



Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Office of the Bishop

September 22, 2016

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” – Romans 8:26

On the evening of Thursday, September 1, several men armed with automatic weapons and grenades attacked the property Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University (SEKOMU), an institution of higher learning operated by our Tanzanian companion diocese, the North Eastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT). They raided the property, shot and killed a guard protecting the university, and shot and injured another. They then proceeded to set fire to two hostels housing approximately 40 students and faculty, threatening to shoot and kill any of them should they attempt to flee. A SEKOMU guard shot one of the attackers in the head. He was in a coma for some time but has since died.

Finally, after several minutes and additional damage to the university, the terrorists fled the scene, thankfully allowing all of the students and faculty within the hostels to escape with their lives and attempt to extinguish the fires. The loss of life and property was far less than it could have been, but the overall damage was extensive.

By chance, a delegation from our synod, led by Assistant to the Bishop Rev. Bradley Burke and former Assistant to the Bishop Ms. Joanne Carlson, was in the North Eastern Diocese visiting our brothers and sisters there at the time of this attack. Having visited SEKOMU just two days prior and shared dinner with Dr. Anneth Mungu, the Vice-Chancellor of the school, just hours before the attack, they were able to pray with, grieve with, and stand in solidarity beside our hurting brothers and sisters as they began the difficult task of recovering from this hateful tragedy. They also shared a letter I had written to Bishop Munga, Dr. Anneth Munga, and the people of the diocese to be read that Sunday morning in worship, sharing our grief and prayers with them in their hour of need. The ministry of presence, prayer, and partnership that they were able to offer our friends in the North Eastern Diocese was a simple, beautiful testament to this longstanding partnership between our two synods. At no time were any of our SEPA people in danger. After the attack all of Lushoto was heavily protected by police.

As you may know, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod has a long history with both the North Eastern Diocese of Tanzania and Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University (SEKOMU), including many companion congregation relationships, sending missionaries from Southeastern Pennsylvania to serve in their ministries for three years, and many groups from our Synod visiting our friends in the North Eastern Diocese. Specifically regarding SEKOMU, we as a synod helped to partner with our Tanzanian brothers and sisters and launch this incredible ministry nearly ten years ago, sending a team to help clear the land for the building of the school and collecting nearly \$500,000 to make the dream of this ministry a reality. Education is of critical importance today in Tanzania, often providing the only path possible for young men and women to rise out of poverty and pursue a better life. SEKOMU, and our small part in their work, has been a critical piece of this story in Tanzania.

As the North Eastern Diocese begins picking up the pieces from this disaster, we now have yet another chance to stand beside them in solidarity and prayer – side by side with our brothers and sisters in Christ. SEKOMU stands at an important crossroads in their ministry – a crossroads where we can be a boost for them to move forward, rising from the ashes of this tragedy stronger, more determined, and even more devoted to their mission than ever before. Please stand with us as we stand with them – in solidarity, in prayer, and in relationship. We ask that you include prayers for the faculty, students, and staff touched by this disaster in the coming weeks, as well as for the North Eastern Diocese as it struggles to pick up the pieces. Additionally, we are asking you to stand in solidarity with SEKOMU by taking a special offering over the coming weeks to help SEKOMU move forward in their rebuilding and recovery. Please use the enclosed bulletin insert to inform and ask your congregation for their support. All contributions should be sent directly to the Synod Office with “SEKOMU Support” written in the memo line. Please feel free to reach out with any questions to Rev. Bradley Burke, Assistant to the Bishop staff liaison for Global Mission, at bburke@sepa.org. Thank you for your prayers, your love, your partnership in grief and hope, and your generous support for our Tanzanian brothers and sisters in their time of need.

With and in Christ,

+ *Claire S. Burkat*

The Rev. Claire S. Burkat, Bishop