



PULL BACK THE CURTAIN

"The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Mark 15:38

Recently I was playing with my four-year-old grandson, Camden, as he hid himself behind a long window curtain. Wrapped in the thick cloth and convinced I could not see



him, Camden giggled intensely as I called his name in the feigned confusion of my search for him. Curtains are not only decorative; they're great for concealing and dividing, whether it's blocking outside light from bedrooms, giving stage performers privacy from audiences, or hiding playful children.

I often write of the wonderful ways God is using our mission to serve His people and share Jesus' love in Liberia.

However, with most mission work, there is a back story spattered with hardship and distress on the road to the joys and successes of ministry I wish to experience and share with you.

Given this backdrop, I'd like to "pull back the curtain" to reveal some of the failure, frustration, and pain we've experienced over the years. Not for sympathy-seeking, but as a means of honestly acknowledging the challenges we have faced, of joining together to carry another's burdens, and of seeking your prayers for wisdom and support.

FAILURE—Poultry Farm

One of Gbarnga Mission's long-term goals is to strengthen local self-sufficiency and sustainability, enabling the mission in Liberia to assume greater financial and administrative responsibility as it grows and matures.

One path is developing locally-run small business ventures, such as poultry farming, to generate income for school operations and outreach programs. We started our poultry farm with high hopes, meeting with experienced farmers, visiting market sellers and evaluating the local demand, exploring resources for chicks and feed, and ultimately developing a business plan. However, things don't always go as smoothly as hoped when working in the post-war, resource-limited environment of West Africa.

Early on we struggled to find reliable, consistent feed suppliers. They were often out of stock or late in delivering feed, so the chickens suffered. This became a heavy cost burden. Producing our own feed was prohibitive due to a lack of in-country sources for corn, protein, and other

essential ingredients. Over time, management problems at our source for day-old chicks resulted in a less healthy and reliable chick supply, severely impacting egg production. And finally, market prices fluctuated rapidly and widely with influxes of imported eggs reaching Gbarnga, forcing us to sell eggs at unprofitable prices.



As the founder of two successful small businesses in the US, accepting that the poultry farm needed to close was difficult. But good stewardship requires knowing not only when to persevere, but also when circumstances make it wiser to change course. The poultry farm failed financially, but the experience succeeded in teaching us what sustainable enterprise in this environment actually requires. We learned first-hand the struggles our Deanville Community members endure every day with far fewer resources at their disposal. Scripture reassures us the mission's success is not dependent on us, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

FRUSTRATION—University Support for Teachers

I am proud of the team we have assembled at the Gbarnga Lutheran Training Center (GLTC). From cooks and security to janitors and farm workers, each of our 56 staff members plays an important role. However, with education at the core, teachers are the cornerstone of the institution. We have worked hard to mentor and model best practices in education, from classroom management techniques to lesson planning and faculty collaboration. It can be very challenging given Liberia's history of disruption and limited resources for primary education and teacher training. Some of our teachers struggle because their own educational experiences were shaped by schools with limited resources and traditional teaching methods, making it more difficult to envision how newer approaches can be implemented and how impactful they can be for our students.

With an eye toward building up our faculty, we have been very supportive of our teachers who desire to improve skills and attain advanced education through local university programs. We have set strict guidelines regarding interference of any outside obligations with teaching responsibilities at GLTC. And yet, some have allowed their university course schedules to take priority, resulting in

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missed instructional time with their students. Liberia's education system has endured decades of disruption, limited teacher training, and chronic shortages of resources. Some of the counterproductive practices that become normalized in such an environment do not disappear simply because a teacher joins GLTC. Building a different professional culture requires repeated training, accountability, and clear expectations.

During staff meetings and in our Employee Policy Handbook, we explicitly state that outside obligations cannot interfere with a teacher's responsibilities to GLTC students. That is why it is so frustrating when this continues to occur. Our challenge, however, isn't simply to get teachers to follow the rules. It is to help teachers experience, internalize—and trust—a different model and a higher standard of education.

PAIN—Medical Interventions
Early in my time in Liberia, I became very close friends with a young woman in her early 30's named Hawa (an alias). She never attended school but hoped to one day write her name and read the Bible. Over the course of a few years, she had various unexplained health challenges that never fully resolved. Nor did the medical community ever clearly convey a diagnosis or course of treatment (though she had X-rays and several blood transfusions). Dissatisfied with unexplained lab tests and healthcare staff telling her she had dry blood, sugar blood, or low blood, we met with a doctor who reluctantly revealed she had AIDS. Despite the resistance and stigma she encountered from some healthcare workers, I worked with Hawa to get her on a regimen of free antiretroviral drugs. Unfortunately, family members soon carried her to another city to a traditional healer who was regarded by the family as a prophet, which meant she was no longer taking any medication. Over many weeks, she vacillated between hospital treatments and disappearing for more traditional healing—she died 4 months after her diagnosis.

Her death painfully reminded me that access to medicine alone is not enough. Effective healthcare can be undermined by poverty, limited health education, inadequate medical infrastructure, fear, mistrust, family pressures, and deeply held beliefs about illness and healing. Gbarnga Mission is working to reduce the impact of these barriers. Charles, our



Community Health Advocate, is present in the village as a Christian health resource. He not only works toward early intervention on medical issues, but also understands the cultural context because he shares the language and culture of the people he serves. This enables him to build trust while encouraging timely, evidence-based medical care. He's a compassionate caregiver who shares the hope of Jesus, the great physician.

Light and Momentary Troubles
It's easy to show you buildings and pictures of smiling children in pristine school uniforms. Physical projects are visible, but transformation of the heart is the deeper work of our ministry—harder to accomplish and nearly impossible to photograph. Nevertheless, I know God holds each of us and this mission in His hands—“nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:39). In the Old Testament temple, a heavy curtain separated the Most Holy Place—the symbolic dwelling place of God's presence—from the people. But Jesus “pulled back the curtain” of division at His crucifixion. He tore it from top to bottom, removing the separation between God and humanity. Like my grandson, Camden, joyfully unfurling the drapery to reveal himself in his hiding place, Gbarnga Mission is working to pull back the curtains of poverty, inadequate education, and illness while sharing the joy and hope of a relationship with

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Jesus with our brothers and sisters in Liberia.

I am grateful for your partnership in the hard work of this mission. Your financial contributions, your gifts of backpacks and school supplies, your words of encouragement to your sponsored students, your heartfelt prayers for wisdom and support—they are making a difference—and I thank you.

Together, we press on knowing, “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Grateful for your partnership,


Jon Rossman
President/CEO

TEACHER PRIDE

By Sharon Meyer, Education Chair

I think it is safe to say that anyone would feel fortunate to have an occupation that both provides for their needs and fulfills their soul. The possibility of finding that kind of



opportunity drops precipitously for those living in developing countries. While the primary focus of Gbarnga Lutheran Training Center (GLTC) is education from Day Care through Grade 9, the impact we have had on the adults on our staff through their employment has also been life-changing. Liberia is still a country emerging

from the trauma of war. Government, health, and education systems continue to struggle to become efficient and effective. Yet on our campus, adults are given the opportunity to earn a fair wage and develop professionally in ways not always available elsewhere.

On our last trip to Gbarnga, the students were away for summer holiday, allowing me to work one-on-one with teachers, hear their experiences, and better understand their needs. In our first faculty meeting, we began by asking each teacher to share a moment from the past year that had brought them joy.

Our Social Studies teacher, Mr. Henry, proudly shared how he has implemented more small-group work to develop critical and evidence-based thinking. Grade 1 teacher Sis Oretha shared how, after our work together this past February, she shifted from teacher-led repetition to helping students develop independent reading

strategies. Brother Darlington shared how his Grade 3 students loved their beginner Bibles so much that they tried to hide them in their desks to read during other lessons. Some even asked if they could stay inside during recess to read! Their stories were accompanied by huge smiles and laughing eyes. Oh, the joy and pride of accomplishment!

We are also happy to have three new teachers on staff. Each takes pride in working on a beautiful campus, in classrooms equipped with whiteboards and teaching materials, and in knowing that they are supported in their professional development and respected as educators.

As Jon Rossman often reminds us at GLTC, we function as the body of Christ, with each member equal in value to the whole. On behalf of our staff, I thank you for your continued support and prayers. ❖

“Oh, the joy and pride of accomplishment!”

HUNGER AND NUTRITION IN LIBERIA | WHAT THE FINDINGS MEAN FOR GLTC

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) ranks Liberia 112 out of 123 countries. The GHI, published by Concern Worldwide and its partners, scores countries using four indicators. For Liberia, these are: undernourishment, 35.5%; child stunting, 26.9%; child wasting, 3.4%; and child mortality, 7.3%.

The GHI uses a 100-point scale, in which Liberia's score of 30.0 places it in the serious category. These national trends are reflected locally in research conducted by nursing student Ms. Farmah Davis for her Bachelor of Nursing senior thesis. She studied the nutritional status of 100 children ages 3–15 attending our school, using height, weight, BMI-related measures, MUAC measurements, and caregiver questionnaires.

“GLTC is functioning as more than a school”

Her study found that chronic undernutrition is a greater concern than acute starvation. 17% of the children were underweight and 6% were stunted, while none were classified as wasted.

Dietary habits were especially concerning. 67% percent of children came to school without eating breakfast, and 86% ate only two meals per day. Only 5% ate fruits and vegetables daily, while 74% ate them only occasionally and 19% rarely. All of the children depended on the school feeding program for food during school hours, and for many, that meal is their primary weekday meal.

The study also found significant household economic vulnerability. Thirty-nine percent of caregivers were unemployed, 24% were daily

laborers, and 63% of households were classified as low income. In addition, 41% of caregivers had no formal education.

Environmental health was another concern. Sixty percent of households relied on hand pumps for drinking water and 35% on open wells. No families reported access to piped treated water. Perhaps most striking, 95% of caregivers reported that their children were sick at least sometimes during a typical month. Repeated illness can worsen malnutrition by reducing appetite, interfering with nutrient absorption, and increasing the body's nutritional needs.

Taken together, the report describes a cycle in which poverty, limited food intake, poor dietary diversity, low caregiver education, unsafe water, and recurrent illness reinforce one another. The school feeding program is therefore one of the community's most important nutritional safety nets.

For GLTC, five practical priorities emerge: protect and improve the school feeding program, address the breakfast gap, begin routine growth and nutrition screening, treat illness and water safety as nutrition issues, and provide practical nutrition education to children and caregivers.

One broader conclusion is clear: GLTC is functioning as more than a school. It is also an important part of the food-security and health safety net for many children in the community. ❖

PRAYERS & THANKSGIVING

- Thanksgiving for our new School Board members and their commitment to improving education and oversight at GLTC. Grant them wisdom and insight as they begin the recruitment process for a new principal.
- For our staff, especially our teachers, beginning a new school year.

PROJECT SUPPORT NEEDED

- Child sponsorships: \$30/month
- Transportation expenses for mission team: \$1,800
- Monthly support for satellite internet access: \$60/month
- Adolescent health club materials: \$2,500
- 23-seat mini school bus: \$35,000

KEEP ON TRUCKIN'

We are grateful for generous donors who enabled us to buy a new 3-ton flatbed truck. It is critical for campus construction and maintenance projects, supports our agriculture team in transporting seeds, fertilizers, manure, and crops, and allows our cooking staff to haul the hundreds of bags of rice used throughout the school year. ❖



Gbarnga Lutheran Mission Project, Inc. is a 501(c)3 nonprofit (EIN # 46-5637972).

Gbarnga Mission is constructing and staffing the Gbarnga Lutheran Training Center (GLTC). Our mission is to share God's love as we facilitate Christ-centered education, community development, economic opportunity, and health initiatives in rural Liberia.



Gbarnga Mission

Gbarnga Lutheran Mission Project, Inc.
445 Elmwood Avenue
Providence RI 02907

Sharing God's love through Christ-centered education in Liberia



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**Thank
you!**

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