

To: Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC) Office, MLT, delegates and churches
From: The Tanzanian Affinity Group, an IMMC task force: Bess Fitzgerald (Kalamazoo Mennonite), chair; Dick and Nancy Yoder (Berkey Avenue Mennonite), Leighton Miller (Wildwood Mennonite), David B. Miller (Prairie Street Mennonite) and Dan Miller, ex officio
Date: February 10, 2020

A proposal for a response to the invitation for a relationship from the Shirati Diocese of Kanisa la Mennonite Tanzania (KMT)

This proposal will be discussed at the IMMC regional meetings held in March this year:

March 7	Southern Region	Kokomo, IN
March 14	Central Region	Goshen, IN
March 21	Northern Region	Midland, Michigan

We anticipate a vote at Annual Sessions on this proposal, or a revised one based on feedback from Regional Gatherings.

Bishop Kateti of the Shirati Diocese of Tanzania Mennonite Church approached our Conference in 2017 with a request to enter into a relationship for the mutual upbuilding of our Mennonite churches. This invitation came when five Tanzanian Bishops visited Mennonite Church U.S.A. in 2017. Paula Killough and Dan Miller visited Shirati Diocese in 2018. The Tanzanian Affinity Group was formed at last year's Annual Sessions and charged with researching the current context, possibilities and advisability of a relationship.

The Tanzania Affinity Group is now recommending that we accept the invitation.

There are many ways that all involved can benefit. We all know ourselves better as we learn about the lives of others and as we watch others learn the distinctive features of our culture. For example, David B. Miller traveled to Tanzania in his role as Teaching Associate of the AMBS Church Leadership Center. During his time there, he experienced life in a very different setting. The power would go out. The tap would sometimes not yield water or cold water only. Sometimes he was almost unbearably hot. A short shopping trip might turn into a long one or become impossible. He felt a disturbing loss of control of his comfort and planning. As he prayed, he began to move into a desire for a state of "yieldedness". The uncomfortable experience was productive as he waited, prayed, sought contentment, and thought about this context. Turning over these ideas with a colleague, he received a further insight: That "yieldedness", if taken too far was a snare equal to and opposite from his former sense of independent control. People who live without much control of their circumstances can be prone to resignation. The twin traps of over-control and under expectation began to show David and his friend the wisdom of a middle way. Dick Yoder recently summed up the lesson in a pithy way: The Serenity Prayer. "God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference". We are convinced that talking extensively about our different ways will yield other insights like these, insights into our thinking, use of scripture and blind spots.

Our committee has been meeting since August to gather information to help us make a good recommendation to the Conference. We have read books on the history of the Shirati area and the coming of the Gospel for the first time through the missionaries of the Lancaster Conference in the 1930's through the 1960's. We have spoken together about our own experiences in East Africa and have interviewed Missions experts, those who have served over the years and several people from Tanzania to learn the current status of bi-lateral relationships. Some trips, relationships and mission giving have not gone particularly well. A short book about some of the key differences between our culture and East African culture, very broadly, was recommended and has proved informative. Initially we hoped to learn enough to avoid misunderstanding and embarrassment for both parties to the relationship. While our studies and coaching will help with this, we have become aware that relating perfectly is never humanly possible. In fact, as the Colossian Forum has taught us, conflict is an opportunity for Christian growth. The fruit of the Spirit grows in situations where we need the fruit of the Spirit. Hosting and being the guests of brothers and sisters in Christ across many miles is the workshop where forbearance, patience, kindness and peace can be made within us. Knowing our conference and theirs to be gifted in hospitality give us confidence that we can make visits work and be profitable for all involved. The Reverend Tobias Magatti, a resident of Goshen with roots in Shirati, has been appointed as Shirati Diocese's official Public Relations Officer. He has been a wonderful source of insight and ideas for our interactions. We welcome his on-going involvement.

Seven delegates from Shirati Diocese are arriving, God willing, for a visit the 10th through the 24th of March of this year. The delegates are paying their own travel and donations from IMMC individuals will provide for expenses related to hosting them here. This will be an opportunity to explore the benefits of sharing with these brothers and sisters from far away.

Our proposal is to engage in a mutual relationship with the Diocese of Tanzania for an introductory period of three years (June 2020 through May 2023). During that time we would nurture the relationship in several ways.

1. We would plan to send one or two delegations to beautiful, resource rich Tanzania. These pastors, lay leaders and perhaps skilled professionals would retreat with clergy and lay leaders to learn each others' stories and to mutually seek wisdom on spiritual and practical issues within our preview.
2. We would plan to receive one or two delegations from the Shirati Diocese (not counting the planned delegation for this March) to offer an opportunity to welcome fellow Mennonites, full of the Holy Spirit, with a different history of church life that might inform and enrich our appreciation of God's big world and God's awesome variety as God build's God's Church.
3. We would foster youth engagement by making and receiving video chats with youth groups in Shirati and encouraging the sharing of stories of life in these different places.
4. We would exchange prayer concerns on a quarterly basis and distribute these through the established email links through out the Conference.
5. We would distribute a poster for display in Conference Churches to familiarize us all with bare facts of our partner's location, history and challenges. We would make available periodic updates to display prayer requests, political or weather-related emergencies and words of greeting from far away.

We have no plans to make any financial commitments, capital or otherwise, in this initial time. Any ideas in that direction would be vetted through the Conference office and would be undertaken after very specific consultation with our national missions partners and other development specialists. We believe that much can be shared to the profit of both partners without capital projects.

Not every Conference church or church-member will be involved in this endeavor. We believe we need at least 12 people representing six or more churches, with at least one church in each region (Northern, Central, Southern) for this relationship to be successful. We hope to involve groups and individuals, especially those who can support us with logistics or those with skills and interests that match those of people who will be involved from the Tanzanian side. We hope this relationship will provide insights to and from urban, suburban and rural churches from one end of our Conference to the other. We believe that it is best to include churches large and small, majority white as well as congregations of color. No one will be required to participate.

There will be evaluation by our committee with input to the MLT after each visit to check on difficulties, benefits and need for fine-tuning goals and logistics of the visiting program. We will keep the Conference apprised of cash flow and of areas of communication needing attention.

Our Conference mission statement contains the aspiration, “engaging the world God loves.” God’s world is around the corner and far over the ocean. This proposal signals a desire and attempt to engage in a different way of relating- personal, corporate, as equals, as God’s beloved, as One Village.