

# **Understanding Our Outreach to the Nyamwezi**

## **(updated April 2022)**

### **Who are we working with to reach the Nyamwezi?**

We are joining a work among the Nyamwezi that is being led by the Africa Inland Church Tanzania (AICT) and is well underway.

AIM in general and Andy and Margaret specifically work in cooperation with and under the authority of the local church. In the case of the Andersens, that local church is the Tabora Diocese of the AICT.

The Diocese of Tabora is responsible for the region surrounding the city of Tabora, which contains 305 churches. An average church in the region has around 30 people in attendance. The Tabora region is slightly larger than the state of West Virginia and the population is slightly larger than that of New Mexico.

There are approximately 51 pastors and 300 evangelists and in the region. A pastor may be responsible for as many as 7-10 churches. Evangelists may be new believers with no formal Biblical training beyond the basic catechism class required for baptism. The evangelists are in charge of the churches for regular day to day teaching, visitations, discipleship of new believers, and evangelism activities. They work with 2-4 church elders and 2-4 deacons to lead services and weekly prayer times. They are not permitted to baptize, lead communion or perform weddings or funerals. The evangelists work under the care of pastors who have at least three years of Biblical training, and have passed the AICT pastors' course.

The AICT has a goal of establishing 200 more churches in Tabora Diocese by the end of 2024.

### **What are the difficulties in reaching the Nyamwezi?**

There are more than one hundred ethnic groups in Tanzania. The largest ethnic group is the Sukuma with 16% of the population. The second largest group is the Nyamwezi with a population of 4.5 million. Tabora is the home region for the Nyamwezi, but there are many people groups living throughout the region. The government of Tanzania is actively working to break down the tribal system in the country.

The AICT churches often are made up of a majority of Sukuma people, which can make it more difficult for Nyamwezi people to feel welcome. The Tabora Diocese is strategically going to Nyamwezi villages and aims to start Nyamwezi majority churches within those villages. However, when entering a new area, it is often the Sukuma people who respond to the gospel message more quickly. It takes longer for the Nyamwezi to leave the hold which Islam has on their lives.

Tabora Bible School provides Nyamwezi with the opportunity to grow into future church leaders for starting clusters of Nyamwezi churches. The AICT recently ordained a Nyamwezi pastor, and Tabora Bible School currently has four Nyamwezi students who are reaching out in Nyamwezi areas to plant new churches.

### **What's the history of the Tabora Bible School?**

The Tabora Bible School was started by the AICT in 2017 as a training center for evangelists. There are several Bible training centers within the AICT, but all quite far from Tabora. Andy Andersen has been part of the teaching staff since the school began and is in charge of the construction of the school facility.

In 2021 Tabora Bible School was recognized by the AICT as part of the Theological Department of the church. The department has a standard six-month curriculum, which they hope to implement at all AICT Bible schools. Currently courses which are taught at Tabora Bible School are based on availability of the volunteer teaching staff.

The school is set up to provide evangelists with six months of Biblical training and the basics of how to lead a church. Classes are held in two-week long sessions over the course of two years. Students return to their home bases after their two-week course of study and practice the lessons they are learning.

There are 17 students in the current class.

The cost for a student to attend each two-week course is about \$50 for transport, food and housing. The complete 24-week program costs a student about \$600. The students pay for their travel to and from school and bring food (rice, corn, beans) plus 10,000 shillings (about \$5 dollars US) for their main meals. Most students pay these costs out of pocket while a few are sponsored by missionaries or their home church.

Many students have trouble completing 24 weeks of study in two years and some extend into a third year of classes to complete their graduation requirements. Many more of the 300 evangelists who are currently serving would attend training if full or partial scholarships were available to subsidized part of their bus fare and the cost of the main meal of the day.

While its campus is being built, the school meets in the Compassion classrooms of the AICT Tabora church. These rooms are heavily used for Compassion International activities, various choir practices, prayer days and other church activities. The teachers face the challenge of teaching without a salary, as they hold other positions in the church for which they receive a salary.

### **What are the most significant obstacles that the Andersons see to the growth of the Church in this area?**

- A lack of leadership to lead the fast-growing number of small churches
- A lack of Bibles and study material (there is not a translation of the Bible in the Nyamwezi language)

**What are the Andersens asking COD to do?**

- Continue to pray fervently
- Send long term missionaries
- Send short term mission teams
- Build out Tabora Bible School