

Gbarnga Mission News

A Quarterly Newsletter of the *Gbarnga Lutheran Mission Project, Inc.*

SPRING 2020



PEACE BE WITH YOU

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’” John 20:19

For months, many in our country and throughout the world have been living in fear of the coronavirus pandemic. Business closures, stay-at-home orders, and new terminology like “social distancing” have saturated the headlines. In the effort to stay safe, normal routines have been upended, our social fabric has been torn, and many decisions are being driven by anxiety, uncertainty, and the unprecedented. Two-thousand years ago the unprecedented also occurred when the Son of God was killed, sealed in a tomb, then rose from the dead on Easter morning. Yet the disciples – despite repeated predictions of this outcome by Jesus – were still afraid and huddled together “with doors locked for fear...” Much like our recent condition, they felt compelled to self-isolate. God knew their angst, their worry, their fear. Jesus responded with profound physical reassurance, standing side-by-side with them to share words they needed to hear:



“Peace be with you!”

Gbarnga Mission is motivated by an awareness that our Liberian brothers and sisters also need His peace. Loving teachers like Patrick and Garmai pray with our GLTC students before starting the school day. Bible verses and Christian songs taught by classroom helpers Annie and Amelia equip these children for days when fear and the unprecedented will inevitably arrive. Your financial gifts and support equip us to stand side-by-side with them doing this important work. As our partners in mission, you are saying “Peace be with you!” to children and families whose daily lives are regularly filled with unknowns: *Where will our next meal come from? Will my child survive this bout of malaria? Can we afford to buy medication or should we risk “country medicine”? Will the hand pump be working today or do we need to haul drinking water from the swamp?*

Your generous support means our students and staff continue to eat a school lunch each day; they drink clean water from our campus wells; and they learn “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard [their] hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7)

Thank you for your partnership with Gbarnga Mission and your continued financial support during these difficult times. Look inside to see how, even now, we continue serving our GLTC school children. I pray that you, your loved ones, and our families in Liberia are safe and healthy.

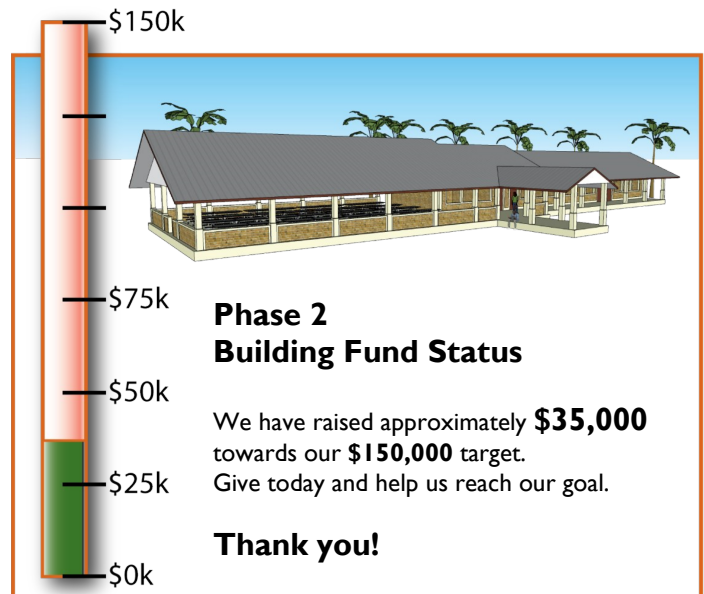
Peace be with you!


Jon Rossman
President & CEO

BUILDING FUND UPDATE

By 2021, we will reach the physical capacity of our current school building which now offers ABC, K1, K2, 1st Grade and 2nd Grade classes. To continue our goal of adding a grade each year, we need your help to begin phase 2 of our building efforts. This next step would integrate a cafeteria/multipurpose room with four more classrooms allowing us to continue expanding enrollment up to 8th grade.

Estimated cost for construction and furnishings is **\$150,000**. With God's blessing and the generosity of your financial support, our goal is to begin excavation and foundation work in October 2020. To date we have raised approximately **\$35,000**. Please consider sending a gift today. Thank you for your support! ❖



GRAINS OF HOPE | COVID-19 RESPONSE

As of this writing, there are 76 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Liberia and 7 virus-related deaths. On April 10th President George Weah declared a State of Emergency closing all schools and severely limiting travel. For Americans, a stay-at-home order equals high-speed internet, electricity, plumbing, and refrigerators;



abundant pantries; and vexing decisions like Netflix versus HBO. For Liberia it means limited access to cash through a crippled banking system, painful food shortages in local markets, and no capacity to stock up on staples like rice as prices rise sharply.

Gbarnga Mission is committed to serving our GLTC families during this

pandemic as its impact stifles education, decimates the economy, and furthers malnutrition. Recognizing many students rely on our school lunch as their only meal of the day, our Board unanimously decided to distribute our stores of rice normally served in each school lunch. Distribution began late-April and is being supplemented by nutritious eggs from our poultry farm.

During our February Liberia visit, we distributed bars of soap donated by **Clean The World Foundation**. When combined with a session on personal hygiene and proper hand washing, our students should be well equipped with soap and timely education about healthy habits. To address the absence of formal schooling, GLTC staff are also handing out reading and math books from our extensive school library so children can have learning opportunities. Also, to limit the economic impact of this crisis, all GLTC staff will continue receiving their wage during this hiatus.

In response to our decision, Principal Sumo emailed, “I hope you are all well and doing fine in Christ Jesus as we are in Liberia, most especially the GLTC family. I would love to extend many thanks and appreciation to you and all Board members, with all supporters for your decision to still support us to maintain lives in this kind of crisis affecting all of us, most especially with our children – the students of our noble institution GLTC. The decision to continue to pay all staffs and feed the students is very rewarding and grateful... This serves as serious evangelism for student enrollment for the next academic year to come and will lead parents who planned to support the school with their children most joy. I am very happy for such encouragement and helpful support for our community.”

Thanks to your support we're sharing God's love through much needed rice — and providing **grains of hope!** ❖

VISITING LIBERIA | REFLECTIONS OF A SCHOOL NURSE

By Kathy Rossman

As a school nurse, my first visit to Liberia was viewed through a public health lens. Human wellness is complex – involving physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects. Liberia's history of civil war and the recent Ebola crisis combined with a legacy of government corruption deeply affects thinking. While visiting villagers, there was a clear lack of confidence in local healthcare. Reports of “padded payrolls” and hospitals devoid of medications are common with patients being required to fill prescriptions in the community pharmacy and return for administering.

Financial difficulties influence health decisions. I learned of sick family members visiting a clinic, receiving a diagnosis, then having no money to buy the prescribed medication. Instead, many use “country medicine” to treat themselves with allegedly medicinal leaves or roots. Illiteracy limits understanding of discharge instructions and which prescriptions are vitamins versus critical antibiotics. There's an acceptance that illness is inevitable.

Diets dominated by rice, cassava, and greens get most calories from local palm oil with little protein from meat or beans — contributing to weak immune systems and

inadequate capacity for repairing injured tissue. It was clear that adults, particularly men, were fed before children. Though I saw many nursing women, it was unlikely they were consuming the additional calories needed for lactation. I wondered how this factored into Liberia's high infant mortality rate. Additionally, nearly one-third of Liberian children under five are stunted due to poor nutrition.

Minor “discomforts” are minimized until the problem is inescapable – becoming more difficult and costlier to treat. Preventative health is limited. Many do not correlate traditional practices, like defecation in nearby bushes, with health consequences such as diarrhea and gastrointestinal pain. I saw a community latrine recently constructed by the YMCA sitting unused because no one agreed who should clean it or haul water for “flushing”.

Injury potentials abound. Babies crawl on littered ground near open cooking fires. Unaccompanied 4- and 8-year old children wash clothes in muddy water deep enough to drown in. An 8-year old wearing flip

flops uses a machete to cut firewood. Black smoke from burning roadside trash filled with discarded plastic is inhaled. Thinking nuts from local cashew trees would be a good protein source, I learned from villagers that the fruit is palatable yet

the nut shell is caustic, causing skin burns and scarring.

I thought it unusual not seeing Liberians wearing eyeglasses. GLTC adult literacy class students expressed a need for reading glasses. Departing through Monrovia, I met a



Brussels Airlines representative who happened to be a Rotary Club member. After this brief encounter, connections were made and donations received that ultimately led to an eye clinic being held in Deansville. As a result, 140 community members were examined, 90 received free glasses, and 50 had medication administered for eye health.

Despite deficiencies in Liberia's health sector, poor nutrition, and daily hazards associated with living in poverty, everyone smiled and welcomed me to a place they were proud to call home. We have much to learn! ! ❖

MEET A GLTC STUDENT: ROSELINE SUMO

Roseline is 6 years old and attends the KI kindergarten class at GLTC. She has two brothers (Winston, age 8 who also attends GLTC and Rickie, age 13) and two sisters (Cecelia, age 11 and Remember, age 3). Her mother, Abigail, is a good cook and has a small garden. Her father, David, works at a rubber farm where he cares for the rubber trees. She sleeps with all four of her brothers and sisters, sharing a single mattress under a mosquito net.

She walks to school with her brother, Winston, and other friends from Deanville who also attend GLTC. She enjoys playing a game called “touch”. To play this game, a large square divided into a set of four squares about 3-4 feet each are scratched into the dirt ground. Two players stand at one end, each on the outside line of one square. Two defenders are placed at key points along the center line and a third defender stands on the perpendicular line opposite the two players. The object of the game is for the two players, working as a team, to cross the field of four squares and reach the opposite side without being touched by any of the three defenders.



When she grows up, she wants to work in agriculture. At the moment, her favorite meal is beans to-boggi (pronounced “tow-bah-GEE”) over rice. ❖



A DAY IN THE LIFE

By Marsha Wilcox
Board Member

Jon and I got up while it was still dark, before the sun had begun to turn the mist grey with the early dawn. As we left, Mission Dog greeted us with appropriate cautionary barking. The guards greeted us as we passed and dawn was unmistakably unfolding. We left the campus by the path the students take from GLTC to Deanville. Jon had arranged for me to make a “Day in the Life” video of one of our students, Comfort Jonah. We were on our way to meet her as she started her day.

Ma Sarah (Ma is an honorific for a woman – think “Mother”), Comfort and Norah’s mother, came and went as she prepared for her day. In addition to managing the household, Sarah’s day entailed fishing and gardening, both to feed her family and for income. She’s got quite a sense of humor. In the middle of the morning, Sarah and a couple of accomplices sauntered into the video with some very comical drama. You can sense her indefatigable attitude in the picture I captured of her carrying bricks to rebuild the preaching point in the village. I asked if I could take her picture and she gave me a sassy look – then posed. Everyone in the village who was tall enough helped carry mud bricks from the block drying area on one side of the village across the road (and up a little hill), to the worksite.

It was a privilege for me to spend time in the village with some of the families of our students as we conducted surveys. I look forward to spending more time working both from here, and perhaps, on another trip to Liberia. ❖



The sun came up as we made our way through the bush, roosters greeting the day as we went. We arrived in the center of Deanville and Comfort’s house. From a radio in a nearby window Radio Gbarnga filled the air. Comfort began her chores sweeping clutter from the dirt around their home. When she was done, she and her younger sister Norah, went down to pump buckets of water for the day (5-8 gallons) – which they carried back up hill on their heads. Next, Comfort built a fire to cook the morning meal, collecting hot coals from a neighbor. Her skill and efficient use of firewood would make any American Girl Scout proud. She used the fire to make a pot of rice to which she added some spices and 2 small deftly cleaned fish. The household reminded me a little of the VW bug commercial – many people in a fairly modest dwelling. It is a large household with extended family ranging from toddlers to seniors. Adults were served first, then 3 or 4 kids shared the remainder in the cooking pot – no squabbling, no fighting, as they shared a small meal to begin their day.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

We are committed to using your gifts wisely. 96% of support goes directly to program costs that impact lives in Liberia. The majority of administrative costs are due to postage and shipping. Help us lower costs even more. Send us an email at: treasurer@gbarngamission.org and opt into paperless communications.

3% administration
1% fundraising

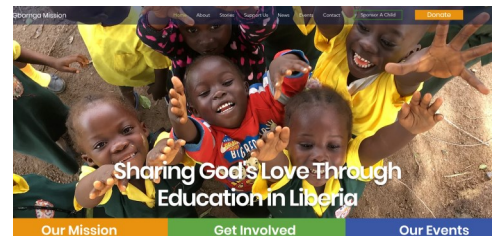


PRAYERS & THANKSGIVING

- For all the Sponsors who maintain regular love and support for their students.
- For the health of Principal Sumo, the entire GLTC staff, and our Deanville families during this pandemic.
- For the privilege of Marsha and Kathy being able to personally meet and serve our students and their families in Liberia.
- With thanks for the pause to focus on the sovereignty of our Lord who is in Control of all things.
- For our world, our country, and our community. For leaders to work together finding solutions locally and abroad. For a vaccine in the immediate crisis and long-term partnerships to care for each other in the future.

UPDATED WEBSITE & DIGITAL PRESENCE

We've launched our updated www.gbarngamission.org website. You can also follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/gbarngamission. Invite others to "like" our page. We're using these channels more frequently to keep our community of supporters informed and share new stories.



Gbarnga Lutheran Mission Project, Inc. is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation (Federal ID # 46-5637972). Gbarnga Mission is constructing and staffing a Christian school in rural Liberia to provide primary, secondary and vocational education for impoverished children.

WWW.GBARNGAMMISSION.ORG



Gbarnga Lutheran Mission Project, Inc.
445 Elmwood Avenue
Providence RI 02907

Sharing God's love through education in Liberia

Help build more classrooms and a cafeteria. Give Now!

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Please accept this gift in the amount of:

___ \$100 ___ \$250 ___ \$500 Other \$ _____

for the **Phase 2 Building Fund** so education will continue for students through 8th grade. This gift is tax-deductible as allowed by law.

Give online at www.gbarngamission.org and click "Donate".



Mail to:

Gbarnga Lutheran Mission Project, Inc.
445 Elmwood Avenue
Providence, RI 02907