

Stephen Hatch

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The call in action

Dear friends,

I have been asked a few times now about how the Swahili nativity play went. Unfortunately, it never happened – the government announced that all pupils must return home for the holidays and so we dutifully cancelled our planned remedial lessons and sent the pupils home.

I realised recently (Facebook told me) that it has been a year since I recovered from COVID-19. I do not know how bad symptoms need to be or how long you need to have them for before it counts as long COVID, but anything more adventurous than walking leaves me breathless and I still get leg aches for no discernible reason. Otherwise I am in good health.

Before I sent my last letter, I had been informed that the bishop intended to ordain me. I did not write about it last time in case it didn't actually happen (I was told it would happen in 2021, but I couldn't get an exact date). Eventually I was told it would be 26 December and that there would be some training first. This meant all day 23 and 24 (when I should have been at school as teacher on duty, so I had to find a replacement) with a practice run on 25 (so my guests for lunch were on limited time). The ordination service went well, with the only hitch being that I managed to trip over my robe when standing from kneeling (to a gasp from the congregation). There were five of us being ordained at the time and there were two firsts: I was the first white person to be ordained in the diocese and with me were the first two women to be ordained too. While the others were all introduced with their husbands/ wives and children, for me, the vicar general announced to the whole cathedral that I was still single and that they would have to change that.

That was all three months ago, and I'm still not used to being called Mchungaji (Reverend) or Baba Mchungaji (Reverend Father). So far the main noticeable change is that now local churches are inviting me to preach (in Swahili). The first invitation happened when the father of one of our pupils (Gabriel) brought his daughter (Victoria) at the start of the year. He is the minister in Muhalala, which is two villages away from us (a 10-minute drive). Gabriel invited me to come and say a prayer. Then three days before the service, when I asked if there was anything specific to pray about, he asked me to preach on salvation. (I normally spend around two weeks thinking about a sermon.) To say I was nervous would be an understatement, but I had barely sat



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Location: Kilimatinde, Tanzania

My call: Providing education to those who would otherwise have none.

My role: Working as a maths teacher and head of the science department, and supporting the headmaster and chaplain at St John's Seminary



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I was ordained by the bishop on 26 December

down after finishing when Gabriel invited me to come again on Easter Sunday, so I figure I can't have done too badly. The second invitation was when a student at the Bible School was unable to attend, so at 7:30am I had to prepare for the 4pm service. (Maybe God is trying to tell me to plan less and trust more?) For the first service I had printed notes, the second one handwritten – the lesson I learned was that in Swahili, always type. I cannot read my scrawl in Swahili in the same way I can in English!

There is a new area dean for Kilimatinde, which the school comes under. He wanted all the pupils to come every Sunday to the village so that they felt part of the community (we used to send them once a month). This caused a few issues with: fitting everyone in the church, stopping pupils running into the village, and keeping our English services going. We now have a plan that, honestly, I do not think is better than what we were doing, but we are going to try and see what happens. It does mean that (I think for the first time ever), Christ Church Kilimatinde has had an English service (the first being a collaboration between myself and the bishop), with more due to follow.

We have been missing our gap year volunteers recently. We used to get some from the UK, USA and Germany, but all went home due to COVID-19 and they have not yet started to return. The bishop even mentioned to me how appreciative he is that while the others were returning home, I came back and have stayed. Among other roles, those on a gap year often helped with extracurricular activities at the secondary school, one of which was baking. I have now had pupils asking if I can do baking with them, as other classes had the chance but they didn't. Now I am not a very good baker and I am also a single male who should not have pupils in his home, but I am also the only teacher with an oven. After discussion with the headmaster it was agreed that I could take pupils for baking, but only those who performed well in their exams and only when another (female) teacher was present. As I write this I have finished one class and have been requested by another class to do the same. Finding time to fit everything in around their normal lessons is sometimes difficult!

Blessings,
Stephen



Photos from top to bottom:
All the new deacons with the bishop;
Celebrating ordination; Pupils decorating a cake during the extracurricular baking class.

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Are you pondering a call to cross-cultural mission? We'd love to connect and help you discern what God might be saying. Find out more about how we can help you to step into God's mission at churchmissionsociety.org/explore

If you would like to discuss your mailings with us or to receive this link letter on a regular basis, please email supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org or call 01865 787400

You can give to Stephen at:
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