

April 10, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!

Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into His presence with singing! Psalm 100:1

Music, singing and dancing are such an important part of life here in Togo. Stories are told, lessons are taught, and emotions are expressed through song and dance. When fifteen youth from the village were brought to Dapaong and given the opportunity to learn Lutheran hymns, a joyful noise was made, with glad singing! As a part of the LeadaChild project, we organized a short 'seminar' for selected students of CEG Lokpano. These students, who were also active members of the Lutheran churches in their villages, had the opportunity to become acquainted with the French Lutheran hymnal and experience life 'out of the village'. Accompanied by the two ordained pastors and vicar who guide them in the village, the students traveled in a 15 seat van from Lokpano to Dalwak, a distance of perhaps 25 miles. . .farther than most had ever traveled from home. Dalwak is a Catholic Retreat Center not far from Dapaong where groups are able to find dormitory type housing, be served meals, and utilize classrooms and a beautiful chapel. Azouma, director of the LeadaChild project, now serves as Administrator of the CLET (our Lutheran seminary) . He invited seven of the pastoral students, all gifted in music, to share several of the hymns that are used throughout the church year with the Lokpano youth. The village kids had been selected as they are leaders of their respective church chorales, however Moba worship songs are in the Moba style, with drums, hand clapping, and various hand-made rhythm instruments. Being introduced to our Lutheran heritage of music, European style, was a challenging experience. But joyful noise was made as the songs were taught and practiced in the large chapel and in the apotams scattered over the Center grounds. The CLET students also worked through some of the Lutheran liturgy, using the chants and prayers found in the hymnal. The seminar not only offered the Lokpano students a wonderful learning opportunity but provided a practical experience to the CLET students in teaching and sharing God's Word.

The seminar provided much more than instruction in Lutheran hymns and liturgy to the Lokpano students. This short trip provided a broader world view to all, as none have ever ventured far from the village. Dalwak, about 5 miles from Dapaong, is a large retreat center, overlooking the large water reservoir that provides Dapaong with water. The center itself is very calm, far from the highway, and filled with trees, flowering plants, and birds. The dormitories are provided with electric lights and running water in the bathrooms – which include flush toilets and showers! These were totally new experiences for the kids. Instruction in using the shower (turning water on and off) and flushing the toilet after use was all a part of the learning experience. Of course, the flushing mechanisms did not always work, so dealing with a plugged toilet was necessarily included. Meals served 'family style' at tables in the large dining room provided more experiences. How to prepare instant coffee or use tea bags with water provided in large thermoses at breakfast and eating bread with butter and jam. What is butter? Jam? Salad of lettuce, cucumbers, shredded carrots, tomatoes and beets. Are we going to eat these leaves? Just sitting close to the table, using a fork, knife and spoon was a challenge for some. I had to remind myself to be patient with the kids, but never having had the opportunity to learn, they were not at fault. I was thankful that we were able to provide this experience for them and I know that they had much to share with their friends at home. Before the group returned to Lokpano Saturday afternoon, we took them to the Dapaong market. Saturdays are market days, so the place was bustling. Though the kids experience village markets, Dapaong is much larger, and the market offers so much more. Trying to keep track of the kids, who all wanted to see everything, was like keeping track of toddlers in the mall! Thankfully I had my cell phone and could contact Azouma when our groups were separated. The two days were filled with joy and gladness, each day learning more about God's world and His love expressed in so many various ways!

Collège Sainte Trinité, the junior high school created by the Lutheran Church of Togo through a grant from LCMS OIM, has had a successful first year. Though the school has only one class level, and fifteen students, the teachers have worked faithfully, and report that all of the students achieved passing marks on their end of second trimester exams. The final weeks of the third trimester remain before the school year will be completed. Though only a short time remains, I am very excited that President Lambon (national church president) and the teachers of the school have invited me to intervene for one hour periods, two days a week. I will be providing extra English language practice on Tuesdays, and some religious instruction on Thursdays. Formal English instruction begins

the first year of junior high, so the kids have just begun their English studies. I hope to help them overcome the fear of speaking the language and reinforce some basic grammar and vocabulary. Religious instruction has not yet been offered at all during the year, so this is an excellent opportunity for me to share Christ's love with the students through some simple teachings from the Luther's Small Catechism and Bible stories. First of all, I will present the Easter story! No better opening story! I am so thankful to be able to serve the Lord in this way.

A more personal event, very joyful and gladsome for me, was the repairing and restoring of my home in Dapaong. 'Environmental conditions' are very harsh here, and construction methods and materials not always the best. So, though my house is built of cement brick, with a tin roof, it was sadly in need of repair. Termites had been working on the wooden rafters for several years, and the ceilings in the two smaller rooms had both been repaired after falling in on me. When termites started building their 'hills' down the walls of my large salon or living room, I realized that more drastic action had to be taken. In mid-March, (dry season), the carpenters were called and work began. The tin roof, or tole, was completely removed from the entire house, and then the wooden rafters. Of course, the rafters had been attached to the cement bricks, so a number of bricks were also destroyed. Working in bright sunshine, with temperatures over 100° F, these guys managed to completely change the roof of my house in two very tiring days. I'd removed many of the moveable items from the interior of the house and covered the larger things with large plastic tarps and old sheets. The third day, the workers ripped out the ceiling from the inside. . .at that point, one could say I had cathedral ceilings - with broken termite ridden wood, broken bricks, nails and dirt everywhere, inside and out. Now, enter the mason with buckets of wet cement to repair and fill. The mason, in true Togolese fashion, found a better paying job before finishing his work on my house, so packed up his buckets and trowels and left! Pause in the work, until another mason could be found to complete the job. Finally, the carpenters finished installing the new ceiling, the mason completed the cement work, inside and out, and the painter was called in. I was so eager to have clean walls, as the white wash type paint had gotten so dirty over the years of dust and rain. The biggest change I asked for was to have the ceilings painted white, rather than varnished. The walls of all three rooms are a nice moss green, and trim is brown. With a new roof and ceiling, newly painted interior and veranda, I feel like I have a new house! It is amazing how much influence one's living environment has on emotional outlook. To live in a cheerful environment makes it much easier to have a more positive outlook! I am thankful Lord, for your help in this change. It took time for me to make the decision to go forward with everything!!!!. . .but now that it is completed, it brings me happiness, and it is easier to serve with gladness.

During this Lenten season the Lutheran missionaries here in Dapaong have been gathering on Wednesday evenings for a simple meal and vespers service. Two families with four children each, a single pastor and myself compose our Lutheran family; we have been meeting for fellowship at the homes of the two families. I would love to welcome them into my home, but the eight active kids would not be at ease in my small compound. I am thankful for the time of sharing and worship time in English these gatherings provide.

Please pray for the ELT (Église Luthérienne du Togo) as her leaders struggle to maintain their focus on God's mission of sharing His love through His word and sacraments. Poverty and human desires provide opportunities for Satan to create havoc. Please pray also for the CLET (Centre Luthérien d'Études Théologiques) where power struggles and financial transparency are problems. Pray that the Lord encourage and strengthen the leaders of both institutions in their decisions and relationships allowing them to share the Gospel of Christ with those who do not yet know of His love and Salvation.

Thank you for your prayers encouragement and support for me, and for my service for the Lord here. I ask for prayers for continued good health as I get older. Also guidance and peace in my heart as I make decisions about retirement and life in the future.

May the Lord bless you all, as you serve Him in your lives!

Valerie Stonebreaker  
Lutheran Missionary  
Dapaong, Togo

