

February 23, 2009

Jambo and Greetings from Tanzania,



Clearly the highlight of today was our being greeted and welcomed by the watoto (children) of Mailisita. It is hard to adequately describe in words just how excited they were to see us return! We captured the moment with some pictures and video that we will figure out a way to share with you upon our return.

We spent much of today on the construction site reviewing progress and showing our admiration and appreciation for their workmanship. The workers are obviously very proud of the buildings and should be. The most striking progress since July has been the addition of the 2nd floor slab (roof for the ground floor) for the guesthouse.

The completion of the 2nd floor slab and associated kitchen area roofing turns out to have been a more critical development step for the school than we anticipated. The Tanzanian Ministry of Education requires that a school have, among other things, a proper kitchen for the safe preparation of food for the children before they will approve the school's "registration" and allow it to open for business. (A bit surprising to us when you consider that many if not most of the Libertyville area elementary schools do not even have kitchens!)



Our plan has always been for the adjacent guesthouse kitchen to double as the school kitchen for practicality and economic efficiency. The guesthouse construction delays mentioned yesterday, further exacerbated by difficulties in obtaining the substantial amount of lumber required for framing the concrete pour, have resulted in the kitchen not being fully completed as yet. The Ministry of Education has insisted that the kitchen be completed (no substitute) and further that an access road (not sure who's going to drive

on it, but okay) be built before they will allow the new school building to open for classes. Interesting challenges to say the least.

So for the time being the children continue to attend Kindergarten in the parish center while our two beautifully completed classrooms await further governmental inspections and approvals.

One of the learnings for us is to better understand the sensitivities of governments in the third world. Westerners have a perhaps deservedly earned reputation for thinking they can ignore local and regional governments and regulations so long as they are “doing good”. One of our past Libertyville travelers was emphatically reminded of this by a customs official upon discovering donated medicines for the local clinic in his luggage. The Tanzanian Customs agent explained that if *he* were to bring unlicensed medicines into the United States without proper documentation, US Customs and the FDA would be having more than just a chat with him about it! Therefore, we must show respect for the local regulations and procedures even where they may appear to us cumbersome and unnecessary. After all, just imagine if some Tanzanians tried to build a school in Libertyville -- I suspect our local and state governments would have just a bit of red tape for them to navigate!

Kesho (tomorrow), we have plans to meet with Alois, the construction supervisor to discuss project progress and estimates (especially the kitchen completion and access road), and Lucas, a Mailisita Education Foundation, Tanzania NGO board member and experienced school builder. As the children finish school for the day, we plan to photograph each one in preparation for assigning sponsorship within the Watoto club. This promises to be a very enjoyable task because the children are so amazingly thrilled to have their pictures taken! (digital cameras are not exactly common place around here ☺)

Kwaheri na mpaka kesho,

Stan & Nathan