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Dear Mission-Minded Friends,

March, 2020

Thank you for partnering with us and the LCMS to prepare leaders that will serve in God's Kingdom in Africa. This semester I taught at Neema Lutheran College (seminary) in Matongo, Kenya. The LCMS is in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church Kenya (ELCK). Your partnership provides sound theological education for 60+ men who are preparing for the pastoral ministry and for 19 Deaconess students.

My wife Karen and I enjoyed connecting daily with students and faculty from 10 different African countries. Many students living on campus are separated from their homes and families by long distances. Addressing income, medical, educational fees, transportation needs for themselves and their families is an ongoing challenge. We admire them for the sacrifices they make. The students are committed Christians and are eager to receive sound biblical and doctrinal instruction.

We started *Super Sports Saturdays* on campus in order to give students an event to look forward to on the weekends. It has been a BIG hit! The seminary is located on the side of a mountain. There are only small trading centers within walking distance of the school. We bought several soccer balls, a volleyball and net, a badminton net and rackets, a parachute, and frisbees. We also had a corn hole game constructed. Sports equipment is not readily available in the area. The equipment takes a beating with the rocky terrain and rough outdoor play. We also received requests to organize field days for Lutheran primary and secondary schools with 300-700+ students. Our first experience was a bit overwhelming but fun! We explained that we only have a small amount of equipment. The staff assured us that it would be no problem. The schools always request that we leave the equipment. 😊

Each Sunday we traveled to one of the student's home congregations. We always packed our vehicle with students eager to visit ELCK churches. They participated by leading the service, reading the scriptures, singing as a choir and translating as I preach. We lead the Sunday School by teaching a lesson with a translator and singing with the children. I brought my guitar to accompany the choir, Sunday School children and hymns during the service. There are no other instruments available. My basic guitar playing is always appreciated!

The people deeply appreciate celebrating the Lord's Supper. This only happens when an ordained pastor is present at the service. Most congregations are served by an evangelist that has received theological training at Neema but is not ordained. Ordained pastors serve 6-7 congregations and visit on a rotating basis. The cost of transport prevents them from traveling at times. They use a boda boda (small, commonly used, not safe, motorcycle) to travel between churches. Evangelists and pastors maintain a garden, find other work or run a small business. The families are often large with 6-10 children.

After the Sunday service, we are always welcomed warmly. At the end of the 2-3 hour service there are introductions, speeches and general communication about congregational/community events that last another hour. We are served a big Sunday lunch which the ladies of the congregation prepare, often at the seminary student's home. In order to honor guests, the Kenyans serve kuku (chicken) along with chapati (flat bread fried in oil), ugali (corn bread made in a big pot) and greens (kale, spinach, other local greens). This meal is a community effort as feeding guests when there are limited resources is challenging. We greatly appreciate their labor of love. We never go home hungry.

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As COVID-19 continues to give global direction to our lives, we seek God's guidance as the future weeks unfold. Neema Lutheran College closed on Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, in compliance with the government mandate. The students had just returned from a break and were informed the next morning after chapel that they would need to vacate the campus. This imposed challenges for many students as transport is expensive and they needed to depend on family to send money to cover the return trip home. Some students traveled 3-5 days journey with many transfers and very little water and food. We took our vehicle full of students about 3 hours toward their homes. This saved students about \$5 each, which is significant to them. They were grateful for the support. We made sure that each student had water, fruit, peanuts and lollipops (a favorite treat). We were able to take care of students in many practical ways because of the generous support you are providing. Your boots are walking alongside us as we see and address many needs of body and soul.

The LCMS Office of International Missions (OIM) has been in close contact with us and all area directors. There are daily Zoom meeting devotions and Sunday worship services led by LCMS missionaries in South East Africa. Ongoing emails keep us updated and informed about the pandemic situation. We are uncertain as to what the Lord has in store for us next, but we are confident that our Father knows our every need.

We wanted to share our experiences with you so that you can walk with us as we connect to our African friends. We hope that this letter gives you a sense of your mission dollars at work amongst God's people in Kenya. May God continue to bless our work together as each of us sows Gospel seeds.

"You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

May our Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit give you His peace.

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**P.S.** We have returned to the U.S. and are taking shelter in IN. We secured tickets and packed our belongings in 12 hours in order to leave Kenya before the airport closed on Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>. We flew from Kisumu, Kenya to Nairobi, to Doha, Qatar to JFK and then drove to IN. We passed through a very quiet JFK. There was very little traffic in New York. It was over a 48 hour journey. Our nephew has a home in Columbia City, IN. He is training with the National Guard and is currently at Ft. Benning, GA. Our family had the house ready. The cupboards and refrigerator were full of good food. Thus far we are COVID-19 free. Like everyone else, we wait on the Lord to see how the future unfolds. We are His witnesses...The Lord continues to provide!

**Please pray with us:** God of all mercy, you love your whole creation. Be with each of us as we are humbled by this tiny but tough virus. This experience teaches us anew that you are Almighty God and that you give us life and breath. Please sustain and protect all those who are putting their lives on the line to serve their neighbor. Through this pandemic draw people to Jesus who alone saves us from sin and death. In His powerful name we pray. Amen