

September 23, 2017

Dear Friends in Christ,

I give thanks to the Lord, Our God, for the two months I spent with all of you at Good Shepherd. It amazes me now, after all of these years, when I return to Turlock, I often feel like I've only been gone a short while, and I am back again with my friends and family. Yes, we are getting older, but friendships remain ageless, and new friends are made. My two 'homes' are so very different, but God's love reaches over all. It is such a blessing to be able to greet friends with a hug and a smile, and feel at home.

My return to Togo was undertaken without a problem! I was able to take my three suitcases (one was a checked carry-on) with Air France all the way to Lomé with no extra charge. At the Lomé airport, going through customs, the person at the 'x-ray' screen indicated to me that my bag full of solar lights needed to be opened for the customs official to inspect. He looked at me, looked at my bag, and asked me what was inside. I replied simply, "solar lights for the villagers. They are a gift for the Togolese villagers from the women of my church in California." He replied, "you can go, you don't need to open it." The woman behind the screen was a bit troubled, but the man in the uniform just waved me on! All I could think was "Thank you Lord!" I was prepared to pay for extra baggage and a lot at customs, and I had gotten through with no charges. This was just a God thing. When I told the other missionaries, they just looked at me in wonderment. Togo's custom laws are very stiff, but that evening, the official was so kind.

I have had two important 'personal events' since arriving back in Dapaong. The first, I was able to pass the Togolese driving exam, and I am now a licensed driver in Togo. A big sigh of relief for me, as my California driving license had expired, and I did not renew it. Too many hassles with the DMV with so little time in California. The exam was being given in Dapaong when I returned, but I managed to speak to the director of an 'auto école' (driving school) and negotiate. Here in Togo, all driving permits must be done through an auto école, which normally requires driving lessons. As I knew how to drive, I only needed to learn the Togolese driving 'code', or rules of the road. Mr. Abel gave me a copy of this code, 936 multiple choice questions on my flash drive, and instructed me to be in Kara (a city about 3 hours south of Dapaong) the following Monday, for the exam. I did manage to read through all of the questions once, and practice driving with the school's chauffeur for about 20 minutes, before taking both the written and behind the wheel exams. It did cost a bit, as everything (even driving permits) is 'arranged' here in Togo. And it was necessary for me to stay in Kara nearly a week, as the written test and driving test were several days apart. But I am thankful that I don't need to worry about this for another five years. As I had not had much time to study, and the behind the wheel test was in a car provided by the examiners, I just hoped and prayed that all would go well. God is good!

The second event is the purchase of a refrigerator! Since returning to Dapaong in 2011, I have not had a refrigerator. Poor and irregular electricity to my house . . . and other more important needs of my Togolese family and students . . . I kept letting this purchase go. Finally, after returning from my California home visit this year, I decided a refrigerator was a priority for me. A solution for the electricity was found, and a very nice refrigerator was available at Tchakala, here in Dapaong. It was a bit difficult for me to spend the money, but I am so thankful to have cold

things to drink and to be able to keep vegetables for more than a day or two. I can have salad and yogurt here at home. I am so thankful for this blessing!

Now, I have been busy as a missionary also. Earlier this year, Stephanie Schulte, our Regional Health Director, contacted me about bringing a Mercy Medical Team (MMT) here to Togo. Steph is presently located in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; I was able to work with President Lambon and Kougbaengbene, a medical assistant, to get things started here. Before I left for California, Steph made a visit to Dapaong, and we worked with the local health officials, President Lambon, and Kougbaengbene, to get things on the way. Much work was done during the months I was not here, however much remained to be done in August, as the MMT was to arrive early in September. Unfortunately, the Togolese Ministry of Health, down in Lomé, had not yet given the needed permission for the team to work early in September. Telephone calls and messages were flying wildly, as the team arrived. . with no word yet from the government. Thankfully, the American team was flexible and very willing to adapt and do whatever possible to serve the Togolese people and the Lutheran Church of Togo. We finally were able to hold three days of 'clinic' in the village of Datoudjena, where more than 800 Togolese villagers were seen and treated as necessary. Free medication was given to those who needed it. And most importantly of all, a Lutheran pastor prayed with every individual who was seen. God provided His guidance and patience as we worked through the difficulties we met each day. We are very thankful! He is the Great Doctor of all. If you would like to participate in an MMT in the future, please let me know! I would love to welcome you to Togo!

September is also the month when students prepare for and return to school. I have been working with Azouma and the students previously aided through our CCCS/LeadaChild project, as well as preparing for new students coming in from the village to attend high school here in Dapaong. This school year, there will be two high school students, two junior high school students, a motorcycle mechanic apprentice and a family of six living here in my compound. Two other students will be living nearby. It will be a busy household. We were able to have three cement blackboards made on the walls of the compound, giving the students plenty of space to study. Much preparation is needed for new students to enroll in the schools here in town; I have been to school offices for enrollment, to the town hall to legalize birth certificates, and have purchased many notebooks, pens, pencils, and erasers for the students. Tutors have been arranged for some of the more difficult courses, as classrooms often have over 100 students, allowing for little questioning or explanation. School was scheduled to begin September 25th, however the date has been pushed back to October 2nd, and this might again change. Once again, Togo is struggling with political unrest, with marches and demonstrations throughout the country every week. Already several people have lost their lives, and homes, buildings and vehicles burned or destroyed. Though I detest violence, I pray that change will come to this country. God tells us in the Bible that we must respect those in authority, however when that authority no longer serves the people or honors God, change must come. I pray for the Lord's guidance and intervention to bring peace, stability and the Holy Spirit's presence to Togo. I am always so thankful for your prayers and encouragement and support as we serve the Lord together, working in His Mission wherever we are placed!

In Christ's Peace!

Valerie Stonebreaker in Dapaong, Togo