

March 13, 2016

Dear Friends and Family in Christ,

"What then is this that is written:

'The stone that the builders rejected has become the capstone'?

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces,
and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

Luke 20:20

These verses from Luke were read, in the Mual language, this morning during the service at Sankpong. I'd read the text earlier at home in English, in French, and finally in Mual to prepare my thoughts for church. These verses have been a part of my life forever it seems. My name is Stonebreaker. But to think of breaking 'that stone' is not possible for me. As a little girl, I often fell down, and have many scars on my knees from the stones over which I stumbled. For those stones that have fallen on me. . .yes, there are emotional scars, but I am not crushed. I am strengthened through faith in Christ, the Cornerstone.

In addition to the Capstone and the Cornerstone is also the 'First Stone'. On Saturday, February 13, I was present for the laying of the 'First Stone' for the chapel in PanaBagou. This group of worshippers is lead by Vicar Hyacinthe and his wife Lene. When Hyacinthe and Lene were students at the CLET I often worshipped with this young congregation, planted by a former CLET student. The worship services have been held for several years in various school buildings in the village until a member of the church donated a portion of his land for the building. The Lord has blessed this group with a site, and now members contribute time and labor for the construction of a stone foundation and mud bricks for the walls. Vicar Hyacinthe and Lene are very dedicated workers for the Lord, and with His guidance and blessing, a new church building will soon be ready to receive the family of Christ within its walls.

In February, the funds for our project with CCCS/LeadaChild and CEG Lokpano were sent. These funds have previously been sent soon after the first of the year, so we were feeling a bit hesitant, and contemplated just how we would be able to aid the school and students so late in the school year. When the funds arrived, Azouma, the director of the project here in Togo, and I quickly made decisions, and I visited the CEG in Lokpano. I was pleased to meet the new school director, talk with many of the volunteer teachers, and visit all of the classrooms. I am hoping to visit again soon, with 'scholarship funds' for a number of students, financial support to aid in paying salaries for the volunteer teachers, cell phones for the two pastors who teach our religious education classes, and some sports uniforms. The trip is only about 35 miles, but the road is not good. It took me nearly an hour and a half each way to make the trip in February. Once the rains begin in earnest, I am not sure that I even want to try.

I continue to work on my language learning. Pastor Djatoite tells me I am trying to go to fast, but I don't agree. He has only worked with women who must begin by learning the letters and the sounds before learning to read. It's true, they have the advantage of learning to read and write the language that they speak and understand. But this morning I was easily able to follow the reading of the Gospel of St. Luke in my mual New Testament, but I didn't understand many of the words. And the grammar. . .or the lack of grammar, is baffling! I was amazed when Lari, and pastors Lamboni, Remi, Djatoite sat around my table, correcting and editing the first document for our project - the ABCedaire, or alphabet book. Just watching them discuss how to pronounce and then write the words to match the sounds and illustrations was again baffling. Much discussion was often needed before acceptance. For those of us who have always had books and printed material available to us, it is difficult to grasp. When I ask about

rules or what is the correct way, the response is ?? we don't know yet. I am thankful, however, the literacy program is very active at this time. We have distributed 300 copies of the ABCédaire to the different centers, along with chalk for the teachers. Each student provides her own notebook, pen and ardoise (slate) and chalk. I attend the literacy class at Nano, twice a week, but hopefully will visit most of the other centers with one of the other literacy leaders. Several of the women have advanced enough to be able to read one of the texts from the Mual New Testament during the Sunday morning church service! It is such a blessing to see these ladies working together, encouraging and correcting each other. . .and yes, teasing and making fun of mistakes while trying to learn. And always trying to decide, with their teachers, what is the correct way to write down the sounds and words that are so familiar to them. The effects of Tower of Babel still create stumbling stones for humanity!

I am very happy to be able to share that, at last, a number of Lutheran congregations are now able to share Jesus's love specifically to their younger members. Those pastors who received Sunday School teaching posters last month at the pastors' meeting, have asked for volunteers from their congregations to be responsible for teaching the children. The teachers and children have arranged their meeting times and places, as church buildings here are just one room with wooden benches. No classrooms, no conference room. In Sankpong, the members got together and constructed an apotam next to the church. This structure of wooden posts and palm branches provides a little shade for the children. The little ones were so excited to have their own special lesson with pictures, simply presented. And lots more time for singing and dancing. The children rejoin us inside for the offerings and prayers. The only problem is the rain! Last Sunday the rain poured down all through the service, and the kids couldn't go out. The noise of rain on the tin roof made it nearly impossible for Pastor Remi to preach. . . he paused several times to ask if every one could hear and understand. I am hoping that sometime soon it will be possible to organize a "Sunday School Teachers' Meeting". There are so many ways to share the Gospel with children to make it real and a part of their lives. . . we need to share with our volunteers, who so willingly accepted the responsibility, how to know Jesus and His love for them. I would like to thank all of the Stitches and Quilts ladies for the purchase of the CPH teaching posters, making this beginning possible. Seeing the posters and having them available for their use urged the pastors to take this important step for the teaching of their children. Merci beaucoup. Niipuok boncian!!

A special note to the LWML ladies who will be attending the Convention in Visalia in April. When I was in California last summer and was able to attend the LWML retreat, I met a very special lady who has kept in contact with me, and has been busily working for the ladies here in northern Togo. Before I returned to Togo, Shirley Dawson asked me to work with the moba ladies in a revenue generating project to aid them. I'd worked with the moba ladies in making macramé sacks to sell here in Dapaong, so Shirley gave me a small sum of money and asked me to have some sacks made for the Spring LWML Convention. I was not at all sure how I would get the sacks back to California . . . but Lene, Angel, Aicha, Marie, and Adjuoa made 18 sacks. These sacks will be displayed and for sale at the Convention as Shirley works to promote efforts to aid the Moba Lutheran Women. Please take time to visit her display!

Thank you all so much for your encouragement and support in prayers and financially. I am so grateful for your continued presence with me in the Lord's mission in Togo.

May the Joy of knowing Christ, our Risen Lord and Savior, be with you every day!

Valerie Stonebreaker
Dapaong, Togo

