

PERSISTENT VOICE WEB EXTRA  
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### **An interview with Rev. Esther Ngomuo**

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It was a special day at the Shighatini Lutheran Parish. On this warm February day in 1994, the first three women to serve as pastors in the Pare Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT) were ordained. The church was packed—with friends, family and with people who wanted to see women ordained. They wondered what it would be like. Would they act the same? How would they dress? The Bishop and his assistant were there, as were more than 30 other pastors including many women serving in the neighboring diocese.

Esther Ngomuo—presently pursuing her Master of Arts in Theology, Development and Evangelism (MATDE) at Wartburg—was one of the women ordained that day. Esther remembers this as one of the most joyous days of her ministry. Typically in the ELCT pastors are ordained in the first congregation they serve but, because this was seen as a special day, Esther and her colleagues were ordained in the first Lutheran church established in the diocese. In Tanzania there are approximately 2,000 pastors and just over 50 of them are women.

Another day that brought Esther a great deal of joy was the first wedding she officiated. This particular couple wanted Esther to officiate at their wedding because they particularly wanted a woman pastor. Esther particularly remembers this day because, as one would expect, people were looking at the groom—so distinguished, the bride—ahhh, she's beautiful and—in this case—the pastor. What! A woman? Esther remembers being asked to be in a lot of the photographs that day.

Esther has found acceptance as she has served as pastor in Tanzania. She says in her country men and women tend to be paid the same—based on their level of education. Pastors and other professionals are accepted in her context because there is a great respect for leaders that comes out of the tribal culture. She has seen that people watch her to see how she will work, to see if she will do the job like a man. Once they find that she has gifts and abilities, and an ability to proclaim the gospel, she is accepted as their pastor. She has even found that she has more influence with some people who appreciate the particular perspective she brings. For instance, in instance of marital counseling, women are more open to hearing from another woman because they don't have to worry that a man is just taking their husband's side.

Esther's research project while studying at Wartburg relates to ministry for those orphaned by the HIV/AIDS crisis. This past summer she interviewed community leaders including, pastors, teachers, doctors, social workers and even some of

the orphans. These orphans lack much of what they need in terms of health care and education. They are discriminated against and many live in difficult situations straining family resources. In some cases 80-year-old grandparents are taking care of children. The Pare Diocese will be blessed as Esther returns with her natural passion and energy and with new resources for community development and outreach.