

FaithBIT



Gifts from the Heart

Reflection by Martin Rathjen

In February, I was privileged to travel with an Immanuel group to visit the village of Uswaa on the foothills of Mt. Kilimanjaro, where we worshipped with a local Lutheran congregation.

The surprisingly large church is surrounded by tropical vegetation where many of the residents are subsistence farmers, living in simple homes while growing and selling food from their small properties.

The 2-hour worship service was in Swahili. We could recognize parts of the worship service and we were guided through the service with the help of some local people who translated portions of the service. At what we thought was the end of the worship service the congregation processed outside while singing a hymn. We followed along to see how the service would conclude.

The worship leaders sat in their assigned spots while the congregation spread out, clustered in the shade to keep out of the hot Tanzanian sun. A piece of cloth had been laid out on the ground and members of the congregation brought items and placed them before the worship leaders, church leaders, congregation and God. These items were simple non-monetary offerings that would be auctioned, with the proceeds supporting the work of the church.



“The very first item to be auctioned was a live white rabbit.”

- Martin Rathjen

The very first item to be auctioned was a live white rabbit. We were quite surprised, wondering what would become of the rabbit, but quickly realized this was a significant gift shared by a member of the congregation for the work of ministry. Other auctioned items included: bananas, greens, 2 eggs, sugarcane, milk and other items.

The auctioneer sold each item to the highest bidder. The funds raised from each shared gift was received and recorded, to support the work of the congregation’s ministry, meeting real needs of people in the community. These shared gifts were very simple, but in their context incredibly generous, given as an act of worship, in response to God’s love and shared for the work of God.

Experiencing this auction of shared gifts in worship has challenged me to again prayerfully consider how God is calling me to generously share my gifts, abilities and talents.