



Gbarnga Mission News

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

FALL 2020

STAYING ON THE PATH

A voice of one calling: In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Isaiah 40:3

Have you ever been lost? My wife, Kathy, will attest I have a terrible sense of direction – a defective internal compass. Give me a map and I can navigate anywhere. Take it away and I may not find my way home.

On a recent hike in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, I was enjoying the beauty of the trail as I pondered my gratitude for those who came before me to define the path I was following. The meandering forest trail was well-marked with rectangular white blazes painted on tree trunks. At higher elevations, vast areas of exposed granite can make it difficult to discern the pathway so strategically-placed cairns directed the way. I trusted those piles of rocks to show me where to go and they're particularly helpful in dark or stormy conditions.



Life in Liberia can be fraught with the dark and stormy conditions of

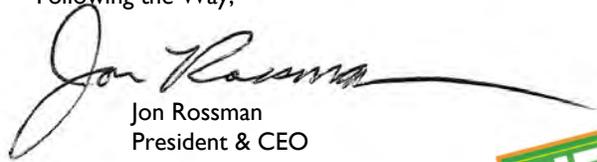
extreme poverty – food insecurity; lack of sanitation and clean drinking water; illiteracy and unemployment; pervasive malaria and poor healthcare. We at Gbarnga Mission – together with you – accompany our brothers and sisters in Liberia on this journey. However, determining the best way forward is often difficult and unclear.

What – or whom – do you follow when you're lost or the path isn't clear. As we approach advent and navigate towards Christmas, consider what cairns guide your life. The prophet Isaiah talks about preparing "the way for the LORD" by making a straight highway – an express lane – for our God. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." He's the "rock" that makes up the cairns we can trust to guide us to our heavenly home.

Acknowledging our internal compasses can lead us astray, I ask you to join me in praying for wisdom and guidance to navigate the complexities of poverty, plan properly for the journey, and not wander too far off track so that God's love will be revealed

to our school community in Liberia. Thank you for your prayers, generous gifts and continued support.

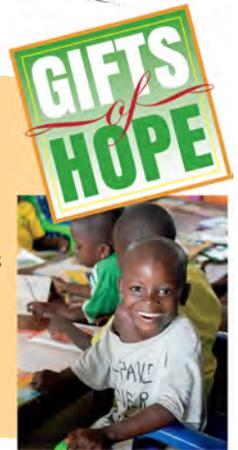
Following the Way,


Jon Rossman
President & CEO

CHRISTMAS GIFTS OF HOPE

Looking for the perfect gift for someone who has everything? Check out our new **Gifts of Hope** Christmas catalog where you'll find ways to give gifts that change lives – and bring hope – to our students and their community.

Visit our website and order online at:
www.gbarngamission.org/giftcatalog



BUILDING FUND NEARS 3/4 MARK

We're nearly 3/4 of the way in our Phase 2 building fund campaign. We need your help to begin Phase 2 building efforts which will allow us to expand enrollment up to 8th grade. Estimated cost for constructing and furnishing four more classrooms and a cafeteria/multipurpose room is **\$150,000**.

Your generous gifts and pledges now **exceed \$108,000**. **Thank you!** With God's blessing and the generosity of your financial support, our goal is to begin excavation and foundation work by year-end 2020. Help us meet the remaining **\$42,000** challenge. Please give today. Thank you for your support! ❖



AN UPDATE FROM PRINCIPAL SUMO | BEGINNING FALL CLASSES AT GLTC

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted schools around the world. GLTC is looking at ways to adjust operations and curriculum so students can continue their studies safely and effectively. After observing the lock down period, the Liberian Ministry of Education prepared a few months of tentative academic activities to help students complete the 2019-2020 academic year. These tentative plans included writing notes, study questions, assignments, and homework prepared by each teacher and given to students. Parents would be asked to help students with their studies at home and bring the assignments back to the teacher for correction.



After looking at the illiteracy rate of many of our students' parents at GLTC, a PTA meeting was held to discuss the best next steps for GLTC students. While following the government's remote learning model, we agreed that each teacher would also host a one-day class weekly with the students from 8:00am to 12:00pm. The tentative classes started the week

of August 17th and will end in early October. 72 students came back this fall to complete the academic year. Teachers will be working on each student's progress report right after the completion of the final class. ❖

THANK YOU ORPHAN GRAIN TRAIN

Special thanks to Paul Arbesman for a contribution of 21 boxes full of school supplies and hygiene kits for our school children from Orphan Grain Train's New England branch in Terryville, CT.



CHILD SPONSOR SURVEY | SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

All of our supporters are a blessing to our mission in Liberia. But, we are especially blessed by our Child Sponsors who have committed to recurring monthly or annual financial contributions to ensure the education and development of one, two – or even twelve! – GLTC students. In an effort to learn more about our Sponsors and make improvements to this critical program, we requested feedback in a recent Child Sponsor Survey. We heard from 23 respondents – 22% were new Sponsors (less than 1 year), 26% have sponsored from 1 to 2 years, and the remaining 52% have sponsored for 3 or more years. Here are three of the key takeaways:

Relationships: Although there have been opportunities to exchange letters, many Sponsors expressed interest in learning more about their child and their families. They want to be more engaged, to know more about what they're learning, and understand the children's lives more fully. There is strong interest in more frequent updates, letters or other personal connections. As one respondent said, "I would love a little more personal interaction/exchanges between us and our sponsored child, and maybe even the whole family." This is an area where we need improvement. Given the lack of a functioning postal system in the rural areas of Liberia, we're exploring other means such as short videos, Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp chats to keep information flowing in order to strengthen relationships between Sponsors and children.

This is a multifaceted mission which meets the spiritual, educational, and economic needs of the whole family

Christ-centered Strategy: Our Sponsors appreciate a well-thought out, God-pleasing plan for addressing the holistic needs of their sponsored child and family. One sponsor summarized it this way, "This is a multifaceted mission which meets the spiritual, educational,

and economic needs of the whole family in this community." Another said, "My first priority is that the mission helps all there learn, understand and know that they, like us, are truly loved, valued, and created by God, and also redeemed by Jesus Christ...I love the attention to the whole child: physical, spiritual, mental, educational, emotional, familial, societal, vocational. I love the self-sustaining aspects and thoughtful steps toward sustainability." We strive to keep Christ at the center of all we do and will continue praying for God's guidance as we work within our "Four Areas of Impact."

Effectiveness: Sponsors yearn to make a difference in Liberia and want financial support to have an impact that creates real change. They see the Sponsorship program doing just that. One respondent was led to become a Sponsor because of "the opportunity to offer education and a better life for these children." A former teacher responded by saying, "I've seen the joy and confidence students develop when they are engaged in active learning. Sponsoring a child allows me to continue making a difference in a student's life." We're working hard to not only be effective, but to be good stewards of the financial resources entrusted to us. We are looking at ways of quantifying our impact to discover how best to serve this community.

Thank you to all who participated in this brief survey. We're always looking to improve so please contact our Sponsorship Coordinator, Bill Meyer (sponsorships@gbarngamission.org) if you have suggestions for the Child Sponsorship program. ❖

MEET A GLTC STUDENT | SERINA SHALLING

At age 13, Serina attends the 1st Grade class at GLTC. Her home is located in the Green Farm section of Deanville Community. She lives with the family of Amelia Dennis who has taken her in as their own daughter. In 2014, Amelia gave birth to her youngest son, Cooper, and had complications during labor and delivery. During recovery, Amelia was unable to properly care for herself and newborn baby Cooper. She asked a friend, Ma Gormah, to find someone to help her with household chores. Gormah went to the village of Kpatawee (pronounced "POT-ah-wee") about 1 hour from Deanville to ask a friend for a child from the farm to help around the home. Gormah found an 8-year old girl whose Kpelle name was Dandallah, which means "they have made me clever". Because there are no schools in this area, Dandallah's biological mother ("born ma") allowed her to go with Gormah with the condition that she be enrolled in school.

Amelia agreed and gave Dandallah the "school name" of Serina. Many children in Liberia have at least two names: a tribal name (or "country name") and a "school name". Amelia promised to send Serina to the same school as her own biological children. This was important because



frequently a child is brought into a home as a helper and while the birth children attend good quality, more expensive private schools, the other non-family children are sent to cheaper, poorer quality government schools. This gave Serina's birth mother confidence that Amelia would care for her like a daughter.

Serina became part of Amelia's family on July 8, 2014 and calls Amelia "Auntie" and her husband "Uncle Anthony". She has four biological siblings back in Kpatawee: two brothers, Daniel and Emmanuel plus two sisters, Nyamah and Naomi. Her biological mother and father still live there. She now has three brothers and three sisters as part of Amelia's family:

Serina loves third period before recess when they study the Bible

Daniel, Cooper, and Bryant plus Eve, Anthonitte, and Madusu. Amelia works as a teacher helper and guesthouse manager at GLTC and helps Anthony with farming a large garden where they grow cucumbers, squash, bitter ball, and peppers. Amelia and Anthony are very loving Christian parents. In fact, their only birth children are Anthonitte, Cooper, and Bryant. The other four children are informally adopted. Serina shares a bed with two sisters, Eve and Madusu.

Serina's main responsibilities during Amelia's post-partum recovery included washing clothes, washing dishes, and hauling water from either a nearby handpump well or a creek. She still does these same chores today. She enrolled in the Mission of Hope School for just three months until the Gbarnga Lutheran Training Center (GLTC) was finished where she is now a student along with Daniel, Cooper, and Madusu. Graduation from K2 class into 1st Grade is typically an important family milestone in Liberia. As Serina's graduation approached, her biological father ("born pa") came from Kpatawee but left just before the ceremony telling Amelia, "She's your child. We don't care anymore."

Serina walks to school with her sisters each day which takes about 35 minutes. She loves third period before recess when

they study the Bible, as well as studying math and social studies. Her favorite Bible verse is Psalm 16:1-4 because she says, "trouble comes to those who worship other gods." She loves the monthly chapel

program at GLTC because, "you speak to everyone [in the school] without fear." Her favorite meal is fried beans on rice and favorite color is yellow because, "it's a clean color."

Her favorite games include playing kickball and "labber". To play labber, two children place a random pile of about 6 pairs of flip-flops (aka "slippers") in the middle as each child stands approximately 6 feet away from the pile on opposite sides. A third child in the middle tries to avoid being hit by a small ball thrown at them by these two opposing players as she

attempts to find the matching pairs of slippers and neatly line them up in a row. If she is hit, she's out and switches spots with one of the two opposing players. If she catches the ball, she can kick it which gives her more time to try and line up the slipper pairs before possibly being hit.

When Serina grows up, she wants to be a bank manager. ❖



LIBERIA LEGACY OF HOPE ENDOWMENT FUND

You can make an enduring impact on the lives of children in Liberia by designating a gift to Gbarnga Mission in your will, trust, life insurance policy, or retirement accounts. You can share both your financial estate and your love for Jesus in one generous gift – and leave a **Legacy of Hope**.

For more information, contact us at legacygiving@gbarngamission.org

PRAYERS & THANKSGIVING

- Thanksgiving to all who participated in the “Get Movin’ for Education” fall fundraiser to support our school construction.
- Prayers that we continue to work well together in Liberia, expanding education, economic development, good health, and most importantly a knowledge of God's saving grace.
- Thanksgiving for the faculty and staff that have persisted in their duties in spite of the problems raised by the Covid-19 virus and for God's continued protection in the US and Liberia.
- Thanks to God for giving each of us unique gifts that we might offer these in ways that can help others.
- Thank you for the leadership Principal Sumo provides in Liberia.
- Prayers for patience and healing for our sister and Board member, Michelle Gasbarro, during her cancer treatment.

\$10,000 MATCHING D.A.F. FUNDS

Former Amazon and Microsoft executives David and Jennifer Risher created a challenge fund to provide matching grants for contributions from Donor Advised Funds (DAF) to nonprofits like Gbarnga Mission. There were 341 eligible nonprofits involved in this challenge. 147 were randomly selected to receive grants and just 31 received at least \$10,000 ... and Gbarnga Mission was blessed to be one of those 31 chosen!

Although this particular challenge ended on September 30th, please consider directing contributions from your DAF or required minimum distributions (RMD) from your retirement fund. Send us an email if you have questions or need more info: info@gbarngamission.org

Gbarnga Lutheran Mission Project, Inc. is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation (Federal Tax ID # 46-5637972). Gbarnga Mission is constructing and staffing a Christian school in rural Liberia to provide primary, secondary and vocational education for impoverished children.

WWW.GBARNGAMMISSION.ORG



Gbarnga Mission

Gbarnga Lutheran Mission Project, Inc.
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Providence RI 02907

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

Our school is growing — Sponsor A Child today !

Name _____

Address _____

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Phone _____

Email _____

Yes, I'd like to sponsor a child for \$30 per month (\$360 per year).

Enclosed is my first sponsorship gift of:

\$30 \$360 Other \$ _____ Or sign up online

at www.gbarngamission.org and click “Sponsor A Child”.

