

Robin Orner

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Sent: Thursday, September 26, 2024 8:44 AM
To: First Lutheran Church
Subject: Tenderness



Tender Moments of a New Life

September 2024
Dr. Stephen & Jodi Swanson
ELCA Global Personnel
Arusha, Tanzania



Dear First Lutheran Church,

Each day in the neonatal intensive care unit, tender moments are witnessed. A mother holding her small baby for the first time. A physician carefully listening to the rapid beating of a new heart. The assistance of a nurse helping support a baby's first breaths.

A NICU can be frightening for a new mother and even more frightening when her baby is born too soon, too small. The team in the NICU uses such tenderness alongside their skilled hands and trained minds... and the results are obvious. Small infants are stabilized, and joyful smiles of mothers emerge. Today, our NICU offers a low-technology, evidence-based approach to caring for small, sick infants that results in an unimaginably high survival rate for Tanzania.

Above and below, a mother nestles her baby skin-to-skin, kangaroo mother care, providing the warmth and assurance that her body can offer even while the infant(s) receives respiratory support through a nasal RAM cannula and are fed breastmilk through an orogastric feeding tube. All the details are attended to and the infants rest peacefully. What a joy and a privilege it is to be a part of providing this care. The world could use more tenderness.



Twins are one reason that some newborns need many days in the NICU, as they are more likely to be born premature. With the assistance of the staff, this mama is able to provide more than warmth for her babies. Kangaroo mother care (KMC) has many benefits- regulates heart and breathing rates, improves lung function, decreases stress, reduces risk of infection, and improves weight gain-- all of which helps improve the development of the small brain!

Tiny Feet, Big Steps 2024
African Neonatology Conference



It's that time of the year! This is the 4th Neonatology conference we have held in Arusha and it looks like it may be even more far-reaching in its impact as we have several new countries sending teams. Over 120 hospitals from 20 African countries and several non-African countries are sending their doctors and nurses to learn from a team of nearly 50 instructors arriving from across the globe. They will be coming to learn innovative, low costs ways to improve neonatology services in their hospital setting. This may be the largest clinical neonatology training conference held in sub-Saharan Africa.

CELEBRATIONS!



In May, **Hannah** graduated from St. Olaf and it was a grand celebration! Caedmon was able to join us and together we celebrated her accomplishments. She excelled in every way and it was a joy to meet her friends and professors with whom she has developed relationships over these 4 years. She had a wonderful summer of travels (including coming home to TZ to attend Indya's graduation), and she is now so very happily settled into the University of Minnesota's College of Veterinary Medicine! She loves every Vet Med class, giving us regular updates of her animal anatomy class, and can't stop talking about how grateful she is to be there. This is such a huge blessing.



Indya graduated from Rift Valley Academy in July and also with honors! She has such a good set of friends with whom she has laughed and hiked and studied over these 4 years. There were times when her "chill demeanor" lulled us into thinking she was just cruising along... until she was awarded the Salutatorian of her class! Another surprise- she joined rugby this year and became a top fearless tackler!! What next?! She keeps us guessing. At this time she is at the beginning of her gap year and is volunteering as a keeper of pangolins and civets at Saving Vietnam's Wildlife Center in one of their national parks, gaining experience in conservation. She is enduring the heat and humidity and is blown away by the beauty of Vietnam. She will be there for 2 months and be returning to MN later this fall to work for a time before heading off on more adventures in environmental conservation.

Caedmon has started his Jr. year at UW Madison, and is deep into his computer engineering classes and loving it. In his spare time he is rock climbing and slack lining on a long line and has managed to walk 70m. His goal? Highlining, of course! Always more challenges. I'm grateful for harnesses and helmets.

Hospital Challenges

There are always hard seasons in life, and these past 3 years have held one of the hardest for us to navigate. Mid-2021 there was an abrupt change in leadership and governance at Arusha Lutheran Medical Centre (ALMC) that was outside of our influence. As we waited to see the outcome of this change, we continued our work. But it has been difficult as ALMC is struggling to pay salaries, procure basic medications, and retain staff.

Through the support of our donors we have managed to uphold the standard of care in the NICU, and keep it running while the rest of the hospital is struggling. **Our NICU remains the gold standard**, the best place of care for a sick or preterm infant in Northern Tanzania. It is difficult to know where these infants will find care if ALMC's NICU has to close. For that reason, we are continuing to walk forward, until we are out of options. If you are interested in helping these mamas and vulnerable babies, we could use your financial support as we procure medicines, supplies and equipment for their continuing care. We are also now paying all salaries for the NICU doctors and nurses through donations. You can use this link for financial support of the NICU: <https://give.ghm.org/nicu> or www.tanzanianchildren.com

Though the work at **Selian Hospital** with malnourished children continues in the inpatient ward, the outpatient program has suffered a setback in our acquisition of Ready To Use Therapeutic Food, the anchoring nutrition food product on which many children rely to complete their healing following a hospitalization. The setback is multi-faceted, as all challenges are, and we are hopeful recently that some forward movement is being made.

The school gardens are growing!! I am happy to report that the ongoing work of nutritional education is bearing fruit (pun intended), and we are looking forward to

new opportunities for education in the community- new schools and a health center. Stay tuned!

Home Assignment

We had a busy summer with 2 graduations on 2 continents, and trips from CA to PA to visit supporting congregations. **Thank you** to those who hosted us! It is always good to connect face to face with you while we are Stateside. We regretfully know there are many more churches that we were unable to visit. The schedule was full and we moved and slept in more places than we care to count! We are both now back in Arusha, in one place, for a time.

Life is full of ups and downs. Joys and sorrows. As you glance back at the newsletter, you will see we are experiencing life! Would you please pray for us- for wisdom, courage, and strength to face each day?

Let us leave you with part of a prayer that resonated with us as we participated in a service at Ascension Church in IL:

"You are before us, God, you are behind; you are in the light and the darkness; you see our most public face; you know the secret thoughts of every heart.

We bring the faith that is in us, and the doubt;

We bring the joy that is in us, and the sorrow;

We bring the pride that is in us, and the shame;

We bring the knowledge that is in us, and the ignorance;

We bring the hope that is in us, and the despair;

We bring the courage that is in us, and the fear.

God, give us the grace to walk in the way of Christ.

Guide us by your Spirit. In Jesus' name."

Steve and Jodi

Care of hospitalized newborns and children, and training of doctors and nurses, is supported through your donations.

www.tanzanianchildren.com

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<https://give.ghm.org/nicu>



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Funds are received through Global Health Ministries (<https://give.ghm.org/nicu>) and directed in entirety towards clinical pediatric training of doctors and nurses in Tanzania, care of babies in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), medications, bed fees, and food for malnourished children.

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