

My visit to Liuli and Milo, 13 -25 September 2011

With USPG: Anglicans in World Mission

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At the end of July I was surprised by an offer from USPG to join one of their working trips to south west Tanzania, which would include a visit to Milo. Coming so soon after the death of Benaiah, this could be considered unfortunate timing as I would of course be too late to see him. But actually the timing was just right, as I was able to pay respects to his widow and many other family members. I also prefer to remember Benaiah as he was when I saw him two years ago, before he became so ill.

The trip also allowed me to learn a lot about the long term sustainability of the Anglican mission hospitals that USPG supports in many countries, Tanzania being just one. Two teams would be conducting hospital workshops in opposite parts of Tanzania – one team heading to Tanga Diocese in the north-east of the country and the other to the dioceses of Ruvuma and South West Tanganyika.

None of the team members were USPG employees, but contractors with the necessary experience. After a rendezvous in Dar es Salaam, the two teams went their separate ways. I was of course heading to the south west, together with Dr Ian Campbell and Catherine Evans from England and Onesmus Mutuku from Kenya.

Background

I should explain a little about USPG's new health programme, *Hands on Health*. USPG is concerned that long established mission hospitals are unlikely to survive the next decade unless health policies change in many African and Asian countries. The current concern is that many of these hospitals and clinics are over-stretched, sustained by declining foreign donations, and lacking medicines, staff and facilities.

The aim of *Hands on Health* is to enable mission hospitals to reach out to their local communities so that they can work together to address concerns, share ideas and work on solutions. Local church leaders would have a pivotal role in bringing community and hospital workers together. In this way, the mission hospital would no longer be seen as the Anglican hospital, but as the community's hospital.

A 12-minute film showing USPG's new health strategy in action at St Anne's Hospital in Nkhotakota (Malawi) can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/30305650> Although filmed in Malawi, it could easily be about either of the two hospitals I visited in south west Tanzania.

Where first?

After travelling overnight from London to Dar es Salaam, we had a 600 mile journey ahead of us to Songea. Thankfully USPG had arranged a Mission Aviation Fellowship flight which took just over two hours compared to a road journey of at least 14 hours. And so we arrived in Songea in the early afternoon, 19 hours after I had left my home the day before.

We were met by Stephanie from USPG (who had been in Tanzania a week already) and our driver Sunday, with a reassuringly sturdy vehicle. Sunday would be with us for the entire trip.

Songea is in Ruvuma Diocese and our overnight stop allowed us to meet the bishop, before we retired to our rooms for a much needed sleep.

And so to Liuli

The next morning we set off for St Anne's Hospital in Liuli, 100 miles to the west on the shores of Lake Malawi. Canon Kalistus Komba, the diocesan secretary, came with us and quickly became a good friend. Our route soon took us on to dirt roads road and we bumped along reaching the lakeshore at Mbamba Bay, where we turned northwards, and arriving in Liuli 5 hours after we set off.



We had time in the afternoon to have a tour of the hospital before the two day workshop that was to follow. In the picture my team mates (Catherine, Onesmus and Ian) are talking outside the entrance to St Anne's hospital.

Liuli has a population of about 4000 and a more urban feel than Milo – although not urban as we know it! Due to its geographical situation with the Livingstone Mountains to the east, rising 1000m above the lakeshore, the hospital receives patients from a long stretch along the

lakeshore going as far as 100km to the north and about 70km to the south, including a small area in Mozambique. It has about 50 beds and treats between 6000-8000 outpatients a year. At the moment they are fortunate to have three qualified doctors, two paid by the government and one by the diocese.

The workshop over the next two days was held in St Anne's Church - the cathedral church for the Diocese of Ruvuma. The hospital had done an excellent job in inviting local community and church leaders and the attendance was very good. The workshop is very interactive and it was lovely to observe rather tentative people become animated as they realised what was happening. I honestly don't think they had experienced



instruction in this style before. They participated well in the small group sessions and in the home visits that were part of the programme.



Liuli is a peaceful place and we all enjoyed the five minute walk from our house down to the lakeshore. There were always people there – bathing, socialising, washing clothes and even vehicles! The picture shows our driver, Sunday, giving “our wheels” a good clean. He comes from Liuli, though now living in Dodoma. Needless to say he was very pleased to catch up with family and friends.

The day after the workshop we were very pleased not to have to leave until after lunch, as this meant we could go to church. The service was extra special because of Canon Kalistus Komba’s presence (he is wearing the red vestments in the photo). The parish was also hosting a visiting choir from the Anglican cathedral in the Diocese of South West Tanganyika – Bishop John Simalenga’s church, for those of you who remember his visit to us.

The service started at 9am and we arrived a little late. It is quite normal for people to arrive when they can and to wander in and out as needs be. This first picture shows the children as they were called forward to be blessed, before going to Sunday school. The service was of course conducted in Swahili and yet the format is so familiar that you can easily feel part of it. Canon Komba was very passionate in his preaching and received a lot of response from the congregation. The singing was beautiful, with special slots allocated to the visiting choir and the parish’s own choirs. And there was of course the wonderful moment where joy bursts out as people start to dance.



This continued for at least fifteen minutes and many people came to dance with us. The lady in the yellow t-shirt was a great teacher, showing Stephanie and Catherine how to use their arms!

When the service ended at 1pm we were all invited to a big celebratory lunch at the hospital. There always seemed to be room as each new person arrived – a chair was found, food appeared and everyone made welcome. Noisy yes, but wonderful, and I found myself thinking “All are welcome at the feast of life”.



We did of course have a five hour journey ahead of us back to Songea, to be completed before total darkness fell. We should have left by 2.30pm, but some members of the team were still engaged in conversation, through no fault of their own. At 3pm those of us who were ready and waiting by the vehicle could sense unease in Sunday as he knew the roads and that the potential for robbery was much greater at nightfall. If I had an unpleasant moment on the trip this was it, but I also knew we were in good hands. We finally left at 3.30pm and Sunday got us back to Songea by 8pm, by which time it was pitch dark. Fortunately, there had still been some light in the sky as we drove through the area he had been concerned about.

After a late supper hosted by the bishop's wife (but with the bishop elsewhere!) my fellow travellers started writing up the report for Liuli and worked through to the early hours. This was one occasion when I left them to it.

And so to Milo

The next morning we were sad to bid farewell to Canon Komba as we set off for Njombe, about 150 miles to the north. Thanks to a good tarmac road, this journey was much quicker than our travel to Liuli and somewhere along the way we crossed from the Diocese of Ruvuma in to the Diocese of South West Tanganyika.

We had already been given quite a few "kangas" as gifts, and Stephanie (who was heading east from Songea) had set each of us the challenge to get an item of clothing made up before meeting her again at the end of the trip. So on reaching Njombe we found a tailor, got measured (very quickly) and left a deposit for the clothes to be collected on our way back from Milo. We then headed to the diocesan office, next to the cathedral church, to meet Bishop John Simalenga, who many of you will remember from his visit to St James in February 2010. We also met Revd Edward Haule, the diocesan secretary, who was coming with us to Milo. As with Canon Komba, Edward was an excellent companion.



After lunch at a local hotel, we left Njombe mid-afternoon for the 75 mile journey to Milo. I would happily have skipped lunch to get to Milo sooner, but had to be patient with my fellow travellers. The uphill journey to Milo is almost entirely on dirt roads and Sunday did really well to get us there by 6pm as daylight was fading.

It had been a long day with lots of road travel, but it felt so good to be in Milo again. We were all going to stay in the house I had been in two years ago and I even had the same bedroom. One big surprise was to see a solar panel on the roof, which meant we would have light all through the dark evenings and power to charge our mobiles, cameras and laptops. More about solar power later.



Many people arrived to say hello, including Dr Simeon Mbuligwe, who at 72 is still holding the fort at the hospital. I have to mention a young lady I was longing to meet. Amy Smith (in the photo) is serving with Peace Corps Volunteers – the American equivalent of VSO. After three months of training and learning Swahili in north east Tanzania, Amy came to live in Milo in August 2010 and so was very familiar with local village life by the time of our visit. Thanks to her smart phone, I had been able to send my first ever

emails to Milo. This was invaluable as Benaiah got weaker. He was able to send me a message, via Amy, two days before he died and this made his passing so much easier to accept.

The first day in Milo

It was lovely to wake as dawn was breaking to the sound of the cock crowing and the ladies who were looking after us. Here is Margreth heating the water for our morning wash and breakfast drinks. Facilities in the house were basic, but quite sufficient and all the hard work was done for us.



Amy arrived before breakfast as Catherine and I had asked if she would show us the nursery class she has started in Milo, with the help of some local ladies.



About 30-50 children attend each morning and there is a small fee each month. Many families have to offer contributions in kind, such as chickens or maize. It was very strange to see these little people walking to school without a parent, with perhaps a four year old holding the hand of a younger sibling. Yet this is quite safe in Milo, where everyone knows you and where there are only occasional vehicles. The children were able to say the letters of the alphabet and many words in English – all very impressive.

After breakfast back at the house, we all headed over to where the workshop was to be held. It was the classroom used by mature students of Milo Bible School, so for two days they would have no lessons. The workshop was due to start at 9am, but people drifted in rather slowly and it was awhile before things got underway. As in Liuli, there was a very good mix of hospital staff, local church leaders and village community leaders. I was very happy to see that Benaiah's widow was present, together with two of the daughters who work at the hospital. Once everyone settled in to the flow of the teaching, they started to unwind and enjoy the small groups.

As much as I would have liked to observe the entire workshop, we only had two days in Milo and there were other important things for me to do. Several UK supporters of the hospital had given me questions to answer and had asked for various photos to be taken. I also needed time to just wander around.



So mid-morning Amy and I left the workshop to go and see Benaiah's grave, in the cemetery alongside

Milo parish church. She showed me photos of the hundreds of mourners who came to his funeral service and burial on Sunday 17 July, the day after he died. Born in Milo and having worked at the hospital for the last 30 years, Benaiah was a well known and much respected person. His grave is still



a mound of red earth, but in September next year a stone memorial will be laid and once again large crowds will gather to celebrate his life. Amy had of course been present at the funeral and burial and I felt very lucky to have her with me as we paid our respects. I also returned the next day on my own.

Walking on beyond the church, Amy took me to see the house she lives in. Peace Corps volunteers are expected to live like everyone else and this she does – although she admits many houses are not in such a good state of repair as hers. She has no electricity or running water and

her squat toilet is outside the main house in a building around the courtyard. The long dark evenings must be a real challenge, but she seems to manage really well.

We continued to Milo Primary School as Amy wanted to see one of the teachers. The school buildings surround a quadrangle, rather beautifully planted with shrubs. It's surprising how many heads suddenly appeared at the classroom windows as we arrived. We visited some teachers in the staff room and I got called upon to visit a classroom where an English lesson was in progress. The children were rather shy about asking questions, but sang a song and thanked me for my visit. Then more waving from the windows as Amy and I walked away.

Primary school tuition fees were eliminated in Tanzania in 2002, thanks to debt relief following the Jubilee 2000 campaign. Families still have to find the money for uniforms, exam fees, books and school supplies and this is difficult for many. The huge influx of children following the removal of primary fees has been hard for the country to cope with and the standard of teaching is often not that high. It will take time for things to improve, but at least there has been a big step in the right direction.

Milo really is in a beautiful location, high on a ridge in the Southwest Highlands. The Lutherans built a mission station there about 100 years ago, including a rather fine house, a church and a health centre.



The Anglicans took it over from the Germans after World War I. The standard of living for Milo's 1400 or so inhabitants may look basic to us, but I was told Milo is better off than some of the neighbouring villages. Because of its height (about 1200m; almost as high as Ben Nevis) it never gets too hot, but it does have a cold season between June and August when people have to wrap up and use lots of blankets. It is a challenging time as all the houses, many without glazed windows, will be really cold.

St. Luke's Hospital has about 50 beds and serves a catchment population of well over 4000 people in ten villages. When the workshop finished for the day, Dr Simeon Mbuligwe and other staff members gave us a tour. Dr Simeon (in the green shirt) is seen here with Joseph Mgina, the senior male nurse. Dr Simeon has been doctor-in-charge since March 2008 and has a very good surgical reputation, especially for gynaecology. Joseph has been at the hospital for many years, starting out as a medical helper and working his way up. They are two lovely men.



We visited the wards (male, female and maternity), the operating theatre, the outpatients department, the laboratory and the Care and Treatment Centre for HIV/AIDS. This may sound impressive, but the contrast with our well-equipped hospitals is stark. One very significant development this year was the installation of solar panels to light the wards. The operating theatre is still lit by a diesel generator. The funding came from USAID and was sufficient to also install panels on three houses used by hospital staff, including the one we were all staying in.

One of the students sponsored by St James's parishioners in 2009 is Christina Kilwale, seen here in her white coat. She gained her diploma as a pharmaceutical technician and has been working as the hospital pharmacist for over a year now. In time she would like to raise her qualification to degree level. Another sponsored student, Sarafina Chaka, had recently completed her 4 year nurse and midwife training and was soon to come and work in Milo. Our third student is still training.



The evening of our first full day in Milo had to be the highlight of the trip for me as we had all been invited to supper by Mrs Kilwale. Many family members came out to greet us, including Benaiah's

younger brother Marko and Benaiah's eldest son Stewart. They are on the right of the photo, talking to Dr Campbell. Marko actually lives in Dar-es-Salaam and he and his wife Angela had looked after Benaiah when he was having treatment there. As the new head of the family, Marko now travels to Milo fairly often.



Inside the house were many other members of Benaiah's large family, young and old. Not all of them live in Milo now, but had come for this special evening and I felt very honoured. It was

soon dark and working out who was who by the light of kerosene lamps was not easy, but so important - everyone wanted to say hello. I probably only managed about five one-to-one conversations, but each was very special. Mrs Kilwale and I really did manage to talk to each other, thanks to Marko's very good English and willingness to translate. In the midst of all the talking, there was a lovely buffet supper to enjoy and then one of Amy's Peace Corps friends arrived - a young man from California who is teaching biology at a secondary school in a nearby village. Everybody was welcome and included in this beautiful evening of hospitality.

The second day in Milo

After so many experiences the day before, our second day started more gently with no extra activities before or after breakfast. Once the workshop got underway, my fellow travellers were kept very busy.

As in Liuli, some sessions involved going out to visit villagers in their homes. Ten groups were formed, with four people in each - a mix from the community, church and hospital staff. All the groups visited pre-organised family homes. Here are some of them setting out and one of the households visited.



The brief for each visit was to listen to what people had to say, to ask questions about their concerns for health and what they were doing about any concerns. Each group then gave feedback on what strengths they had seen in the household they visited and also about how they thought they had worked as a team.

As well as being aware of what was happening in the workshop, I wanted to spend some more time wandering around observing daily life. The weather was magnificent, but that is perhaps easy for me to say as I didn't have much to carry. I never cease to be amazed at how graceful the people look as they carry their water and other heavy loads.



The parish priest in Milo, Canon Geoffrey Mтуру, is a very good friend of retired archdeacon Christopher Wagstaff, who some of you will remember from his visits to St James. Christopher is a very loyal and active supporter of Milo - both the hospital and the Bible School - and always has a fund raising



project on the go. Among other things, Christopher asked me to get a photo of Geoffrey with his wife Emma in front of the new house that has been built for them. They are still living in the old clergy house, which is in rather poor shape, but it won't be long before they can move to their new accommodation. The young man on the left of the photo, Michael, is the parish catechist (or lay reader).

On my way back to the workshop I met some bible students hard at work on the land. Milo Bible School runs a one year course from February to November. There is a

fee of about £180, usually met by the student's parish. Academic ability is very variable and often quite basic, but the students get sound teaching and also learn skills such as carpentry, tailoring and horticulture. They have to provide their own food from the land around the school and they have some cows, goats, pigs and chickens. Selling some of the milk and eggs gives a small income. After graduation in November, the students return to be catechists to their home parishes. Some may later go on to train for the priesthood.



The workshop finished soon after 4.30pm to allow everyone time to return home before darkness fell. Ian, Catherine and Onesmus were very tired and had a much needed collapse before returning to our



house, but soon we were all busy fitting other things in before supper – Catherine went off to play netball, while Ian and Onesmus went off to get a view of Milo from a nearby high point. I took advantage of this window of time to talk with Dr Simeon about some of the issues Christopher Wagstaff and I wanted to know about. During both days of our stay Dr Simeon had either been at the hospital or attending the workshop, so our time to talk alone was very limited. Even this precious time was interrupted when the head of the Bible School came

to introduce the priest who will take over from him next year. They were very gracious and waited patiently as I finished my conversation with Dr Simeon. Each encounter is important and I wished I had more time to spend with everyone.

The evening was spent in working on the workshop report and we were all very grateful for the solar panels that gave us light, unlike the other houses in Milo.

Leaving Milo

After breakfast the next morning we had a meeting with the “working group” who were going to carry the lessons of the workshop forward - Rev. Geoffrey Mтуру (parish priest), Peter Msigura (Head male nurse and Patron), Mariam Muyobole (Head of Maternity), Edith Samlongo (Head female nurse), John Mgina (Care and Treatment for HIV/AIDS) and Dr Simeon Mbuligwe.



The meeting began with some reflective comments from the group. Dr Simeon said this was the first time there

had been a coming together of the hospital, the church and the community, and that “*the community’s eyes have been opened – this is our hospital.*” Edith talked about the realisation that St Luke’s is a hospital for people from all church and non-church backgrounds and that the community was optimistic



about a common partnership with the hospital. John (in the green shirt) said “*I acknowledge that I am part of the group of young, energetic men here, and I will continue to support and spread what we have learnt here. Thank you for coming.*”

After farewells to the ladies who had looked after us, to our hospital hosts, to Amy, and to Marko and Mrs Kilwale, we left Milo by 11.30 to descend to Njombe.

Homeward bound

In Njombe we collected our colourful clothes from the tailor's shop, visited Bishop John to report on our visit, ate lunch, filled up with petrol and then set off to Iringa where we would spend the night.

We were now on the homeward journey to Dar es Salaam, about 475 miles to the north east. The light aircraft flight on our outward journey had saved us many hours of road travel – but not now. We were extremely lucky to have such a good solid vehicle and an excellent driver, so I did not have a single moment of anxiety.

We arrived back in Dar es Salaam about 5pm the following day, but had stopped for breakfast, drinks and lunch en route! The other team had already arrived, as had Stephanie from USPG, so there was much to share and a lot of joy as we were reunited. There was just time for a quick change into our African attire, before an hour's debriefing session and then supper in a restaurant. Stephanie was impressed by what we had achieved on the dress front – we certainly rose to her challenge!



Our outward flights from Dar es Salaam were at various times the next day, some leaving in the early hours. Ian, Alison, Catherine and I did not have to leave for the airport until 4pm, so there was time for a lie in and a shower before doing anything else – real luxury.



An added bonus for me was that Marko Kilwale had also returned to Dar es Salaam. Thanks to our mobiles we spoke to each other and Marko said he really wanted his wife Angela to meet me. They have two married daughters and one son all living in Dar. We decided on a rendezvous at the airport terminal and here they both are with kanga gifts for Catherine and me. I felt rather sad as they walked away, but I know my friendship with the Kilwale family will continue. Marko has offered to be a translator and I have already taken him up on his offer.

A few reflections

My first reflection is of profound gratitude for all that I experienced and for safe travel. I've worked out that we covered about 1600 miles within Tanzania, of which 2 hours were on the MAF plane and 28 hours on the road (this would have been 40 hours without the internal flight). Add to that the 9334 miles return air travel between London and Dar and one has to be thankful for the skill of all the people who made our travel possible.

Also profound gratitude for the kindness and consideration of all the people who looked after our needs and made us feel so welcome wherever we went.

Arriving home was of course lovely, but not without some discomfort from reverse culture shock.

- It felt very strange to see mums collecting their children from the nursery in our church hall, strapping them in the back of large vehicles, and yet looking rather stressed and in a hurry.
- The huge range of products in the supermarkets also made me think "Do we really need so much choice?" The meals we had been served were all much the same because our hosts were using the products available where they lived, but they were tasty and very good. Saying grace had a very special feeling. We could also see that no food was ever wasted.
- The ease with which we turn on the tap for hot water or our light switches and computers, together with many other aspects of daily life.

I certainly don't view the way of life of the people I had visited through rose tinted glasses; there are times of frustration when you wonder why something has not been mended or what is the real story here? But you can't help but feel how unfair it is that we have so much while they don't have many of the things we take for granted – such as electricity, easy access to clean water and health care, decent education, fit-for-purpose homes and access to the internet. Things are definitely progressing – the Tanzanian government is playing its part, mobile phones are an immense benefit, roads are being improved - but for the foreseeable future any help we are able to give has a tangible and positive impact for many people.