

19 August 2021
Jacobson Mission Update

Dear Friends in Christ,

Greetings dear friends and supporters of our healing ministries in Africa,

It's been a tumultuous year for many and particularly for the Jacobsons. And as we continue in our times of transition and exploring our future, we want to share with you all and catch you up on where we have traveled on this recent journey and where we are hopefully headed.

In 2020, we planned to semi-retire and to continue to serve the ELCA and the hospitals in Arusha as part time consultants and advisors. We returned to the US to explore sharing time between Arusha and Minnesota as we transitioned our lives.

As brought our transitioning directly in line with the Covid pandemic with its sheltering and bubbles and basically made it difficult to discover what our new lives might look like.

Covid, together with the murder of George Floyd touched us deeply as we adjusted to Covid-19 while also learning to explore and hopefully begin to confront racism in news ways and to explore within ourselves the personal ghosts and challenges of white privilege. Other letters have explored some of this further but for this update, it simply meant that the combination of challenges around covid and racism really made it much more difficult to transition and to find a new norm for our lives going forward. Oh yes, we were definitely safe and comfortable and yet very challenged to find our new niche as servants and as folks moving into a new community.

Then, equally unexpectedly we were faced with both a huge personal health challenge and a very professional challenge arising at the hospital, ALMC.

On the professional side, three months ago the diocese decided to not continue the contract of Dr. Paul Kisanga as the director of ALMC. I had worked with Dr. Kisanga for many years with the plan for him to be my successor. He did take over that position and was doing an excellent job.

Suddenly, with limited consultation, the Diocese leadership replaced Dr. Kisanga with a non-medical accountant to be the director of ALMC. It is a perplexing decision and to my eye, was not a wise one for the long term success of the hospital. I have yet to understand what is behind such a decision and unfortunately see difficult times ahead for ALMC before things improve. I feel that I have done all that I can to give the diocese leadership greater perspective on the risks of such a decision but with little listening taking place. I'm very much sorry to say that I see very hard times ahead, and that ALMC will need to find its way through these self-inflicted challenges to the very long term survival of these medical ministries.

There seems to be no rational explanation for these changes and it is so worrisome to envision how they may be leading ALMC into a time of low morale, deterioration, and potential loss of many programs designed to offer new or expanded medical services for the people of

Tanzania. So yes indeed, this is a time of heartbreak and concern. All of this as Linda and I have stepped back from active roles in guiding the hospital's future.

And yet, we ultimately do believe that ALMC is not ours but God's and God has a plan for ALMC and it is a plan for good and not for harm. Ultimately, we trust that God will continue to guide it and yet, these changes are unfathomable and appear to be very risky for the future of this jewel of a hospital which has been developed in the heart of Arusha. There is very much a sense of the loss of a guiding vision and charismatic leadership for the dynamic team we have developed at ALMC. So it is difficult to envision a good way forward. We hope the leadership of the ELCA and the ELCT will help to find a way forward. Donors and partners and even the Tanzanian Ministry of Health are all trying to find a way to restore the hospital situation.

Into the midst of Covid-19, our transitioning, racism, and the changes at ALMC, we were also suddenly confronted with my current health issues. In May, Mark developed a chronic headache which we all thought was due to the stress but then he had some visual changes and we returned to Minnesota in June and subsequently were diagnosed with a brain tumor.

Certainly, a dire challenge, and yet we have been so blessed. The whole legacy of doctors who have been through ALMC and Selian rallied behind us and helped us obtain the very best of care. Six weeks ago, Mark had laser surgery on the tumor and is now undergoing chemo and radiation which are the mainstays of treatment.

The great hope is to get this into remission and that Mark will move into the longer term survivor category! God is the great Healer, and we are thankful for the many miracles we see happening each day.

We plan to be able to continue to serve and minister with our programs which ultimately survive at ALMC as well as at other Lutheran programs in Juba and Bangladesh.

As far as being your Lutheran missionaries, please know that the bonds we share with you as a congregation are holy and sacred to us. We are ever so grateful for your faithfulness and support. Your prayers and love have carried us through many challenges and we feel them with us even now in the midst of these latest challenges.

We continue being hopeful and eager to serve. So please know we remain a part of these ministries which we do indeed undertake and have undertaken over the years, in a real partnership of ministry with you. Our journey together in mission with you has been full of blessings, excitement, challenges, and joys. We trust God that this sharing of ministry will continue moving forward as together we share the love and compassion of Christ with the people of Tanzania.

Blessings,
Mark and Linda