

ELCA missionary Linda Jacobson (right, standing) and women from the Widow's Might craft project (left) in Arusha, Tanzania, meet with visitors.

# A Tanzanian Way of Life




Mark and Linda Jacobson have served as ELCA missionaries for 38 years.



**Mark and Linda's powerful story is featured in a new ELCA documentary called *Kuambatana (Accompaniment)*:** The Ministry of Mark and Linda Jacobson, which is available to watch now at [ELCA.org/Kuambatana](http://ELCA.org/Kuambatana).

have spent more of my life in Tanzania than anywhere else, and it's my home," says Linda Jacobson.

Linda grew up in Tennessee, the daughter of a Presbyterian pastor, and was deeply interested in mission work from a young age. Mark Jacobson grew up in Stillwater, Minn., and describes a similar calling: "From an early age, probably in high school, I had a sense of responsibility to give back to other people, to serve people in the name of Jesus."



Now, because of the support of the church community, including your gifts, Mark and Linda continue as missionaries in Tanzania and South Sudan. They are the ELCA's longest-serving active missionaries.

In Tanzania, the church operates many hospitals and medical centers. When Mark and Linda first arrived in Arusha, the North Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania had several small, rural pharmacies. Mark's role was to develop a team of community health care workers and share ideas of primary care, basic hygiene, sanitation, water control and nutrition in surrounding communities. After a while, Mark and the other health care workers realized that preventative care could do only so much, and they began work to expand Selian Lutheran care center into a hospital.

As Mark was working in community health, Linda was grateful to have the opportunity to care for their children, work at the church and be a teacher.

"What really led to a big part of my service was my neighbors," Linda says. "The women who were around me came and said, 'We need work.'" So she worked alongside them to begin the Widow's Might craft project, which lifts up women who have lost their husbands and have had their property and livelihood taken away from them. The project allows them to use their skills of creating weavings, jewelry and art so they can become economically independent and thrive in the community.

"Mark and Linda Jacobson are people who were totally involved in the community," says the Rev. Solomon Jacob Massangwa, bishop of the North Central Diocese. "For example, Linda has helped many women around where they lived. She did not separate herself but lived in the midst of them and [has] been with them through everything they were experiencing."

Meanwhile, Mark's work was changing. It took about 10 years for Selian Lutheran Hospital to build up the infrastructure to be able to do surgery. Then, as the AIDS epidemic hit, his team developed a hospice and palliative care program. This program was created to prevent people from dying in pain and suffering,

without the stigma and broken relationships that too often came alongside an AIDS diagnosis. The program brought together their spiritual gifts and the physical care needed to work with such patients.

"Mark and Linda really have taken medicine in a holistic approach, the way the church in Tanzania has been doing for years," says Rahel Mwitula Williams, ELCA director for Global Mission funding. "He ... adapted a Tanzanian way, African way, of life in treating a person with love and respect and dignity."

In recent years, Mark and Linda have been formative in leading other significant projects. Mark helped oversee the ambitious construction of the Arusha Lutheran Medical Centre, which is now one of the most well-respected and highest-quality hospitals in Tanzania. They have also been highly involved in the Reconciliation Lutheran Center, which provides health care, spiritual care and educational opportunities in Juba, South Sudan, and the Plaster House, a rehabilitation center in Arusha, Tanzania, for children recovering from major surgeries and injuries.

"You give Mark an idea and he knows how to turn that idea into a reality," says Dr. Paul Kisanga, executive director of the Arusha Lutheran Medical Centre.

"The two things that make me feel most proud about the ministry that I carried on are [first], the fact that we built a high-quality, high-reputation hospital with Tanzanians responsible for what has happened there," Mark says. **"And then, related to that, is just the pride I have with having stepped away from the leadership of the hospital to see it, under my colleagues who have succeeded me, growing and expanding into new directions."**

Your generous gifts to the ELCA make this kind of transformative, holistic work with our companion churches possible. Without your commitment and support, Linda and Mark's mission work would be much more difficult.

"I never saw myself as being the answer, but the fact that it was a relationship," Linda says. "That we were in accompaniment, and that we worked together, and we figure out things together."