

TANZANIA: A MISSION OF CHANGE *By: Courtney Buss*

Going on a mission trip to Africa was always something I said I wanted to do, but never in my wildest dreams did I think it would ever come true! But there I was in church one Sunday morning when it was announced that a group from our parish was planning a trip to Tanzania. I had a glimmering thought of “wow, that would be cool”, but quickly shrugged it off as unrealistic for a college student. However, when I got in the car and my parents asked me if I would be interested, I knew that this was something I was going to make happen. From then on, I felt God’s call to serve-and boy, did He have an adventure in store for me. And while I was nervous about what lay ahead, I knew I had to trust the Lord and he would keep me safe.

A story of Relational Solidarity

This international relationship began for St. John the Baptist with the Sisters of Our Lady Queen of Africa in 2014 and in less than 2 years more than \$100,000 was raised to fund the building of a new convent in Mwanza, Tanzania. (Those involved are convinced of God’s provision.) In 2017 a small group visited to see the convent and continue to foster a relationship which further solidified when a group of 21 visited in June 2019.



In June of 2019, I joined 21 other parishioners from St. John the Baptist in Marshfield to begin our journey to Sumbawanga, Tanzania. Each person brought two check bags with them filled with donations of medical supplies, microscopes, art supplies, musical instruments, and soccer equipment-totalling 2,000lbs! It took 2 days to arrive in Sumbawanga, and although we were ecstatic to be able to bring so much for the sisters, I will admit we were quite relieved when we finally got the suitcases delivered and didn’t have to haul them around any more airports.

From the moment I met the Sisters of Our Lady Queen of Africa, I felt a sense of safety, love, and compassion. These sisters had a relationship with God unlike any I have ever seen, and their faith showed the entire time we were with them. In the short period that we were in Sumbawanga, we saw firsthand the work these sisters do and the challenges they face as they follow their mission of service through education of girls, care for orphans, and healthcare for the surrounding community. It was truly inspiring to take part in their worship and visit all of the places where they make miracles happen.



New Convent

Even though St Martin de Pores Orphanage is understaffed, these precious kids are obviously loved and full of hope. The children are learning English at an early age through songs like Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes. This facility has an impressive sustainable biofuel system. Yet, they use dish towels covered with plastic bags for diapers, mosquito nets have holes, and toys were scarce. Just like everyone else we met in Tanzania, they may live with a shortage of material things, but there was no shortage of faith. Although they have next to nothing, these people are filled with such joy and gratitude for life. The children always had smiles on their

*Prayer given to us by Mother Superior of the Sisters of Our Lady Queen of Africa
God of all courage, help us to walk alongside our sisters and brothers in Tanzania as they struggle to feed their families and live their faith. We know you hear the cry of the poor and call on us to live out your desire for charity. May we, through prayer and action, show your love for the people in need around the world as we share our bread with the hungry. In Jesus’ name who shared bread with the hungry and gave hope to those in despair, Amen.*



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faces and were eager to play with us. There was not a dry eye in the group when we had to leave, for it was extremely difficult to say our goodbyes.

For me, the most inspiring and memorable part of the mission trip was getting the opportunity to visit St. Theresia School for Girls, a secondary school run by the Sisters of Our Lady Queen of Africa. There, we met an enthusiastic, motivated group of students who were eager to meet us and talk to us. The headmaster was generous enough to let us spend an entire day with the students. We split into groups and led different activities-some groups made rosaries, others played games, some taught medical practices, a group taught art, and another taught the students how to use the 10 laptops that were donated. My group taught the students to play the recorders that we brought. As a music education major in college, this may have been the most rewarding experience of my life. In this moment, it didn't matter that they didn't play with the greatest fundamentals or understood every single word I said (my Swahili was not great). What mattered more was that I was sharing the wonderful gift of music that God gave to the world, and I was using my talents to enrich the lives of these students. I think sometimes we take for granted all of the blessings God has granted us because we get so caught up in our jobs, social media, and material things. We may even wonder if God is even real because we don't hear him over all of these earthly distractions. But I heard God that day-in the students' laughter, excitement, and touching music.



Also while at the school, I was able to meet the English teacher, Erasmus, and we immediately formed a special bond. He invited me to come to Tanzania again and teach music, and that planted a seed for potential future trips to this wonderful country. To this day, we talk and video chat, and he sends pictures and videos of kids playing their recorders. Through Erasmus, I still feel connected to my friends in Tanzania even though we are thousands of miles apart.

Throughout the rest of our time in Tanzania, we shared meals, danced, sang, and had daily Mass with the sisters. We also participated in a beautiful procession for the feast of Corpus Christi with over 1,000 people. The whole city took notice as we carried Jesus through the streets. Sister Scholastica, the Mother General, held my hand for almost an hour during the procession. Through her, I felt the hands of God and my soul was at ease. We also had the chance to do some sight-seeing. Of course, a safari was planned, and we drove on dirt roads in our Land Rovers to Katavi National Park. We also ventured to Kalambo Falls and Lake Tanganyika. The nature of Tanzania was yet another reminder of the amazing works of God.

Our shirts said "Tanzania: A Mission of Change", in truth think we all were changed more than the African people we met. My group went to Tanzania thinking that we were going to help them, but in all reality they helped us more. Sure, we brought them necessities of life, but they showed us perseverance, faith, trust in God, and gratitude. This mission ended up being more of a "seek to understand"; and with this newfound understanding, I think we have fostered a relationship that can carry out the will of God.

As they say in Swahili, Tumsifi Yesu Christu! (Praise be Jesus Christ)



St. John the Baptist is planning our next effort in partnership with our friends in Tanzania, the establishment of a new school for boys and girls. Education is the key to unlocking the chains of poverty. 100% of your donation goes to direct support for the Sisters of Our Lady Queen of Africa, without any "middle man" or processing costs. Donations can be made to St. John the Baptist. Attn: Tanzania mission