

Companion Synod Network Report

The Companion Synod Network exists to foster and maintain the relationships that the Western Iowa Synod (WIS) has established with the Southern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (SD-ELCT) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH). The purpose of these relationships is that we seek to share gifts between Companion Synod churches as sisters and brothers who support one another in the mission that Christ gives to the whole church.

The network has had to cope with several challenges during the last year. It will be no surprise that the pandemic has halted any in-person visits between WIS and our companion churches. We miss deepening of rapport that can result from such in-person connections.

Instead, our contacts with our companions have been limited primarily to internet video conversations and emails. We hope that the time will soon arrive when in-person visits between our companion churches can resume.

In the meantime, we try to support the joint projects that we have developed with our Companions.

Igumbilo Girls School—Despite the fact that that school had to suspend classes for several months in the spring due to the pandemic, it continues to provide a quality secondary school education for young Tanzanian women. WIS continues to provide \$2000 a month for scholarships that support poor and orphaned girls as well as young women from the Maasai people. We welcome all who can help us continue the much needed financial support of this vital ministry.

Well-Drilling Team—Over the years, WIS has provided funds for equipment and salaries that enables a team of Tanzanian well-drillers to drill a dozen wells each year. Each well serves thousands of people, providing clean, safe water to improve the health and well-being of people who live in the communities where they are located.

Center for Agricultural Development. CAD was established to provide training for small holder farmers to enable them to improve their food production. The goal has been to eventually make CAD a self-sustaining entity. An outgrowth of CAD has been the development SACCOS (Savings and Credit Societies) which function similar to a savings and loan association. Each SACCOS is based in a village and is able to provide loans to farmers and small business owners so they can expand their operations. So far, 4 SACCOS have been organized in the SD, enabling members who receive short-term loans to double and triple their income, greatly improving their family's standard of living. There is an ongoing need for funds to provide capital so that even more loans can be made.

Medical Supply. In the past, the Network has been able to provide needed medical supplies for the SD. We have also supported individuals who have entered medical training so that they can work at Ilembula hospital and other medical facilities in the SD. Currently we are supporting Ester Kitunda, a graduate of the Igumbilo Girls School, as she works toward a medical degree. Upon graduation, she plans to work as a physician in the SD.

Companion Congregations. Over 20 congregations in WIS have established companion relationships with congregations or other institutions in the SD. Partners these relationships commit themselves to supporting each other's ministry through prayer and mutual

encouragement. On occasion, WIS congregations have also provided financial support for projects undertaken by their companions. The greatest challenge for the Network has been to facilitate communication between partners in these relationships.

IELCH. Recently, the WIS CSN joined the Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the ELCA and Bishop Izani Bruch of the IELCH to highlight the increase in gender violence that has been occurring around the world. A joint pastoral letter was issued by Bishop Bruch, WIS Bishop Lorna Halaas and Indiana-Kentucky Bishop William Gafkjen (Indiana-Kentucky synod is also a companion for the IELCH). The letter as well as a Chilean produced video calling for an end to gender violence was featured in the E-spirit and on the Synod web page.

On behalf of the CSN, I want to thank the members of the WIS for the ways that you continue to support the relationships that we have with the churches in Tanzania and Chile. We have seen how each partner has been enriched by these relationships.

Respectfully submitted,
Pastor Arlyn Norris, CSN chair