

## Hosting Guests from Tanzania

At the heart of the Bega Kwa Bega partnership and the practice of accompaniment is the belief that mutual relationships flow in two ways - with both communities sending and receiving prayer, gifts, and people. Hosting guests from Tanzania is therefore an important act of reciprocity as we seek to be present with our brothers and sisters in the Iringa Diocese.

From the beginning of the partnership and the exchange of Pastors and Teachers, congregations have been receiving guests in Saint Paul from Iringa. These visits have included individual congregations inviting select leaders from their companion parish as well as groups of congregations facilitating the visits of large groups and choirs.

**Typical visits** often last for ten to fourteen days and include a blend of 'active' and 'rest' days. During these visits, guests are invited to participate in the life of the congregation and local community through worship, school visits, and time spent in a variety of homes. Tanzanian visitors have often been interested in observing a variety of social ministries that US congregations are engaged in as well as being exposed to the challenges that individuals and communities of faith experience in the United States.

**Invited guests** have tended to be Pastors and their wives or lay leaders. Since Tanzanian culture places a high value on social order and hierarchy, it is important to be mindful of that when extending invitations. Given the frequency with which pastors rotate congregations in Iringa, we are increasingly encouraging congregations to consider inviting lay leaders of partnership committees who are more likely to remain rooted in the parish. Regardless of their position, it is always best to invite a couple people so that our guests have someone to share the joys (and stresses!) of the journey with.

**Costs for hosting guests** are significantly lower than sending teams of visitors to Tanzania. Airfare is the single largest cost to take into consideration. US congregations should also expect to pay for costs associated with their guest applying for and receiving a visa to the United States. Included in those costs are trips to Dar es Salaam and fees for the visa interview at the US embassy.

While hosting guests in the United States, congregations need to be mindful of the amount and type of gifts that they may desire to give to their guests. When guests return home, seemingly 'small' gifts received in the US can set up imbalances in the communities that guests return to.

**Challenges** that arise by receiving guests run the gamut from cross-cultural (mis-) understandings to the technical details of applying for and being awarded a visa for travel to the United States. While a rewarding experience, it does require careful consideration. If your congregation is considering hosting a guest from our companion diocese it would be best to contact the Director of BKB as soon as possible so that you can begin to prepare.

**Is it worth it?** As congregations who have hosted guests will tell you, the answer is an absolute 'Yes!' Hosting guests allows those who are not able to travel to Iringa to have a first-hand experience sharing life together with your companions. It also allows our brothers and sisters to see us in our homes and churches, to have a better understanding of us and the the world we come from, and to begin to imagine what God might be up to in our lives and communities.

To learn more about hosting guests from Tanzania, email [begakwabega@spas-elca.org](mailto:begakwabega@spas-elca.org) and we'll work with you.