

December 01, 2010

Jambo from Moshi, Tanzania.

The nearby town of Moshi is really starting to grow. Our project is in the outlying village of Mailisita. In Swahili, "Maili" means mile, and "sita" is six...so you can probably figure about how far from downtown Moshi we are ☺. Our friend, Richard Torimo, the son of a local hotel owner, gave us a sneak peak tour of the tallest building in Moshi. It's still under construction, but rises to an impressive nine stories. It even has a singing elevator! Why you would get into an elevator in an area where the electricity has gone out *at least* once each day we've been here is beyond me...so of course we rode in the tiny elevator to the top with our excited host. The view from the top was both amazing and enlightening. We had never been able to see more than the relatively dusty street in front of us in Moshi, but perched up nine stories it looked like a different world. There are so many trees throughout the town and the number of construction projects visible to us was impressive. Moshi is clearly an expanding city.

Our host was understandably proud of Moshi's accomplishments and its newest and tallest building. We boasted in return that our 3-story guesthouse building is the tallest building under construction in all of Mailisita village...by a good two stories!

Our first stop on Monday was to see how our 1st graders are doing. They greeted us in a very order and mature fashion. They arranged themselves in three lines in front of the school and Catherine Calisti, first grader extraordinaire, led them in a medley of English language songs. Nathan thanked them and asked one of the children in the front, "how are you?". In answer, every child within earshot chanted in mantra-like unison, "I...am...fine,...how...are...you?" Most of them will graduate this week and return as 2nd graders in January. They've come sooo far!

Our second stop was over at the parish to see the Kindergarteners, and potential new batch of 1st graders for January. Ahhh...now there's the anarchy of being mobbed by children I remember from past years. Their enthusiasm for arrival was not to be contained. Their teacher, Regina, did her best to bring them under control – and she can definitely command their respect. They too sang some songs for us and showed off their early English learning.

Monday afternoon was spent in a Board of Directors meeting for the Mailisita Education Foundation of Tanzania. This is the Tanzanian registered NGO (non-governmental organization) we established locally to direct the project and provide long-term oversight to the school and guesthouse. The board is chaired by the Mailisita parish priest, formerly Father Kawishe (Father Val's brother), and currently Father Riziki. The board discussed the school budget for the coming year, the hiring of an additional teacher for the 2nd grade, and community feedback regarding school admissions decisions. Parents of some children in the parish were understandably disappointed when they learned there would not be enough room for their children, yet orphans from the village, but not the parish would be admitted. This was a very good discussion and test of their admissions philosophy which places need above religion or parish affiliation. The village of Mailisita is multicultural including Catholics, Lutherans,

Muslims, and other religions, but the problems of poverty, AIDS, and a growing orphan population cut across these lines. Father Riziki and the NGO board affirmed the admissions decisions and reiterated their commitment to, “orphans of the village first, extremely poor second, and parishioner if space allows”.

We closed out the day with an outdoor dinner of local cuisine and enjoyed the views of Mount Kilimanjaro. Tomorrow we will tour the guesthouse and inspect the work completed since our last visit. We have dinner plans with our friend Fr. Maningi at his nearby Karanga technical school.

Kwaheri mpaka kesho,

Nathan, Stan & Father Val