

The Bishop's E-lumination



A Message from Bishop Robert T. Hoshibata

November 15, 2006

Joyful Praise and Hope in Mozambique

Dear Members and Friends of the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference,

Sunday, November 5, 2006 found me joining 10 of my colleague bishops and others attending worship at Mahlazine United Methodist Church in Maputo, the capital city of Mozambique.

We boarded a large bus that had been secured to transport us 20 minutes away from our hotel to a church on the outskirts of the city.

We arrived at a church clearly identified by the familiar cross and flame. The bus pulled into the church lot and parked on bare ground. We saw a group of simple buildings. As we disembarked from the bus, we were warmly greeted by members of the congregation. We were told that years ago the site was selected by the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) as the place where a well would be dug.

The well was dug, and in thanksgiving for the new well and the love of The United Methodist Church, a worshiping community developed. This was one example of our love made real in the world, which began as caring and compassion for a community and eventually led to the building up of a worshiping body and a church.

At present, the congregation worships in a building that looks very much like a social hall. As in many churches in Africa, this facility serves as the "home base" for a number of satellite smaller groups gathering for week-day Bible study and worship. For special occasions when all the members of the church gather, worship is held under a tree. Such was the case on the Sunday that members of the Council of Bishops worshiped with this congregation.

Worship was joyful, energetic, and spirit-filled. Singing and dancing (yes, dancing!) was an integral part of the acts of praising God. In this country which is recovering from the effects of colonialism and the aftermath of civil war, a very touching birthday celebration was held for a young woman. She was called forth and a song was sung. A prayer was offered in her honor, which included the words: "Thank you, God, for giving this child another year." It was a reference to the joy that people experience to acknowledge that a person has made it through another year in spite of difficulty and struggle.

The exuberant spirit of the congregation permeated the gathering. As the service proceeded, I could see, not far away, the children of the church gathering around the bus that had transported us. They were offered an opportunity to climb into the bus and sit and enjoy a novel experience.



Bishop Bob Hoshibata would like to communicate directly with Conference leaders. To do that he has established this email newsletter.

He encourages your feedback, comments, thoughts and ideas. Email him at Bishop@umoi.org.

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At one point, the pastor interrupted the service to announce that the bus had become stuck in the dirt. He asked all who could to assist in freeing the bus. Immediately, men, some women, and children ran over to assist. It took a good 30 minutes, but eventually the bus was freed. There were loud acclamations from the group and we returned to worship. The women then broke out into a loud and joyful hymn of triumph. The incident with the bus worked itself well into the sermon that followed. It was an example of the ways in which Christ's followers assist, support and care for each other; and a real life demonstration of the church going into the world in service!

This was not a wealthy church by any means! But there was a wealth of spiritual energy and joyful praise. I found myself wondering how, in the midst of poverty and the diseases associated with poverty (malaria and HIV/AIDS) the human soul could find such joyful expression. Following worship, we were invited to the parsonage, just yards away from the well that UMCOR had built years ago, still standing, still in use. We enjoyed the generous hospitality of a meal prepared by the church. As we left, there were expressions of thanksgiving for our being there; for our caring; and for our connection over many years and many miles. This was a Sunday that I will not quickly forget!

In Christ,

Robert T. Hoshibata

Gracious God of all creation: We give thanks for this world and for all your people in every place. In gratitude for your love, we offer this prayer for The United Methodist Church in Mozambique. As you have brought that church through difficult moments of war and violence; now bless our sisters and brothers in Christ in Mozambique with strength and resolve to continue their good work making disciples. Give us the same strength and resolve as we do the same. And may the Holy Spirit which can excite us and enliven us dwell among us and in us and in our faith communities, In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen!