to Alight for their programs in Sudan and Somalia and to work with our Lutheran team in Juba, gives purpose and produces gratitude for the opportunity to be in the mix of making a difference.

All three of these countries are not only ill prepared for a pandemic like COVID19, but they are also very new and fragile governments which have limited responses to the epidemic at their command. Alight country teams provide some health care for a million and a half in Sudan and half a million in Somalia. Our Lutheran Clinic in Juba, while small, is nearest health facility for a couple hundred thousand people.

We as Christians, are called to be both voices of hope and servants in doing whatever we can possibly do to mitigate this coming tsunami and to work for resilience in recovery.

Blessings,
Mark and Linda