

17 May 09

Dear Friends and Family,

Aristides A.D 125 describing Christians of his time: “They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them and they love one another. They despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. He that hath distributeth liberally to him that hath not. If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof, and rejoice over him as if he were their own brother: for they call themselves brethren, but not after the flesh, but after the Spirit of God. And if there is among them a person that is poor or needy, and they have not an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.”

Sunday May 3rd was a very special day for the hospital and the Methodist Church in Kenya. But I will start with Saturday May 2nd. That evening Presiding Bishop Rev. Dr. Stephen Kanyaru and his wife, Mercy, had dinner with us. What a privilege it was to have them in our home. I have spoken of both of them in the past. Rev. Dr. Kanyaru built the new Methodist Conference Center in Nairobi and did it in one year. Mercy came to Maua for our Alternative Rite of Passage for our young women in December 2008. One thing that makes me so grateful to both of them is the way they work as a team. Mercy Kanyaru is attending all the Synod Meetings with her husband. There are ten Synods (what we would call districts in the UMC) and while they were here they saw anyone who wanted to talk to them. They literally spent every minute they were not in meetings or eating talking to the people who want or need to see them. Mercy is a graduate of the Maua Methodist Hospital School of Nursing and has literally nursed in hospitals all around Kenya. She is very proactive in her work for women and girls. Some of the people who come to see them are women who need Mercy’s support, understanding and wisdom. For someone in the Presiding Bishop’s position it is very unusual to bring your wife and work as a team.

The next day was a combined Synod church service for all the churches in the Nyambene Synod. Presiding Bishop and the Bishops (District Superintendents) had decided that the ordination service for this entire six-Synod region would be at St. Joseph’s Methodist Church in Maua. The service started at 11am (and that was when they had announced it would!!) At the front of our church sat Presiding Bishop, all the Bishops of this region, all the pastors of this region and invited pastors from other denominations.



Presiding Bishop questions the ordinands

Two choirs from our church sang, the Ki-Meru Service Choir and the Women's Fellowship Choir. There were three other choirs that came from churches in our Synod and Kaaga Synod. The singing was glorious.



The Women's Fellowship Choir



Ki-Meru Choir

The Presiding Bishop preached a very good sermon and then three pastors were ordained. The Prime Minister, Raila Odanga, was to be at the service and at another very important function. the opening of the Maua Methodist Hospital SACCO building. The Prime Minister could not come but sent the Minister of Cooperatives, Joseph Nyagah. His entire entourage was introduced and most spoke briefly and then Mr. Nyagah gave a short and humorous address which ended with his giving St. Joseph's Methodist Church a gift of 200,000Ksh (\$2632) from the Prime Minister and 50,000Ksh (\$660) from himself. Needless to say all the members were on their feet cheering. The government has asked to have most functions on Sunday so the government elected officials can attend church and give them gifts. The churches are critical of the government, both parties, and are calling for them to behave in new ways that show they care about the poor and hungry rather than themselves. We ended the service with communion. The entire service only took 3 ½ hours, which was 2 ½ hours less than the last ordination service!

From the church we all walked in mass to the new Maua Methodist Hospital SACCO building, which is located about one block from the church for its opening by Mr. Nyagah. (A SACCO is like a Savings and Loan in the US) The SACCO building had been scheduled to open on 4 October 2008 but the Prime Minister could not be present so they had postponed it until Saturday 3 May and then moved to Sunday 4 May 09.

The ribbon cutting ceremony was watched by all and then Mr. Nyagah, Presiding Bishop, all the pastors and the officers and workers of the SACCO toured the building. The police and security forces shooed all of us away. Between the church and the hospital there had been several white tents set up and we all went back to wait for the important folk. After about a 40 minute wait Mr. Nyagah and all the others walked down the center of the street to the tents while the people shouted, cheered and sang loudly. The Minister for Cooperatives, his entourage, Presiding Bishop and the many Bishops and pastors and other important Maua officials then sat under the shade of the tent. The program began with dances done by local traditional dancers.



The first group of traditional dancers



One of the dancers in her colorful & delightful traditional hat

The crowd there was phenomenal, so excited and very well behaved. Mr. Stanley Munga'thia, our hospital administrator, is the Chairman of the SACCO and was such fun to watch as he sat next to Mr. Nyagah and listened laughed, joined in the dancing with traditional dancers and spoke.



The crowd in one direction



Mr. Munga'thia in the dark suit next to Mr. Nyagah in tan suit

Then the best part for me happened. Mr. Munga'thia is from Machungulu, the community where our AIDS Program began in 2001. He had invited the Living Positively With AIDS Women's Group to sing and dance for the occasion and as they took their place I saw Margaret. Most of you have either heard me talk about Margaret or read my story about her. She was the first person the hospital put on anti-retrovirals and everything about Margaret was and is a miracle. Well, I was so thrilled because in the past when I have seen Margaret I have either not had my camera or I took pictures that were very poor. Margaret seemed almost as pleased to see us as we were to see her.

We watched as she and the others danced and sang, and how the crowd loved them! They always write songs about AIDS and how women must fight for their rights as wives, widows, mothers, and women that are HIV+. When they completed their presentation we were able to spend some time with Margaret and take some pictures to share with you.



Margaret dancing with her group



Margaret and Jerri together again

At the end of the festivities we were tired but what an incredible day we had. Worshiping with over 2000 people in our church, the ordination service, the opening of the SACCO and spending time with Margaret. Some days God gives Bill and me so much joy, such incredible opportunities to be “with” the people, to laugh and cry, to dance and praise, to worship and commune. God is so good!

Your continued prayers have brought rain. The Mboone River has reached its bank on a few days and is flowing well. Our world seems to be filled with so many colors of green we can hardly contain ourselves. We can see the corn (maize) growing and we are so thankful for your prayers and God’s goodness. We need at least 2 – 3 more weeks of rain. Water for drinking is available again for most everyone and if we can grow that corn and the beans there will be food in September. On behalf of the hospital, the church and our community, thank you for your faithful prayers for weeks and weeks. You make a difference in our lives and we are so very grateful.

Please pray for me as I will be preaching in Ki-Swahili worship service next Sunday. I need you with me that day. Thank you!

In His grip,

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"I reckon on you for extreme service, with no complaining on your part and no explanation on Mine." (God speaks to us) Oswald Chambers