



THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF TANZANIA DIOCESE OF MARA

NEWSLETTER

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CUTTING SEASON



VISION AND MISSION




Vision: Lives transformed through power of gospel



Mission: To be best Christian provider of spiritual and development services

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MESSAGE FROM BISHOP



Bishop Dr. George Meshack Okoth

I am encouraged by the messages I have received from our first two newsletters and thank each of you who take time to read what is happening in Mara Diocese. This newsletter highlights some of the challenges we face here in Mara Region and my brother Bishop Mwita Akiri from Tarime Diocese shares with us about a subject which many of our supporters may find confronting. To truly understand the challenges we face here in Tanzania, it is important that you our friends are aware that Christianity in this region is less than 120 years old and the Anglican Church in Mara is about 100 years old. So as you will read there are many challenges as we continue our work of bringing hope to those still caught up in ancient practices.

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Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. The practice is internationally recognized as a violation of the human rights of girls and women; and has no recognized health benefits for women (WHO, 2016). It is important to understand the background and the culture of the Kuria community in order to be simple and give the indigenous people the first opportunity to talk, discuss, and dialogue about the problem of female genital mutilation.

Interventions should encourage the Kuria people to think critically about human rights, gender and social inequalities, and oppression; within their specific socio-cultural context.

In addition, the Church through the Diocese of Tarime, has a huge plan to reduce female genital mutilation through the primary and secondary schools we are building.

THE CHURCH VIEW ON FGM IN OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.

In the first place, in both the OT and NT, the Bible is silent about FGM practice. However, the Church considers it an abomination on God's creation.

Neither does the Church equate it to male circumcision among the Israelites. The Bible says that male circumcision was allowed as a sign of God's covenant with Abraham. This covenant reached its fulfillment in Jesus Christ (*Gen. 17*).

Today circumcision is spiritual, not physical (Col. 2:11-12, Phil. 3:3; Rom. 2:28-29).

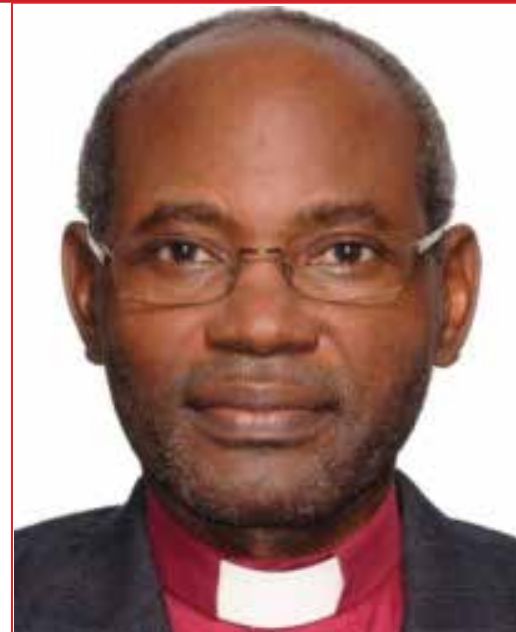
THE CHURCH PERSPECTIVE ON FGM

The church perspective on FGM is to offer basic education, focused on all aspects of women and children's health; physical, social-cultural, and nutritional. The improvement in formal education is likely to contribute to attitude and behavior change in the long run and to change the underlying gender relations between male and female. Other factors that are significantly associated with FGM to change attitudes are exposure to anti-female genital mutilation messages, increase in gender equality attitudes, and knowledge of harmful female genital mutilation effects.

BISHOP MWITA AKIRI

TARIME DIOCESE

A PASTORAL VIEW OF THE PRACTICE



BISHOP MWITA AKIRI

FGM takes place in Tarime every other year. It is on again in December 2022. Kuria community and others view it as a right of passage by which children become adults. Most of our rural churches will be half empty during the FGM season.

But it is more than a right of passage. It is a religious practice. The traditional clan leaders of each of 13 Kuria clans must make animal sacrifices and prayers to cleanse the designated cutting places within each clan. They believe this protects all who will undergo the cut (male and female) from misfortune.

The church teaches against FGM during confirmation classes and in sermons. Candidates are taught that Confirmation is a Christian right of passage because it enables the candidates (young and old) to join other Christians worldwide in becoming the partakers of the Body and Blood of Christ. Also the Church teaches that participating in FGM is tantamount to correcting God who created women's genitalia. Equally going through FGM is participation in the worship of other gods. This angers God who has commanded us to not worship other gods (Exodus 20:3).

One complication is that some parents of Christian children and husbands of Christian women are pagans. They have the power to order their daughters to undergo FGM otherwise they get cursed or chased away from the home.

While safe house programmes and projects help protect children, some children stay there during the cutting season but when the season is over, they undergo FGM without much drama. Some poor parents also send their kids to safe houses to get them fed and supported materially.

For us in Tarime, we believe that educating school age children and adults in churches and in the communities against FGM is a better long term way to fight FGM. As a Diocese we have had programmes as part of Mogabiri Centre community development programmes especially through Gender Based Violence (GBV).

For further information on FGM in Tanzania refer to Christianity in Central Tanzania: A Story of African Encounters and Initiatives in Ugogo and Ukaguru, 1876-1933 Mwita Akiri (pages 157-169)

STORY FROM SARA AND FLORA

My name is Sarah, I am 12 years old, I am in standard five in primary school. I am the second child out of three children to my mother who is the third wife of my father. My father has three wives and 9 children. The first wife (Flora's mother) has four children and the second wife has two children and my mother the younger wife who has three children.

My step sister Flora (12 years) the daughter of my step mother (the first wife) and I, are the victims of Female Genital Mutilation. Flora is in standard seven (final year in primary school) and this year on October she will sit for her national Examination. We left home on the 30th August 2022 after hearing the news that our father and our grandmother (my father's mom) wanted us to be cut during our school holiday. It was fortunate that our sister in-law who also went through the act (cutting) many years ago heard about it and come for our rescue, through her experience and the knowledge of the effects of FGM she helped us escape from home. She said that she doesn't want what happened to her to happen to us, so we should leave to the Safe House that is in Mugumu town.

We planned it and the next day early in the morning me and my sister left home, I don't remember the exact time we left but it was before the usual time that people wake up to go to their farms.

We walked about 20km from our village (Merenga Village) and reached to the Safe House in Mugumu in the evening around 6pm. We were very hungry as we didn't take anything in our tummy except for the ripe bananas we bought from the 1000 Tshs that was given to us by our sister in law. Despite the hardship we faced to reach at the Safe House we were so happy to know that we are finally at the Safe place where no my father and granny cannot come to cut us

Actually our life in the village is so poor, our mothers are the one responsible for family care and wellbeing of their children. My mother (Sarah) is selling vegetables to the local market and Flora's mother is a retail seller of Cassava and Maize. They earn very little to feed the family and provide school needs and this is why I was a bit late to join school than Flora. Our father took advantage of the situation and think of cutting us so that he can marry us to wealth men and get cows as dowry to help sustain family.

I hope that for us being here at the Safe House, we are given a chance to fulfill their dreams, we will taken back to school to get education and I will be able to become a Police Officer and my sister Flora wish to be a teacher. Please continue praying for us

So sad to say that, girls face difficulties in their indigenous families and seek somewhere else to be accommodated, but we hope that God will pave a way through for their dreams to come true.



Sara and Frola

FROM SAFE HOUSE COORDINATOR



STORY BY NEEMA AND STEVEN

My name is Neema. I am 15 years old and I never got the chance to go to school so it is unfortunate that I don't know how to read and write. I was born in a family of one father with three wives. My mother is the first wife and she has four children, I am the first born. My father is a motorcycle driver and he manages farming and cultivation but the money he gets only goes in his pocket and alcoholism. He provides nothing to his family of 15 children and three wives. Only his wives are responsible for family wellbeing. They work too hard in the field and whatever they get pays for their children's needs and wants.

My brother Steven (13 years) and I, are both safely accommodated at the Mugumu Safe House run by the Anglican Church, as we both faced domestic violence. Our father overworked us in the field for him to get money for alcohol. He beat us whenever we don't do what he wants us to do. He refused to take us to school despite being advised by family members. He always says to us that we only value to him because he can get money through our work, but giving us education is a very stupid thing for him to give us.

I witnessed his wrong doings to our family since I was six years old when he sold me to my auntie who lived in Arusha to be a domestic worker. I was in Arusha for almost seven years and came back in 2020. When I arrived home I learned that my young brother Steven was also taken to our uncle in a village near Kenya. Later 2021 Steve also joined us in Bonchugu village in Mugumu (home place). At our age we were supposed to be at school but our father again insisted that we should go to the field and cultivate. Our mother couldn't do anything to help us because she is afraid of what will happen to her if she sided with us.

Therefore I decided to take my brother and together we walked from our village (Bonchugu) to the Police station in Mugumu which is about 8km away. The police officer listened to us and called our father to come, he refused and they decided to take us to the Safe House. We are now staying here and wish we could get opportunity to go to school, we have dreams we want to accomplish in life. I (Neema) want to be an International chef and my brother (Steven) wants to be an accountant.

PRAYER

"A prayer for the kids. As the center we ask friends to really pray for these kids so that they can get all the requirements to allow them to join school and for their father to change into a better and responsible father. For these kids to stay at our center they need food, clothing, shoes, medication, school uniforms, books and other school supplies. see the last page of the newsletter to learn how you can assist children like Neema and Steven"

STORY BY NGUTI MWITA

Mwita is a member of the Anglican Church in Tanzania, Diocese of Mara, from Gesarya parish, Serengeti district, Mara region. Serengeti is one of the six districts that make up Mara region.

in the Serengeti district there are many tribes, but a large area is inhabited by the Kurya tribe, which is among its tribe.

The Kuryas are a community that engages in small-scale breeding and food cultivation, in the traditions and customs of the Kurya tribe, they perform circumcision for male and female children every two years, that is even number years

They do the traditional circumcision activities for those years due to traditional reasons that they are lucky years, so it is blessed that young people who undergo circumcision do not have problems because they are years of blessing for the Kurya community.

The Kuryas are a society that lives in a polygamous marriage system.

For more than eight years now, the government and human rights stakeholders have been strongly opposing bad traditions and customs, especially female genital mutilation and sexual violence, ambitious efforts including arresting female genital mutilators and sending them to prison have partially weakened these activities, although they are not successful in all percentages

As a member of the community who comes from that environment, he has been giving education to his family to avoid bad and oppressive traditions, even though it is not easy because most of the people he gives education to are older than him, so they see him as if education has taken him out of his originality.

Male circumcision is done as usual and is not restricted by the government and health organizations such as TACAIDS have been sponsoring safe circumcision equipment and his father is one of the male circumcisers who circumcised him in 2012 at the age of 14.

Through the safe house center under the Diocese of Mara in 2020, his uncle who has been a pastor in the Anglican Church was able to take his daughter to protect herself from circumcision.

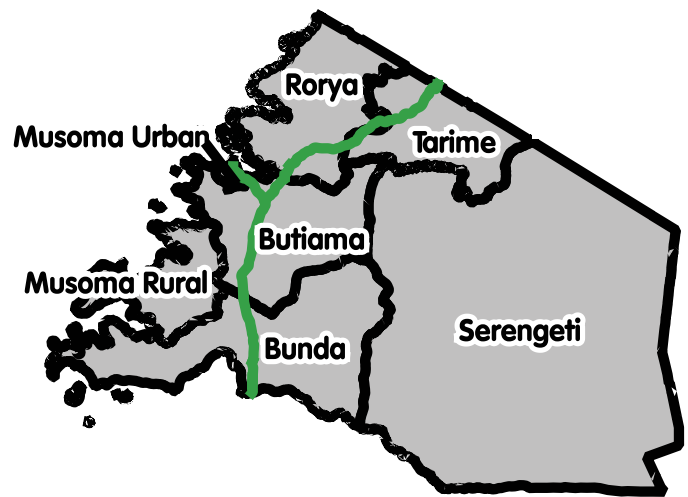
More education is needed to liberate the community to get rid of false traditions, especially during the end of the year when these activities take place.

In 2018, during the period of circumcision, his little sister from another mother were required to perform circumcision, he found time to stay with them and give them education and about the health effects, but after a while, they escaped by themselves and went to perform circumcision and even now they are married and have their own families.

At the end of the year, especially on the 12th month, churches become less crowded due to circumcision activities

Your prayers are needed in these communities to avoid false traditions and unproductive traditions.

POLYGAMY IN MARA REGION



LAY CANON MOSES NYARONGA

Polygamy is a type of relationship that typically involves a person marrying more than one partner. In Mara region, polygamy is the specific form of marriage where one man marries multiple wives.

Polygamous marriage in Mara region was very common because they used to believe that it is a union between two families not just two individuals. It was heavily integrated into African traditional religion in many places in the region, because it was largely related to gods, various spirits, human life and life after death. Polygamous marriage was also a link to the family, clan and society in general. During polygamous marriage, spiritual services including prayers, rituals, almsgiving, sacrifices were offered. The services were accompanied by various celebrations and concerts that include dancing, singing, and eating. The community of Mara region had various marriage festivals and concerts.

Many tribes in the Mara region believed in the power of spirits and that any challenge in life such as divorce, drought, hunger, floods, the arrival of insects such as caterpillars and locusts, diseases and deaths, were caused by the spirits or the anger of ancestors. Therefore, each tribe had a way of performing a marriage ceremony to appease their spirits. They used to perform these rituals in special places set aside for worship or under a certain tree or on a mountain.

In Mara region many people opted for a polygamous relationship instead of monogamous marriage. Men had between 2 to 40 wives with a good number of children. Polygamous marriage became the heritage of Mara residents from generation to generation.

POLYGAMY IN MARA REGION

Polygamous marriage was heavily integrated into African traditional religion so as to be seen as sacred and revered. Divorce was a sign of bad omens and rituals were conducted to send away the evil spirits believed to have caused it. They used to believe that procreation occurred according to the wishes of God and as abundantly as possible. Communities in Mara believed that polygamous marriage was about procreation and providing for children as this was seen as these ceremonies bring together the whole family and allow each side to get to know each other. People were discouraged from marrying for love or sexual attraction.

The African traditional religions of the inhabitants of the Mara region were very successful in investing in the psychology of the people. People were deeply immersed in the polygamous married.

When Christianity entered the Mara region, some locals accepted and joined the Anglican Church. But people who had many wives found it difficult to continue coming to the church because they were excommunicated from Holy Communion.

Over the years, the economic situation and Anglican Church in Mara region has brought great reforms to the polygamy systems where one person could have 40 wives and larger families and therefore raising children is become expensive.

Currently polygamy is associated with physical, emotional and sexual abuse and mothers in polygamous families are demonstrating negative emotions including loneliness, despair, anger, powerlessness and sadness.

reason behind this

- A man's wealth was measured by the number of his wives as well as the number of children and cattle or livestock.
- It was prestigious to have many wives.
- Many wives demonstrated a source of labour since the married women were forced to go to the field to graze livestock, do the farm work, bring up children and all sorts of domestic work.

GB CENTER

A PROGRAM SUPPORTING GIRLS FROM EARLY MARRIAGE

By Canon Helen Hoskins

The Girls Brigade Sewing and Handcraft Centre was started in 2010 with the purpose of helping girls from the villages with little education, by giving them a skill to enable them to have their own income, nurturing them in a Christian environment and equipping them to make their own choices and decisions in life, and so able to have their own dreams and goals and to stand firm against unwanted pressures and coercions. Most of the students live in the hostel with living as a Christian Community an important component of the course. They have daily devotions morning and evening, worship together on Sunday mornings and also teach Sunday School and sing as a choir in local Bunda churches.

The main subjects are machine sewing and embroidery, learning different designs. The course also includes other handcrafts such as bead jewellery, Business management, Cooking, Bible lessons and ministry training for Sunday School teaching and Girls Brigade Officer training.

It is a joy when students commit their lives to Jesus and are baptised and confirmed. This year we had 7 students baptised and 9 students confirmed. On completing the course graduates receive assistance in purchasing a sewing machine so that they can set up their own sewing businesses.

Each year we have a Reunion day, inviting past graduates to come back and share with current students their successes and challenges and to join together for a special program culminating in a netball match between current students and graduates and of course a cake. The total number of students enrolled from 2010 to 2021 is 294 of whom 253 have graduated and over 200 have received their own sewing machines. This year we have 21 students enrolled. Our capacity is 36 students and we hope to reach that number again next year. We are also introducing a Hairdressing module to the course as well as running a 6 month non-residential Hairdressing course.

The students pay fees but we also have a number of sponsorships available to enable students from poorer backgrounds to study.

The Reunion Day testimonies of the graduates show us the value of our course, as we hear of successful businesses, graduates taking on their own students, building their own houses, sending their children to secondary school, involved in local church ministry, and Christian marriages.

The GB Centre Community has established itself as a place of great blessing where lives are changed as graduates grow in their Christian faith and in practical income generating skills to improve their lives and pass that on to the next generation.

SUPPORT GIRLS IN THE MARA REGION



This newsletter has outlined significant challenges. The issues of gender-based violence, especially the ritual of female genital mutilation are being addressed in various ways by the Anglican Church in the Mara region. The Mugumu Safe House provides respite and restoration for girls who have fled during the “cutting season.” There are however a number who remain there longer term as well as girls unable to return due to other violence and abuse. The Safe House provides the following activities:

- Temporary accommodation for girls who flee from FGM.
- Mediation between Safe House staff, police and government agencies to assist most girls to return home.
- To assist remaining girls in getting education.
- Providing education and sensitization to the community on the effects of FGM to girl and the society.

The Diocese of Tarime provides education through a gender based violence program to the community on FGM. The majority of Kurya’s live in that region.

*“To support these programs you can donate directly to the following bank accounts, noting that **Eddie Ozols**, an Australian is the honorary Business Manager of Mara Diocese and a lay canon in Mara and Tarime Dioceses.”*



Donate through Anglican Relief and Development Fund Australia using this link

<https://ardfa.org.au/tanzania-fgm-prevention>

In Australia



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Account number: 215841509

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Sort code: 23-14-70

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