

September, 2008

Greetings in the name of our gracious and loving God! Praise the Lord!

I hope this finds you all well and that you enjoyed the summertime. I was in the US for vacation and my daughter's wedding on September 6. Needless, to say, it was good to be home and be with my family.

The transition to the US from Liberia was easier than when I was in 'Central Asia', but it was still difficult. There is so much in the US, and here people are just trying to get their basic needs filled, especially food. The price of rice, their staple, as gone up from \$27 per 100 bag to \$38 per bag. Depending on the size of the family, and most of them are large with many relatives living together, a bag may not last a whole month. Most people have minimum wage jobs that pay \$50-60/month so after buying rice this doesn't leave much for other things, let alone emergencies. I don't mean to put a 'guilt trip' on people, but it is a reality and we should continuously be thankful for all that God has blessed us with and translate that into sharing to those who have need whether in Liberia or down the street. [I know I'm preaching to the choir!]

*Just what is it that I do in Liberia?*

You may not really know what I do in Liberia so I thought I would take the opportunity to explain my job(s). I see my work in three categories:

- I am officially assigned to the United Methodist University, Winifred J. Harley College of Health Sciences/School of Nursing. I teach and have administrative duties.
- I also collaborate with the Ganta United Methodist Hospital administrator and with the Ganta United Methodist Mission Station on issues that concern our institutions collectively.
- The third job is running the unofficial guest house. There is a large guest house on the mission station that accommodates 20 people. This is used for large groups such as VIM work teams. However, when a few people come for special projects, many times they stay with me. These could be people from GBGM, or the smaller medical teams. I consider this an important part of my work because people sometimes need to talk through their experience and their emotional reactions to it, especially if it is the first time they are in Liberia or a developing world

*Now on to the news of the Nursing School!*

The school year ended and 20 students graduated. Twenty-four students started the school year but for various reasons, four didn't finish. Graduation was a nice day and I enjoyed meeting parents of the students and seeing them - students and relatives - relieved that it is all over! Many of them will work in the Ganta United Methodist Hospital and others will work in various other facilities in Liberia. Now all they have to do is pass the Liberian Nursing and Midwifery Board examination that is given in November to be fully licensed

registered nurses.

Besides my teaching and administrative responsibilities, I put the finishing touches on the new RN to BSN course program and wrote the accompanying curriculum that was accepted at the United Methodist faculty senate meeting August 2<sup>nd</sup>. Previously, we only offered an Associate degree so if a student wanted the Bachelors Degree, they had to transfer to another college. There the costs are higher than UMU (United Methodist University) and they might be made to repeat many courses. We are happy to be able to offer this program starting September 2008.

The other large project completed is the admissions process for entrance into the Nursing School. During the war, when the school was in Monrovia, they didn't need one because there were many hospitals that could accommodate 130 nursing students. However, when the school moved back to Ganta where we can have only 80 students, this became a necessity. The entrance process has two parts - an aptitude test and an interview.

The aptitude test consisted of three parts - math, English and competencies in the prerequisite courses. We had the passing grade set at 70%. Sixty-eight people sat for the test and only 8 passed 2 of the 3 parts! We had to lower the standards to 40% was passing. Then 26 people 'passed' all three parts. Also, we decided to take people who passed 2 of the 3 parts to make a total of 39 students for the incoming class. We realize that we will have to put in extra effort in some areas as remedial work.

It was sad to see these results and they reflect the problems in the educational system in Liberia. One problem is the lack of good education during the 16 years of war. School schedules were disrupted, teachers and students fled to neighboring countries as refugees and there is a general lack of qualified teachers. Cheating and bribing are common and accepted practices to make passing grades. The government and private schools are trying to correct these problems now but it won't make up for the generation that has lost so much.

However, we are committed to the nursing profession in Liberia. Students know that cheating is not tolerated. Unfortunately, the reason one of those four people didn't graduate was because he was caught cheating on a test 3 weeks before commencement! (He plans to come back and repeat the course.) Students have to study for their grades. I am blessed to work with instructors who hold high standards and don't 'water down' their material or their tests. The result of this shows in our 87% pass rate on the national examination that was given in November.

### *United Methodist Connections*

While home, I attended a 5 day United Methodist Missions Conference in Stony Point, New York. There was a broad representation of the General Board of Global Ministries Mission Personnel Program Area including Church and Community Workers, Deaconesses, a Home

Missioner, Home Missionaries, Young Adult US-2s, Regional Missionaries, Missionaries of the National Plan for Hispanic and Latino Ministries, as well as "Standard Support" GBGM Missionaries gathering together. Did you know there were so many different types of missionaries supported by GBGM? Praise God for all the ways it is possible to serve him through the United Methodist Church!

It was uplifting to all be together worshiping, hearing each other's stories, sharing the joys and sorrows of the work. We had a memorial service for past missionaries who have died this year. (The total years of service for the 41 was 1000 years!) Also recognized throughout the whole conference were eight missionaries who retired this year. This was very inspiring. One couple had been missionaries in Japan for 41 years! The conference culminated with a banquet where Bishop Felton May was the guest speaker. It was good to see him again. He was just back from Liberia where he spoke at the commencement exercise for United Methodist University...small world!

Well, all for now. I am thankful every day for your support and prayers. I look around my room and see evidence of you in the itineration notebook that reminds me of the visits we had the fall of 2006 and the cards you sent. These things actually help me focus on the work - especially after just coming back from the US with all the excitement of being with family, friends and a wedding. Now I have to be serious and work! And here you are with me, helping me dive into the new semester with class registration, new students to meet, and courses starting.

As usual, before I end this newsletter, there are some specific prayer requests:

- for doctors to come to work in the Ganta United Methodist Hospital for short term, long term, any term!

- for the new semester and for the two new instructors as they begin teaching for the first time.

- for money to fuel the generator. The new generator which UMCOR gave to the mission station after the old one 'blew' an engine block uses 7 gallons an hour at \$5.30/gal. We can only run it 4 hours a day.

- and especially for the day when "...no more shall be heard the sound of weeping and the cry of distress." (Isa 65:19)

Blessings to you all, In Service to Our Living God,  
Sue Porter