

MARCH 24, 2009

Warm greetings to you from Herbert and Mary Zigbuo in Liberia! We are thankful for your continuous participation with us through support of our ministry. Thank you for your prayers and gifts of funds and materials.

Our main ministry focus is provision of vocational education to youth and young adults through our United Methodist schools. Mary is also involved with coordinating and developing programs for persons with disabilities.

Though the government mandates primary school enrollment for all children, it is estimated that only 34% of Liberia's school age populace has access to educational facilities (2008 CIA WORLD FACT BOOK). According to 2007 statistics from Population Reference Bureau, Washington, DC, it is estimated that approximately 60% of Liberia's public is under the age of 20. This translates into 1,980,000 school age persons in Liberia...with an estimated 673,000 having access to educational facilities. UMC supported schools provide education for approximately 20,000 (30%) of the 673,000 persons having access to educational facilities in 15 counties.

The international organization, Teach a Man to Fish, indicates, "In many developing countries, traditional academic based education does not prepare people how to earn a living in a country where employment opportunities are very limited. Needed is a system of education that will teach technical skills alongside traditional academic modules - producing graduates able to go directly into entrepreneurship opportunities or paid work, or into further education". This is also true for Liberia.

Vocational courses are offered in selected UMC schools. Upon entering senior high level (grade 10), a student selects a vocational course (computer technology, building trades, drafting, agriculture, carpentry, business education, home economics, etc) to specialize in. The student does this course for three years (grades 10-12) to satisfy government's competency requirements.

We work closely with some of the senior high-level schools (UMC currently operates 99 schools, 14 of which are senior high level) seeking to help build the capacity of their existing vocational education programs. Our recent focus has been on the Tubman Gray School in Gbarnga, located in rural, central Liberia. Tubman Gray School has 861 students. Not only does the school offer trade courses for students enrolled in academic classes, the administration also created an extension program to provide trade classes for persons in the community who have limited or no formal education. With prioritization on accessibility, even mothers with young children who are still

breast-feeding are allowed to bring their children to school. Eighty-nine persons are enrolled.



In March 2009, a six-person work team from Western North Carolina Conference went to Tubman Gray School to assist with: setting up and teaching people how to use donated carpentry shop machines, constructing a three classroom building for vocational classes, medical screening for all students, and library reorganization and set up.

We are in need of assistance to provide vocational teacher training to all 58 of our trades courses teachers in July and August of this year. We are also in need of assistance to enable us adequately supply and equip (typewriters, computers, manual sewing machines, agricultural supplies, carpentry and building trade supplies, etc). the vocational classes.

It is a joy to see these young people obtain opportunities to enable them elevate their quality of life.

Mary coordinates CBM supported programs in Liberia. CBM is a Christian organization whose objective is to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities and to reduce the risk of disability from disease. CBM supports comprehensive eye care services for desperately poor persons through two eye hospitals: (Seventh Day Adventist Hospital and Ganta UMC Hospital). Mary also work very closely with the UMC School for the Deaf located in Monrovia.

We are thankful for the opportunity to work with Christ-centered systems to enable the restoration of sight and teaching of skills to reduce the risk or visual impairment and helping to provide educational opportunities for the hearing impaired. Thank you for your Christ-centered partnership in this.

We invite you to come and assist us as a short-term or long-term volunteer, or on a work team.

You may assist our work by sending funds through the General Board of Global Ministries' Advance Special project:
Swords to Plowshares, #14488A

Yours in Christ,
Herbert and Mary Zigbuo
**For more information or clarification,
email us at: umcliberia@yahoo.com**

