

Just the Facts: How to Build a Church in Tanzania

By Linda J. Hewitt

The St. Paul's Missions Committee was fortunate to be able to meet with Father Martin and Pres. Renee Ritsi of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center on Monday, November 20, 2006. We had many questions for them! Much work still lies ahead, but they answered many of the nuts-and-bolts questions everyone has been asking. Here are the answers.

We will be building a church in the Bukoba diocese in western Tanzania. The area is remote, poor and needy, but rapidly progressing. The exact location has not been chosen yet. That decision will be made by Bishop Jeronymos, whom Father Martin thinks very highly of. The Bishop is fluent in Greek and speaks good English. He was educated in Thessaloniki, Greece among other places and is noted for his humility. He has been working hard to establish churches in this area as well as building a high school and other structures. There is also a seminary nearby preparing new priests for all of the churches that are being built! So far there are more churches than there are priests available, so each priest is responsible for multiple churches and there are trained catechists who help out. This is partly due to the fact that people are not well-educated in this part of the world and there are fewer seminary candidates. The Bishop is working hard to change that.

Bishop Jeronymos believes in making the local populace contribute to the building of a church and we will be working hand-in-hand with the people who will be worshipping at the church we build. The locals will be responsible for pouring the foundation and gathering the raw materials, which could be stones, wood, or adobe bricks, depending on the area. Then we will be primarily engaged in raising the walls. The more technical aspects, such as the roof and windows, will be built by more skilled artisans. We will have someone on site supervising the entire process, but basically St. Paul's will be providing two teams of 10 to 12 people over a month's time, two weeks for each team. The first team will be in Tanzania from July 3, 2007 to July 17, 2007, with the second team to follow from July 14, 2007 to August 2, 2007.

We will be lodging close to the site, perhaps in a hostel built for that purpose, or in a building nearby. Previous mission teams were housed in a school building. So, we will have a roof over our heads and we will not be sleeping on the ground. There will be pit toilets provided. We will need to bring sleeping bags and mosquito netting, as well as work gloves and boots. Father Martin also recommended ibuprofen to ease the aches and pains at the end of the day!

All of us are looking forward to participating in the building of a sister church in Tanzania!

