

## Message 6. Tanzania USFW Conference. Dec 2-9

Greetings from Tanzania.

I travelled down to Mugumu, Tanzania with Miriam Mahanga, a woman who was born in Tanzania, but led to Kenya to avoid circumcision and early marriage, and then trained at FTC and married a Kenyan fellow student. She carried along her infant daughter and then visited her mother's home after the conference. She taught about stress of Tanzanian women, and then organized a group of the women to do a drama of the three widows in the Bible (Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah).



Miriam with daughter

Roster, the new USFW T Clerk

Collins (provided school bus) and Amos

A year ago, the Yearly Meeting (traditionally in East Africa led by men) chose all the women leaders, instead of letting the women choose their own leaders. Normally USFW is run entirely by women. I tried to assist Roster, the new clerk as she comes from near the Malawi border, (3-4 days bus ride away), and does not know the active USFW women leaders who were removed from office. Amos, the husband of Naomi, the new recording clerk prepared the program of the conference without getting input from the women from Tanzania or myself, but the other Kenyans were able to help her.

We all enjoyed the singing and dancing throughout the conference. A team of nine other women from Kenya came down and gave everyone white head scarves, (a uniform created by Kenyan women). They even gave them to young children, men and boys, (and thus did not have enough for all the women who came the next day). All who got scarves danced in a kanga line in appreciation of the gifts.

One activity everyone enjoyed was learning how to hand sew, even the shepherd boys who were tending herds of cattle grazing on the church grounds. I had been given a bunch of short zippers, so I bought locally a piece of the beautiful Kitenge cloth and then taught everyone how to make a simple, useful coin purses (or cell phone bags). When we ran short of materials, I asked the Kenyan visitors to let the Tanzanians sew their first, and then made a quick trip to town to buy more cloth, needles, and zippers for the second day. Some cleverly used up any thin scraps left to make a strap for their purse.

I tried to let Tanzanians teach lessons, not just those of us from outside. The son of Mary Joseph, a young doctor taught one good lesson in health, and some of the Kenyan visitors gave lessons as well.

The main speaker was Olivia Salano who met Roster at the yearly meeting sessions held in October. She spoke on Being knitted together- based on the Biblical story of David and Jonathan's friendship. The third day she spoke about terrorism (threats on David's life), which was confusing to some of us.

Meanwhile, Quaker Men held a conference in Kisangura, a nearby village, and had only 8 men show up. The men then decided to come over to join the women's gathering.

Margaret Joash, the only old leader still in leadership, worked tirelessly getting the small church in Mugumu to feed and house all the attendees. It is not an easy task to feed and house 100+ people. Most of us stayed in local homes of Quakers, while the team from Kenya went to nearby safari hotels. On Saturday,

those who could, dressed in white, as we celebrated Margaret's many years of service as a woman of substance and gave her a solar lamp.



*Heron on grounds*



*Women busy sewing*



*Namesake, Marian*

Mugumu was the very first church built by Friends (started by Maragoli Quakers from Kenya more than 50 years ago). The old adobe brick meetinghouse had recently been improved to include metal windows, but no glass) so was not safe for housing folks overnight. (The climate is warm here and there are many mosquitos that carry malaria). A foundation for a larger building had been laid years ago, but never erected. Pius Chacha and Mary Joseph then helpfully led a fundraising to help build a larger church and raised over 400,000 Tanzanian shillings.

On the last day, the Tanzanians wrapped each of us from outside in beautiful blue lasso cloths. They gave me in addition a colorful certificate of appreciation and a document asking me to keep helping them. I explained that I can serve as an advisor to them but cannot guarantee many years of work, and I do not qualify for any work permit (due to old age). A young daughter of Daniel Kisangani who is named after me, came to greet me the last day, just before I left to return to Kenya and prepare to go to Uganda for their womens conference. Also on the last day, after a rain shower, we had rainbow arching over the meetinghouse. I shared with some about Noah and the rainbow which is a sign of hope. I was reminded of the Irish folktale that if you go to the end of the rainbow, you could find gold, and realized this might be true in Tanzania, as they mine gold in several areas.



*Kanga dance with scarves.*



*Rainbow over old meetinghouse.*



*Procession honoring Margaret (on left)*

I am grateful we ended the conference well and everyone travelled safely to their homes. I had one day of rest in Malava and will go early tomorrow to Uganda's conference. Thanks for all your support. In gratitude, Marian