

Ben and Katy Ray

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The call in action

Dear friends

A belated Happy New Year! We hope you are all now through the worst of UK COVID restrictions? We were lucky enough to spend Christmas with Katy's parents, whom we hadn't seen for over two and a half years. We were also able to see Bibi (Ben's mum) for a few weeks prior to Christmas. Bibi managed to avoid getting Omicron, but unfortunately, Katy's mum Jane wasn't so lucky. Soon after Christmas Day she came down with the tell-tale signs. Fortunately, she wasn't too ill and made a good recovery after about 10 days. COVID rules for travel, etc made for a very stressful arrival and departure for both sets of grandparents!

Christmas celebrations

We finished the year at Neema with our staff Christmas party. A great chance for us to reflect on the year, to dance together and share a meal. Santa also made his customary appearance to hand out sweets and presents to the children, many of whom are sponsored to go to school, thanks to the work of People Against Poverty, UK.

This year was particularly poignant as we remembered those we have lost – three Neema staff members and two colleagues from the diocese. We also wished farewell to Angelina, Thomasi, Maria and Mariam Saidi who all retired last month and Joel Haule who has secured a job with the government since getting his degree. Thomasi's leaving present was his own house built on land that he will be farming in his retirement.

As well as remembering those we've lost, we were able to celebrate God's faithfulness to the project throughout this last year. If it weren't for his provision, we wouldn't have been able to set up the new web shop and physical shop in Dar, upon which our hundred or so artisans and cafe staff have become so dependent for their income – Iringa visitors are still very sparse.

This new venture has not only provided employment, but also created a small surplus from which we have been able to fund other projects. For example, last month, 42 homes of people with disabilities were wired so that they could be connected to the Tanzanian national grid (TANESCO). Julius Lukelo (whose home is sometimes hard to reach in the rains) has had a simple bridge constructed across the seasonal stream in front of his house. Jema Mdegella (Neema's inspiring accountant) was able to finish her simple self-built home with windows, doors and plumbing, and three staff members have had their prostheses renewed.

Wedding bells

This January, we were delighted to celebrate the marriage of Ally (our cafe manager) to Gladness at Kristo Mfalme (Christ the King) Anglican Cathedral in Iringa. It was a very special service as they were both confirmed and married on the same day. This

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Name: Ben and Katy Ray

Location: Iringa, Tanzania

Our call: To show God's love for the most marginalised in Tanzania by providing training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Our role: Directors of the Neema Crafts Centre for people with disabilities.



Kata keki tule! Cut the cake, let's eat!

meant Bishop Joseph was in attendance along with a very joyful choir who sang songs especially written for the occasion. The reception party was also extremely vibrant and included the Neema staff dancing a sofa down the aisle with Athuman (our shopkeeper) lying/dancing on it!

Family news

The five of us including Julia (2), Alessia (6) and Zachary (8) are all really well. Alessia and Zachary continue to enjoy their life in Iringa, Zaki still loves maths and playing endless board games – he's worryingly good at Scrabble! Alessia has a lovely group of friends at school and has started to enjoy reading. Julia charms everyone she meets, but can be a typical troublesome two-year-old at home! She attends a little pre-school with her best friend John four days a week.

Our final-issue work permits come to an end in March 2022, and we need to decide how to gain permission to continue our work here. The two options are: renew our current visa under the Anglican Church of Tanzania (maximum stay has now been extended to a further three years) or apply under a new organisation.

We currently anticipate going for the latter option as this will assist us in our potential move to Arusha in August/September, however things may change as we look for new managers for the Neema Crafts Centre in Iringa.

We will have worked at Neema Crafts in Iringa for almost 11 years this May, and we are ready to widen the scope of our work to impact the lives of more persons with disabilities (PWDs) across the country. We are looking to move to Arusha as this is a more strategic place to base our operations. We intend to keep working closely with Neema Crafts, but only as one of a number of similar enterprises that we assist. We have already recruited a new Tanzanian operations manager who will cover much of Katy's role at the centre, but we are still looking for a general manager.

Our bishop is keen to have a new volunteer in this role. For this reason, we are asking our supporters to assist us in finding a suitable couple or single volunteer to help oversee the project. If there's anyone you know who may be interested, please encourage them to apply. We have begun advertising the role/s on Christian recruitment websites such as oscar.org.uk and offering free accommodation and a first year's stipend (which will come from our UK charity).

Please do pray for us as we navigate these changes. It is really hard to think of leaving Neema Crafts and Iringa as we have invested so much of ourselves here and we love the people and the place so much.

Back in the UK

We are very excited to be finally able to visit the UK and our wonderful link churches, and are looking for somewhere to stay from mid-May until mid-August. If any churches or individuals know of a suitable place the five of us can rent/stay during this time, please do let us know: benandkaty@hotmail.co.uk

With every blessing for the year to come,

Katy and Ben X



Photos from top to bottom: Farewell Mariam Saidi; Jema outside her simple new home; at Ally and Gladness's wedding reception; Katy and Diana sorting a new order

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You can give to Ben and Katy at:
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