



## The Calm before the Storm

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*March 2020 update from:*

**Dr. Stephen & Jodi Swanson**  
ELCA Global Personnel



**Dear Linda,**

In early March I started drafting this update, with the intent to share on the lives of our 3 kids, our community and hospital work, and an upcoming

national Tanzanian neonatology conference that Steve was leading. Even at that time, the world was quickly turning upside down. Separated from friends and family across the world, we watched and prayed and discussed our own contingency plans. Inevitably, Tanzania's first confirmed Covid-19 case arrived, in our very own Arusha. As everywhere else, everything suddenly changed.

Over the past weeks, we have many long discussions with family and colleagues, weighed our evacuation options, and prayerfully reflected upon the reasons for which we came to Tanzania (in 2013). We have assessed the extremely limited healthcare options in Tanzania (should we get sick from Covid-19), the high likelihood that all borders may close and international flights out of Tanzania be cancelled, and the possibility of panic and increasing scarcity when the virus arrives in full force. And, we have decided to stay in Tanzania.

As healthcare providers, providing medical care in a time of need is in our very DNA. It isn't exactly "shelter-in-place" and isolate, as both of us still have roles to play in the Lutheran hospitals here. The Tanzanian doctors that Steve works with look to him for support. Many in the community rely on us for healthcare. The hospitals are still caring for patients, everyday.

We are in a period of great uncertainty. While the ELCA Global Missionaries has recalled all it's missionaries back to USA, we have their support to stay and still serve in Tanzania. The thought of leaving our Tanzanian colleagues in a time like this does not sit well in our souls. At the time that I am writing this, there are 12 known Covid-19 confirmed cases, but as we all know, this virus travels silently, and numbers are likely much higher. We are all holding our breath. It is hard to tell if things are truly quiet or if this is the calm before the storm. We are preparing, and doing our best to anticipate

what we will need. And doing our best to be calm and intentional in our service.

We are encouraged that we are not alone. God is with us. I told this to Hannah as she was being evacuated out of Timor Leste, and traveled alone across the oceans to us yesterday. So also, I tell myself. God walks with us. We pray for you, that you will be safe and you will be well, and that you will have peace. The peace that passes understanding.

With all our love,

Jodi and Steve

Keep reading for news of the kids and the work in the NICU and the community!

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### **Happy News from the Kid's Corner**



Hannah, Caedmon, and Indya are pictured here with Mt. Meru in the background. 19, 16, and 13 years of age which means it is "The Year of the Teenager" in the Swanson family. And yes, the moods are all over the place some days. Overall, each one is happy we made that move in 2013 and call Tanzania "their home."

Hannah is in the midst of her gap year after graduating from Rift Valley Academy last July. After high school graduation, she traveled to the South African bush for a 6-week volunteer program in wildlife conservation. It was a remarkable experience for her. She now has all her applications into colleges/universities, and is waiting to hear back from all of them. She spent time at the end of last year with our family in the States, and began the process of learning to drive (thanks to the help of the women in my family!). Such is the life of a Third Culture Kid as she begins to get her

bearings in the USA. Hannah was recently in Timor Leste, on an island in the Indonesian chain, volunteering in Marine Conservation. She was scuba diving almost every day and learning to identify various species of marine life for their research and work with local communities on ocean conservation. Abruptly, the decision was made to close the program and evacuate all island volunteers. It was stressful but we managed to get her home yesterday, just as international borders closed.

Caedmon is head and shoulders above the girls as you can see in the photo! His school is an IB school which means this is Middle Years Program Year 5 (MYP5) and requires the completion of a Personal Project. He decided to dive into computer programming and learned two computer languages outside of regular school hours, and has designed his own website. Since his school is now closed, he is now at home figuring out how to do school remotely!

Finally, our Indya. Suddenly she has leapt from 12 to what seems to be 18! She is developing her own sense of fashion, and continues to have her collections of feathers and shells, an aquarium of fish, and today she is drying out some of her sand collected from the Indian Ocean over Christmas. School isn't quite so exciting to her as it used to be...I think that means she really IS a teenager. Finally, let me answer that question so many people have asked- her ear surgery seems to have been successful last October and she has once again entered the pool!



*Playing in the Indian Ocean*

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**Every Baby Counts. No Matter How Small.**



Our most recent 3-minute video.

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## **316 Babies, a remarkable Survival Rate, and the writing of an essential NICU Handbook.**

Last year our NICU cared for 316 babies. 45% were premature, some weighing less than 2 pounds (<1000 grams). 85 babies (30%) from our poorest families were fully supported by our NICU Fund, and all remaining NICU babies received partial subsidization.

Among viable babies admitted to our NICU, **93% survived**. This has to be among the highest NICU survival rates reported anywhere in East Africa, and is a great tribute to the hard work of our entire team. At present, we are in the midst of writing the first-ever neonatology handbook (300+ pages!) for use across all of Tanzania, and hope to publish it soon.

Though COVID-19 is occupying all of our hearts, our NICU remains full

every day with vulnerable babies and attentive mothers. We are taking precautions. And we continue to need funds to help us care for these most vulnerable babies, especially in this time when the hospital faces financial uncertainty. Please take a moment to watch our newest 3-minute video, "***Every Baby Counts. No Matter How Small.***", and consider giving.

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## Schools and Gardens

As we have worked with communities and their leaders, Elly has taught nutrition at village meetings, and we have had wonderful engaging conversations with the people. For some time now, we have been talking with the ward Educational Officer who asked us to help him with hunger in the schools. There are 4 primary and 2 secondary schools in this ward, each with more than 1,000 students per school! It's another overwhelming opportunity. We met with headmasters and teachers to discuss the possibilities and we have started Health and Garden Clubs in 5 schools this week! In each school it looks a little different, but the one thing that looks the same? The eager and joyful faces of children!!

... Since I wrote that paragraph above, the schools have now closed. Not exactly the best way to start a new project! However, I have been working with a young Maasai man who is eager to be a part of our project and he will stay in communication with the leaders of the schools. The wonderful English teacher pictured below has been asking for educational tools to use to spread correct information about the coronavirus, so I am thankful to have made this connection before the outbreak!



**3rd Grade never looked so good!**

## Sincere Thanks

There have been many challenges we are facing and we ask for your prayers.

- New Work and Resident Permits to be granted to stay in Tanzania.
- Health and Safety for us and discernment to deal with the pandemic as it unfolds here.
- Wisdom and grace in parenting 3 teenagers, all with differing needs, all under one roof as we try to live by the principle of sheltering in place while still being of service in the hospitals.
- Peace. Pray for peace. Pray for wisdom, that we will know where we can best be of service to Tanzanians at this time.

In all these things we give thanks for God's unfailing love, and His wisdom that guides us.

Jodi and Steve Swanson



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Church in America**  
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Information regarding tax-deductible contributions for pediatric work can be found at:

[www.tanzaniachildren.org](http://www.tanzaniachildren.org)

All funds are received through Global Health Ministries (GHM), and directed in entirety towards clinical pediatric training of doctors and nurses in Tanzania, care of babies in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), medications, bed fees and food for malnourished children.

Donations inside and outside USA can also be received

through: [www.tanzaniachildren.com](http://www.tanzaniachildren.com)

**Your support makes this work possible!**

GHM will send you a tax deductible receipt.

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