

**A Letter From Rev. Michael Fonner and Leslie Weed-Fonner, MSW
ELCA Missionaries which Trinity Supports in Nairobi, Kenya
Describing the Missionary Work they are Doing**

We are in our early 60's and came here at this point in our lives, as our 3 children are pretty independent young adults, to work together in a new part of the world for us. We have 10+ years of Church and Peace Corps service in 4 different Asian countries in addition to work in New Jersey, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. It was our son who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Zambia several years ago who introduced us to Africa and Kenya has proved to be a challenging, exciting, meaningful, and very wonderful place to serve and work closely together. I have divided our work into three sections according to how we think of our work.

NILC/Nairobi International Lutheran Congregation:

Our primary assignment is with this congregation which has within it an English congregation and a Swahili congregation. We work with both but more so with the English side as our Kiswahili is limited at best and there is a Kenyan pastor with whom we serve who has primary responsibility for the Swahili congregation. The congregation is comprised of mostly Kenyans and Tanzanians with a healthy number of Eritreans, Cameroonians, Ethiopians, Indians, Europeans, and Americans. We do the work of regular ole congregational ministry: leading worship, visiting homes and hospitals, youth work, parish managements with an Elders Council. etc. The congregation has 3 schools, a Nursery School with about 40 children, a Knitting School with about 20 young women students, and a Sewing School with about 10 young women students. The latter two schools prepare these women to be self-supporting contributors to their communities. Most of the local people with whom we work in all venues are poor or even impoverished although the English side of the congregation does have some highly educated doctors, business and embassy workers, UN employees, teachers, etc. We are working to transition the congregation from foreign missionary leadership to local leadership as we will likely be the last ELCA missionaries to serve this congregation as the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC) has many very capable English speaking leaders/pastors.

PLCC/Pangani Lutheran Children's Center

This is a program run by KELC for girls who are unable to live with their parents because their parents are living on the streets in very difficult circumstances. It has 2 sites, one in the city and the other in a more rural setting just outside the city. The former has about a dozen girls living at it and it also has outreach programs to support girls who are able to live in their homes while the latter is a fully residential program with 48 girls and 4 housemothers. While Mike exercises some pastoral presence and ministry at PLCC, it is more Leslie who has a clearly defined involvement. Leslie is a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker trained in child therapy and trauma treatment. At PLCC she counsels and provides a confidential therapeutic relationship for both the housemothers and girls to talk about their lives, schooling, work, families, etc. She meets regularly with the girls and housemothers individually and is also now starting to meet with the housemothers in a group to discuss shared concerns like helping the girls during difficult times, discipline, their own lives away from their families,

etc. We are at PLCC once or twice a week and work closely with the very gifted staff of a Director, Social Worker, Educational Specialist, Outreach Director, a seamstress, and visiting German volunteers.

Kujitegemea

This Kiswahili word means self-reliance, self-support, and self-governance. KELC, like many churches and organizations in the Global South or developing world, has origins in European and American church and NGO work. For many, many years, churches have been supported and led by missionaries and other workers who have come from abroad in service to the world's most needy. In recent years, there has been a transition from support and leadership from abroad to local support and leadership. This has led and is leading to many challenges as churches and organizations take full control of the work that is being done. A key effort of KELC and therefore of us as ELCA Global Mission workers who are working alongside our Kenyan companions is to work with Kenyan leaders as they become self-reliant, self-supporting, and selfgoverning.

The KELC Bishop and his staff have put together a Kujitegemea effort with which we are assisting. It is identifying individuals within the church who can support the church in strong ways as well as develop efforts such as guesthouses, water projects, and schools that will produce sustainable income for the church. In all that we do at NILC, PLCC, and with KELC, we are fostering a self-reliant attitude and effort so that, in a matter of years, KELC can be a fully self-reliant church. It will continue to work with its partners such as the ELCA but it will, we hope, stand on its own two feet financially, leadership-wise, and programmatically.

+Peace & Joy,
Leslie andMike