

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done.
Genesis 2: 2-3.

Dear Friends in Christ,

After all of the work of creating the universe, the words of Moses in Genesis tell us that God rested. My study Bible explains that He rested, not because He was weary, but because 'nothing formless or empty remained. He creative work was completed, and it was perfect. It needed no revisions nor repairs. He rested to consummate it. The Sabbath Day rest.

God's creation was perfect - until Satan and sin brought their curse. And God gave us His promise of a Savior. The promised Savior came to us in Christ Jesus. The work of sharing this Good News and God's love is not yet finished. And with the curse of sin still very present in the world, there is much to do.

I have been blessed to be used by the Lord in this task for many years and in many ways. I arrived in Lomé on December 29th, 1997 and in Dapaong on January 1st, 1998 to begin a life of service to the Lord and His mission. There have been joys and sorrows, challenges beyond belief. Friendships and relationships creating a caring family. I have taught missionary kids, Togolese high school students, seminarians from all of French West Africa; traveled in vans with the youth choir to sing in village churches; helped coordinate the Moba Literacy project, driving to far off sites while trying to learn the language myself; searched for funds for church projects and pastors; coordinated the CCCS/LeadaChild project in support of the Lokpano junior high school as well as supporting and guiding many of the village students who have continued their education, even on to university. It has been a joy for me to help former missionaries return to Togo with special projects, coordinating their visits with the local church. Two Mercy Medical Teams have served with the Lutheran church here, bringing health care and God's word to the villagers. Former missionaries, now Concordia University Professors, have returned with teams of university students to experience life and learn from the Togolese people. It is impossible for me to remember all of the opportunities I have been given to share the love of Christ in reaching out to others. Yet, the greatest blessing I have received is the strengthening of my faith and my relationship with our Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I have been richly blessed.

The work of the Lord in Togo, as well as throughout all the world, is not finished. It will continue until Jesus returns. However, after serving for 20 years in Togo and nearing my 70th birthday, I feel it is time for me to retire from active mission service. I am tired in many ways – physically, mentally and emotionally. I hope and pray that the Lord telling me it is time to rest as I look forward to the Sabbath-rest with Him. This decision has not been easy, and I still hesitate, not yet feeling as if I've finished the task set before me. Yet there are a number of factors influencing my decision. The first is my age and health. As I grow older, health problems continue to present themselves and cannot be ignored. Secondly, the security situation in northern Togo is unstable. LCMS-OIM has informed us, the Lutheran mission team here in Dapaong, that we should depart by March 2020. The jihadist terrorist threat in Burkina Faso, the country just north of Togo, and about a 30 minute drive from Dapaong, has become very menacing. The other missionary families will probably be sent to Brazzaville, Republic of Congo. A new seminary is being established there, and their service will be beneficial. I have been asked to join the team, but I do not feel the call to continue to serve in Brazzaville. It would be too difficult at my age to adjust to another African culture and life in a big city. My third reason is most likely what is known as 'fatigue.' I am just tired. My 70th birthday will be in April, 2020, and I am hoping to retire at that time.

Now, with all of this said, I do not yet know if I will retire in Turlock, with my family and my family of God at Good Shepherd. . . or if I will return to Dapaong (after formally retiring) and live in my home in Dapaong with my Togolese family and friends. Again, health and security play major roles in this decision, and at this point there are no concrete answers. I just don't know the future and must place that all in God's hands. When I do return to Turlock next spring, I will have appointments with my doctors. If the problems can be dealt with and managed in ways that will allow me to return to Togo,

where health care is minimal. I will be thankful. The security situation is also unforeseeable. The jihadists seem to enjoy attacking Christians. I trust the Lord with my life, but I do not want to jeopardize those around me, nor create stressful situations for others. I must wait and see. All of this is difficult for me, as I would like to have definite plans laid out for my life. 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart' has been one of the verses from the Bible that I have held close to me these many years. Though I want to know. . . I cannot. I must trust.

As for the future of Good Shepherd's Togo Lutheran Mission, that too is still undecided. God's mission and His work in Togo is far from finished, and if the LCMS-OIM missionaries must all depart, even more gaps will be created. I have talked with Pastor Youngdale concerning the future many times, but with so many possibilities and undetermined factors, we are uncertain of a final decision. We continue to consider possibilities and pray for guidance. A final decision concerning the future of the Togo Lutheran Mission will be communicated to you no later than June, 2020.

I haven't sent a newsletter for some time, and I apologize. A bit of an update: One of my fellow missionaries, Rev. Jacob Gaugert, is responsible for Theological Education in West Africa. He has had a project with LCMS-OIM to bring containers of theological books to the various seminaries with which he is working. Last year, books arrived for the CLET here in Dapaong, and after spending some months in boxes at his house, they were finally brought to the CLET library and put on the shelves. But with no cataloguing or classifying, no one really knew what had arrived. Since late April, I have spent as many hours as possible in the CLET library, cataloguing the books and attempting to find the Dewey classification number for each book. We have received books in French, English and German- some are new and I have removed them from cellophane wrap. Others are very old, from the mid to late 1800's. Some have the author's signature! Thus far I have catalogued over 2000 books, and still have perhaps an additional 1000 to list. I have enjoyed my work as librarian and am learning a great deal as I read a little in many of the books and bring home those that interest me. I am very thankful for this opportunity to serve and to learn.

I continue to work with many of the students we have helped through CCCS/LeadaChild. This year three of the students passed the Baccaalaureat exam, completing their high school education. We are now searching the various possibilities to continue their education or a formation. It is very difficult in Togo for young people to find employment, and all possibilities are considered. These young people have such a desire to achieve and to overcome the difficulties and poverty that confront them! I am also working with Pastor Remi in searching various ways to continue the Moba Literacy Project. There is the desire to learn, but so many traditional and financial barriers to overcome. We are looking for sources of funding to continue the work. The college (junior high school) which the Lutheran Church of Togo opened last fall had a successful school year. Though there was only one class level, all of the students succeeded. This coming school year, it is hoped that there will be three class levels. The entire church membership is now committed to supporting the school. I pray for the success of the school, and that it will be a means of reaching out to others with the Gospel.

Thank you so much for the prayers, encouragement, and support for the many years I have been in Togo. My Good Shepherd family – all of you – have been an important part of my life and service in Togo. Though there is a great distance between us, we are united in Christ. The Lord has worked through your efforts also to His glory here in Togo.

As I consider the future, and work through retirement, I ask for your prayers. Prayers also for the future of the GSLC Togo Lutheran Mission and for the Lutheran Church in Togo.

Your servant in Christ,
Valerie Stonebreaker
LCMS-OIM missionary – Dapaong, Togo

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