

Thursday, February 2

I left Butler about noon on Tuesday and arrived in Jinja at 3:00 am on Thursday, after stops at Washington Dulles, Brussels, Bujumbura, Burundi and Entebbe Airport, Uganda. Rev. Peter Maganda and our driver for the time I'm here, Patrick, picked me up at Entebbe Airport for the 2 ½ hour drive to Jinja. While in Jinja I always stay at the Jinja City Hotel, which is owned by the Lutheran Church of Uganda.

There was a teachers' conference at the hotel on Thursday and Friday and I was asked to speak to the teachers for a few minutes on Thursday morning and offer them some encouragement.

The next stop was Mafubira Lutheran Church and School, which is in the suburbs of Jinja. I had visited there once before, on my first trip in 2019. Rev. Benard Mwesigwa showed us around the facilities and talked about their needs. Afterwards we stopped at the nearby home of Rev. Ronald Lobaale, to meet with him and other congregational leaders.

We then stopped to look at a piece of land that's for sale in Mafubira. Since the first time I visited Uganda in 2019, Rev. Peter has talked about the church's vision to have a mission training center. He told me Mafubira would be a good location because of its proximity to Jinja, which is the largest city in eastern Uganda.

The next stop was the seminary in Magamaga, where I delivered 21 Lutheran Service Books to the students. You might recall that two years ago, two LCMS congregations in western New York merged and had a lot of extra LSB's for which they wanted to find a good home. I contacted them immediately and told them of the need for these books in Uganda. They got the books to someone who lives in Erie, PA and Joanne and I drove up there to pick them up. So far I have delivered 38 LSB's to the seminary but still have a lot more at home.



While there I met and talked to many of the seminarians, and also met with Bishop Charles Bameka and six pastors to talk about our ministry in Uganda. There are lots of needs, as we already know, and I told them we really need to know what the highest priorities are. That's something I expect to know before I leave Uganda.

We also discussed the need to make someone in the LCU our representative in Uganda, so they can coordinate activities and write reports for us. I agreed this is a good idea and asked them to make the selection.

The last stop of the day was to see the new Lutheran secondary school that's being constructed in Magamaga. A Lutheran church in Illinois donated the land and also is paying for the construction.



Friday, February 3

We first drove to Iganga, where we picked up Richard Okello, who is the principal of Triangle Lutheran School. Trinity Lutheran Church also worships here. From there we drove north to Serere District, which is where the deanery was able to purchase four acres of land last year, thanks to the people of Trinity Lutheran Church in Wexford, PA. Serere District is on a remote peninsula on the eastern shore of Lake Kyoga and the language spoken there is Ateso, which Rev. Peter does not speak but Richard is fluent in the language. It's about a 3 ½ hour drive from Jinja to Serere, the last 1 hour and 20 minutes on rough dirt roads.

We stopped in the village of Pingire, where a man named Joseph met us and directed us to a village where a young man named James Okello is leading worship. To get to the village we had to turn off the dirt road and drive on a dirt walking trail back into the bush. I met James two years ago when he was a seminarian and I was leading a 3-day Renewal Conference in the Eastern Deanery. Unfortunately, he dropped out of seminary last year but he and I have been keeping in touch. We met with some of the church leaders of his congregation; unfortunately, most of the congregation was at a funeral.

I should mention that when we visit a congregation, the meetings are very long. Congregational leaders all give speeches and the visitors do as well, and of course there are always questions to be discussed.



Richard Okello translates as I speak to congregational leaders. Seated between us is Rev. Peter Maganda.

James has a heart for cross cultural ministry, for revival and the for entire world. He took us into the tiny building where he leads worship for about 40 people, which would have to be done standing, as there is not enough room for people to sit. On one of the walls is a laminated poster showing the flags of all the nations of the world and the people of this little village pray for all of these countries.



(L-R) Richard Okello, me, James Okello and some members of his congregation in front of their church building

We three visitors all spoke of our high regard for James and our wish that he return to the seminary to complete his training, be ordained and become their pastor. James agreed to do so and is returning to the seminary this week to take final exams from his last semester. The rest of the seminarians were taking their exams last week; they had to be postponed from December because the seminary closed then due to a case of Ebola in the area.

On Saturday I received the following email from James:

“Dear brother Bill, I am more than happy to hear from you yesterday, thank you for stepping into my community, this is a sign of victory in Jesus Christ our Lord I believe. May God bless you so much in your daily work. Thank you for your prayers you have given me as your friend. I can't describe the love you have for me.

Yesterday I shared all the information about your being in Serere with women and men who are working in Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Qatar, and other parts of United Arab Emirates (UAE) as house maids, security men and factory workers originally from Teso, drivers etc.

I pray with them online and I have 143 members praying day and night for other countries and the world.

We as praise and worship church need to be sharing more with you on our planet (imo app) if you can please let us know your program and we meet. As we are also part of the church and Teso.”

Next, Joseph and his wife Katie invited us to their home to have a meal with them. They are very hospitable people and they went with us to show us how to get to the land the LCU purchased last year. From their home they guided us to the land purchased with funds we sent; however, the funds were raised by Trinity Lutheran Church, Wexford, PA.



A large mango tree on the church land

After we arrived people started walking over to see what was going on. Soon a large crowd of about 80 people was there to greet us. After a short meeting, most of us walked the border of the church property, so that local leaders know where it is.



Walking the border of the church property

We then returned to the large mango tree, where the local villagers sang a song and danced, which they told us was a welcome, after which I would be considered a member of their tribe. Don't even think about it, of course I joined in the dance!



Welcome song and dance

We then had a meeting with local leaders, with many speeches by all. They were delighted to know there will be a Lutheran Church and school in their community but also said this means there is a need for a well on the church property. Currently people must walk 3 km (about 1.7 miles) to the nearest well. We told them we will try to raise funds for this project, as well as to build a church/school structure.

Saturday, February 4

On Saturday we drove to Kamuli for the wedding of Fred Waako and Edith (I'm sorry I don't know her family name). They are both leaders in the LCU Eastern Deanery. Edith is the head of women's ministry and Fred recently graduated from the Lutheran Lay Leaders Training Program, which is funded by Lutheran Lay Renewal of America. I have spent a lot of time with Fred and Edith on each of my previous visits and we have become good friends. I was surprised to see another good friend, Fred Magezi, (whom some of you have met) dancing up the aisle next to Fred Waako as the best man.

Presiding Bishop Charles Bameka performed the ceremony, with Dean Peter Maganda assisting. There were also eight other pastors present and I was invited to sit up front with them.



Kamuli Lutheran Church was jam-packed with about 160 people and probably 300 attended the outdoor reception under four large tents. The reception was very long, with many speeches and entertainment of singing and dancing. I too was invited to give a speech. To say that this was the most joyous wedding celebration I have ever attended would be a gross understatement!