

Our God is on a Mission, and that Mission is Global!

Let me say that again: **Our God is on a Mission, and that Mission is Global!**

Just ask Doctor Ousmane Soh. Doctor Soh grew up in the Fuuta Toro region of northern Senegal, a member of the Fulani ethnic group—traditionally nomadic herdsman, who have been credited with bringing Islam to West Africa, over a thousand years ago. Ousmane grew up in a faithful, fervent Muslim family, and excelled in his Koranic studies so much that he was chosen by his Imam to receive a scholarship to study in Libya. There, too, he excelled in his studies, so much so that he got a scholarship not just to Koranic school, but to the University of Tripoli, where he eventually studied medicine, and became not just a Doctor, but a Cardiac specialist. More remarkable, however, was that in the course of these studies, as he was trying to improve his English he discovered an English bible at a local library, read it cover to cover, eventually deciding that he was really drawn to the God portrayed in this Bible, the God who sent Jesus Christ, who sent the Holy Spirit, who wished to share good news with all the world. He then sought out a Christian community where he could continue to grow in his faith and understanding in this God he liked so much. Long story short: this Fulani man from a country that is 93% Muslim travelled to a country that is 98% Muslim and there became a Christian. And built into his calling to follow Jesus, was a call to return to Senegal, to set up a clinic that would serve the people of his home region—the Fuuta Toro—which he did in 2005. And while he refers to his clinic as a Christian clinic, most of his patients are Muslim, and he does not use the clinic to proselytize. But it is his way of entering into God's mission, a mission of reconciliation, of healing and wholeness.

Our God is on a Mission, and that Mission is Global! Just ask Pastor Tumsifu Mbwilo. Pastor Tumsifu is the newly ordained associate pastor in the Nduli Parish—CtK's companion congregation in the Iringa Diocese of the Lutheran Church of Tanzania. She was ordained about two weeks before we CtK travellers arrived in Nduli this past January and February, and she had only actually been at the parish about a week. I'm sure you can relate, Pastor John, to the learning curve she had before her as the newest member of the pastoral staff there. Imagine during your second week on the job not only having to learn everything there is to know about your new parish but on top of that having to host a bunch of foreign visitors who didn't even speak the language. But Pastor Tumsifu handled us, handled herself and handled the situation of being the new pastor in town with an abundance of grace. And I was amazed at her quiet confidence and pastoral presence on so many levels. First, in a number of Lutheran churches elsewhere in Africa, including in Senegal, where I served for a decade, Women are not yet able to serve as Pastors. But in the ELCT they are. Plus, the fact that the Nduli parish needs a second pastor speaks to another

miracle of the Church in Tanzania. It's growing. Growing by leaps and bounds—it's well over 6 million members now, nearly 25% larger than the ELCA. And as it grows, the church has been strategic about how best to serve these growing congregations. Nduli, for example has had as many as eight preaching points, including the main church site. But now two of the preaching points have been combined with two preaching points from another congregation to form a whole new parish. And I would suspect that that's part of the reason Pastor Tumsifu was placed at Nduli—to be already place as the resident pastor when the Nduli parish births yet another new parish. Can you imagine such growth? Growing, sub-dividing, growing some more assigning a new pastor for further growth. Is it any wonder that the newest pastor of our companion parish is named Tumsifu—which means “Praise him?” Praise God for the faithful mission by our Tanzanian companions!

Our God is on a Mission, and that Mission is Global! Just ask those disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were devastated—their leader has been killed their movement has collapsed. They wonder where it all went wrong. But our God is on a mission, walking right along side them. Sure, they don't recognize Jesus walking with them, not at first. But as they walk, he reveals God's mission to them—explaining the scriptures to them. He's neither leading nor following at that moment—he's accompanying them. Then suddenly they recognize Jesus when he breaks the bread. Then, suddenly, looking back on their walk together it all made sense—God's global mission, beginning in Jerusalem, continuing to Emmaus, and going out to the very ends of the earth—it all starts to make sense. No wonder this story, this gospel message has become a central paradigm for our own global mission work in the ELCA. No matter where we go, as we accompany our sisters and brothers as they walk whatever road they're on, Christ walks the road with us. Our eyes are open to see God's ever-expanding mission, and Jesus is revealed to us again and again in the breaking of the bread—in both the literal meals that we share together, in the communion that we receive around the same shared table, and in the more figurative sharing of our resources. We make this mission road by walking—walking together both with our God and with our companions on the way.

Our God is on a Mission, and that Mission is Global! Just ask Julia Hubbard, Sally Fifield, Caleb Southerland, or Nate and Chelsey Crary, They are all recent alums of the ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission program—and I join my voice to those who say that this is without a doubt *the best thing* that the ELCA is doing right now. Young people—typically between the ages of 21 and 30—spend a year in service with one of our global companions, and in the process, they have their eyes opened to God's global mission—often in a way that they continue to look for the ways that our God is on a mission in very different contexts than the one they served in for that year. Julia served in Malaysia, and she brought that experience of God's global mission first to her work in Saint Paul, then to the Bega Kwa Bega office in Iringa, where she helps facilitate the

scholarship program we participate in, along with helping accompany groups of like ours, serving as a sort of a cultural bridge between resident Tanzanians and visiting Minnesotans. Sally served in Argentina, but now seeks ways to enter into God's mission closer to home, in Minneapolis' 4th precinct, for example, where the arc of God's mission bends towards justice in the Black Lives Matter movement. Nate and Chelsey served a year in Lutheran schools on illegally occupied West Bank in Palestine, but used what they learned about our missional God to work in campus ministry in the U of M's bank, as well as in entering God's mission in a middle school in Moundsview and a congregation in New Brighton. Though they spent their year "over there," serving in a foreign mission field, they returned with an uncanny ability to see what God is up to everywhere.

Our God is on a Mission, and that Mission is Global! Just ask Rafael Malpica Padilla. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, Rafael is a lifelong Lutheran, an ELCA pastor, previously the youngest Bishop in our church, serving the ELCA's Caribbean Synod while still in his 30s. Currently, though, Rafael is the Executive Director of Global Mission for the ELCA. And he is the first to admit that his title is a misnomer—maybe even the most misleading in the entire ELCA. I'm not actually in charge of Global Mission, he says, smiling. My job is to oversee and direct the ELCA's participation in God's mission *outside* of the USA and the Caribbean. I'm the director for this church's mission in the *rest* of the world—but that doesn't fit on my door or on my business card very well. The point he's making is that mission and ministry carried out by the ELCA on the territory of the ELCA, that's still part of God's global mission. We need to stop making the distinction, he says, between local and global missions. Think about that in our own context here at CTK. We can enter into God's global mission nearly every day of the year. What we do in the context of our own congregational life—worship, faith formation, community building, service projects—that's one way of entering into God's global mission. Connections with and help given to neighboring congregations like Redeemer and Pueblo de Fe, that's part of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God. SUUNY lunches, the community garden, too. IN fact, travel time from this sanctuary to God's mission field, is about 2 or 3 minutes—and completely free—since Community Partners for Youth (CPY) is right in our own gym, in our own basement. No passport necessary, no malaria drugs needed, no currency exchange, no layovers.

Our God is on a Mission, and that Mission is Global! I know I've said it before, but as we celebrate Global Mission Sunday again this year, we need to remember what we're talking about when we talk about God's global mission.

It's God's. Our God is on a mission, and we are invited and empowered to join God on that mission. Global mission is not about us, what we do, what we give, or what we bring. It's about God, what God is doing, what God is giving, what God is bringing into being.

It's Global. Sure, it's a good and practical thing focus our efforts on Tanzania, on Iringa, on Nduli. It's a wonderful thing that this congregation has done as much as it has to support our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Nduli Parish, the the Maasae Girl's School, at Ilula and Selian hospitals, Huruma orphanage, the plaster house, not to mention secondary school, nursing school, university and seminary scholarships. We can be proud of what we have done—what God has done with our hands and feet, our resources and time. But at the same time, that should not keep us from recognizing, honoring, and celebrating the fact that *missio Deo* is not limited to that work, nor confined to that one place. God's mission encompasses the entire globe. From Nduli to New Brighton, Minneapolis to Mogadishu, Appalachia to Argentina, Philadelphia to Palestine. God's mission is not just "over there," it is everywhere.

It's Mission. God's mission is about sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. It's about reconciling people to one another and to God. It's about loving others without stopping to inquire if they are worthy, and meeting the needs of others even if they can never pay us back. The mission of God, the mission God calls us to enter into is transformative, not transactional.

Sisters and brothers at Christ the King, we **are** a part of the church that our God—the God of mission—has in the world. So today, on this Global Mission Sunday, more than anything we celebrate our God—a missional God who calls us, the Church, to join God's mission in the world. Let us enter boldly into God's global mission, as we meet Jesus in the faces of those we accompany along the roads we are on, as our hearts continue to burn within us with the good news of resurrection and new life, and as Christ is revealed to **us** over and over again in the breaking of the bread.

Bwana Asifiwe. Amen.