



Sierra Leone Initiative Newsletter

2019

MISSIONARY JOURNEYS TO SIERRA LEONE

Special Opportunities ~ January 2019

Each year groups of missionaries from Sierra Leone Initiative partner churches in the Susquehanna Conference travel to Sierra Leone to build relationships with sister churches. This year some of these groups were also given the opportunity to build relationships with other organizations that provide support to the Sierra Leone Conference by attending the Sierra Leone Partners Conference held in Sierra Leone on January 22nd and 23rd.

Along with the Sierra Leone Initiative, organizations represented at the Partner Conference from the United States included Helping Children Worldwide based in Washington, DC area, Mission of Hope based in North Carolina, Central Vision Global based in North Dakota, Operation Classroom based in Indiana, Africa Uplifted based in Minnesota. Also represented were groups from Norway and Germany including CELAD/TRACE, Hugesund Rotifunk and Africa Uplifted-Mission Alliance, and Global Board of Missions.

While each group has its own area of focus for support, connections were made that will help all groups build on what they are doing and help others at the same time. Your prayers for the continued work and growth of these organizations is greatly appreciated.

Following the Sierra Leone Partners Conference, the 139th session of the Sierra Leone Annual Conference was held. As part of this conference, the organizations from the Partner Conference were recognized. Much appreciation was conveyed from the pastors and churches in Sierra Leone for the work these organizations are doing. Specifically, Rev. Mariama Bockarie shared that if not for the Sierra Leone Initiative, she would not have been able to follow her call from God to become a pastor and make disciples for Jesus Christ.



Facts about Sierra Leone



Sierra Leone is located on the western coast of Africa.

Size: 27, 699 sq. miles— slightly smaller than South Carolina

Bordering Countries: Guinea and Liberia

Climate: tropical, hot, humid; summer rainy season (May-December); winter dry season (December to April)

Population : 6,205,000 (est.)

Religions:
Muslim - 60%
Christian - 20-30%
indigenous beliefs - 5-10%

In a Health Index Study (10/2014) of 142 countries – Sierra Leone ranked at the BOTTOM

Infant Mortality Rate is 87 per 1,000 births (WHO 2015)

Average Life Expectancy in Sierra Leone (WHO 2015)
Men – 49 years
Women – 51 years

Reflections from First Time Visitors

First-time SL Traveler's Perspective

I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to meet with our sister church in Africa this year. I was even more fortunate, to have a woman who had talked to our congregation, often, about the needs of that particular Church, to our own church for many years. Coming to our sister Church in Sierra Leone was everything Pam said it was. Their worship was long and heartfelt. Their love for God isn't just on Sundays as some Christians. They never looked at a clock to see if the sermon was running into their lunch hour. They value each of us as congregation members and pray for us often. Their needs are urgent, and we are answers to some of their prayers as God leads us to help them. This year Pam and I whittled down the list and are ready to talk to our own church about their needs. I know it won't be denied. Its humbling to walk into your own church, filled with so many wonderful things that were contributed for so many years, and be asking for money to help others with such a significant need. Here these people are, God's children, sitting for hours worshipping in blistering heat, without all the accommodations we have become accustomed to. I am so blessed to have gone. I was able to personally look at their worshipping structure and see with my own eyes the great needs they have. On this journey I met a young lady my age. Scripture tells us to walk in love. Jesus did just that. I saw it first hand when I traveled to Africa. From the people God lined up for me to travel with to the very person I

(Continued on page 2)



connected with while there, I saw it. Time, age, poverty, wealth, color of skin, location means nothing in God's eye. It's about a loving connection between us all as His children. I was honored to sit with Julia and feel that bond. We'd never met until that day, yet we seemed to know one another for centuries. Our backgrounds, means of wealth, family lineage had nothing to do with simply feeling God wrapped around us as we spoke. We talked about common interests, future plans for our families, ourselves, and the needs of our sister church in Tombodu, Sierra Leone. Paxtonville Church would like to make differences in the lives of others, and I think we are already doing that here locally, but we also are called to walk in love outside of our own communities. I may only have that one moment of time with Julia, but it will last a lifetime; just like God's spoken word still lives on, so will our bond. I will always have a place for Tombodu UMC and its congregation in my heart.

Desiree Snook, Paxtonville UMC

My First Trip To Sierra Leone And Praying That It Is Not My Last

When arriving in Freetown on January 14th, at 8:25 pm, I was overtaken with emotions, thanking God and unbelieving that I was finally in Sierra Leone. I have known about Sierra Leone for over 8 years since my son, Brian traveled there in 2011. I have always felt that I had a heart for the people in Sierra Leone, even though it took me all these years to follow Brian.

Throughout the next 10 days, I learned why Brian loves this country and its people. The people I met are very humble, loving, and joyful for a people who have very little. I was amazed how much they love Jesus and depend on him daily, much more than we westerners do.

In Motema Town in the Kono District in eastern Sierra Leone is where New Creation Community, Dover's partner church, Bishop Bangura Memorial UMC is located. I learned just how hard life is for my brothers and sisters. Yet I also learned how very much alike we are. We all want the best for our children. We all have dreams, needs, and wants. But for the people of Sierra Leone it is much harder to have their dreams come true. Yet they try everyday to keep moving forward as best they can, with God's help. I continue to pray daily for my family in Africa. I have gained 3 "sons" that I didn't have before who I have tried to keep in touch with weekly.

My life has changed since this trip to Sierra Leone, I have more compassion for those who struggle daily in this life. I know that I am blessed beyond measure with more than I deserve. I know that no matter what life throws at me God is always there to take charge if we only ask. My faith is much stronger since my trip.

By the grace of God I hope that I will be able to go back and see my African family again.

JoMarie Warner, New Creation Community



Reflections on Sierra Leone

My travel to Sierra Leone in January of this year did not require any great sacrifice on my part; arriving in Freetown, much with which I am familiar was available to me- comfortable accommodations, cable tv, pleasant foods and surroundings- and so was much that I seldom encounter- urban traffic congestion, street-side sales stands and people everywhere. While I could possibly have lived in my "first world" bubble, the presence of vehicles from Doctors Without Borders and the International Rescue Committee parked near where I dined reminded me that I wasn't in Pennsylvania anymore.

Things were a bit more challenging when we journeyed to the east, into Kono District, where electricity was available only 12 hours a day (7PM-7AM) and the variety of available menu items was greatly limited; still, as a preacher, I am accustomed to eating chicken. But I am confident that, in spite of the limitations I experienced, my diet was more substantial than those among whom we visited.

My stated purpose for being there was to visit The Kossuh Town Church on the Eastern edge of Freetown, partner church under the SL Initiative of Hollidaysburg UMC. A weekday visit with the pastor and leadership gave me the opportunity to experience native cuisine, polished off with soft drinks that

were welcomed in the 80+ degree heat. This congregation began in 2013 with 5 members and has a current membership of 200 with 250 attending. Like the country, the congregation is young with a young pastor, Ventis Osman Koroma and 3 assistant pastors; not many members are employed, nonetheless great things are happening. Outgrowing their cinder block building, the walls of a larger building surround it now and it is their goal to have a roof over it by year's end.

The Sunday worship I attended was a Building Committee Fund Raising and Thanksgiving Service with a Guest Speaker, and the District Superintendent and Conference Program Director also in attendance. To my surprise, we were given a worship folder with the order of service; the songs were very familiar- "All Hail The Power of Jesus' Name; 'Tis So Sweet...; Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah; Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing; and Take The Name of Jesus with You." A very moving contemporary song was new to me: "Nara Narekele mo" ("Take My Thanksgiving" in Nigerian), which asks, "What Shall I Render to Jehovah, He's Done So Very Much for Me". The music was supplied by a keyboard, a drum set, and guitar. The youth also sang and there were numerous offerings, for the men's, women's and youth programs, and multiple offerings for the building program; here various leaders of the congregation were asked to hold the offering basket and members donated to them. After each offering an unveiling of a table with building materials was held. (There were multiple layers of fabric covering them, so it took multiple offerings before they were seen.) With all of this, the service lasted several hours; afterward the entire congregation was served a luncheon prepared by the church, made possible by funds sent ahead from the Hollidaysburg congregation.



In Sierra Leone 60% of the population is under 25 and an additional 32% is between 25 and 55; that leaves only 8% over age 55. Being in that group, I was called "Dad" and offered assistance where the ground was uneven and frequently asked if I needed to sit down. The people I encountered were cordial and pleasant. They displayed joy in their worship and conversations and I look forward to assisting them in their journey of faith in the days ahead with my prayers and gifts. My presence with them was memorable and worthwhile.

Myron Jones, Retired Pastor

Why We Return

Once again I find myself blessed to be able to share the experience of our most recent trip to Sierra Leone in January 2019. Over the past 7 years our sister church, Calvary UMC, and the village of Taiama has been through many changes. Since 2012 we have seen 3 different pastors (who are also District Superintendents) at Calvary. Although the pastors may change, the strength and perseverance of the congregation remains.

We have assisted with the re-tiling of the church floor, watched the work of Operation Classroom construct a technical school and are about to complete the rebuilding of the parsonage and DS office. But this year we also experienced something that we have prayed for since the very first trip. When we got to Taiama we were met with not only hope but action. The Lord has truly been at work in Taiama.

We were shown upgrades and improvements made to the church by the people of the church! Reverend Deen was so proud to be able to show us the new church steps and security measures for the church completed with funds that they themselves had raised. He has also made great strides toward an agricultural project that will involve the entire district. His vision is strong and his faith appears to be moving him and the congregation toward that ultimate goal of self sustainability.

We remain grateful that the Lord has blessed us with the call to be part of such an inspiring transformation and look forward to many more years of sharing of love of God and country with our brothers and sisters in Sierra Leone.

Your humble servant,
Tiffany Holland, First UMC, Mechanicsburg



**Sierra Leone
Initiative Team
Susquehanna Annual Conference**

Paul Amara
Randy Ball
Marsha Banks
Kristin Brown, Treasurer
Fred Clark, Emeritus
Rev. Jeff Fisher, Emeritus
Steve Herman, Emeritus
Ken Mengel
Jim Jacobs
Pam Perna, Chairperson
Rev. George Reynolds
Hildegard Sollenberger, Emeritus
Donna Thomas
Chris Wagner, Recording Secretary
Jo Marie Warner

**Sierra Leone
Initiative Committee
Sierra Leone Annual Conference**

Rev. Winston Ashcroft, Connectional
Ministries Director
Rev. Mariama Bockarie
Beatrice Fofanah
Leonard Gbloh, Education Secretary - Primary
Lydia Jalloh, Financial Services Officer
Phileas Jusu, Communication Director
Joseph Pormai, Education Secretary - Secondary
Rev. Solomon Rogers
Smart Senesie
Business manager/Estate Officer - Ex-Officio

FINANCIAL UPDATE

The additional full time pastors added to the Sierra Leone Annual Conference payroll over the last few years created a deficit amount recorded by their auditors to the Susquehanna Conference. Although this occurred without our understanding, the Initiative feels honor bound to pay this deficit. **Thank you to all covenant and non-covenant churches who have paid their covenants in full or donated to reduce this deficit.** The current deficit figure is \$14, 804.71.

Sierra Leone Annual Conference remains short of the amount of payroll needed for all full time pastors! Needed for Susquehanna Conference to meet the entire full time pastors' payroll: maintain current 68 covenant churches, charges, or clusters and add 8 new covenants at \$1,200/year, or 6 new covenants at \$1,500/year, or 5 new covenants at \$1,800/year, or some combination of these covenants.

Be missionaries in Sierra Leone fulfilling Jesus' statement to his disciples in Acts 1:8 to be witnesses for Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit...to the ends of the earth.

What Can I Do?

- PRAY, PRAY, PRAY
- Sponsor a covenant to provide Pastor Salary support individually, church-wide, cluster-wide
- Send someone next year from your congregation to Sierra Leone with one of the visiting teams
- Encourage your youth, UMW, UMM or Sunday school classes to unite to provide Pastor Salary support
- Consider creating a fund raiser to help provide pastoral salary support
- Involve your congregation, you will help and bless others & provide joyful fellowship

How to make a donation

- Send monetary donations to the Susquehanna Conference Office, Accounts Receivable, 303 Mulberry Drive, Mechanicsburg, PA 17050.
- Funds may be listed on your monthly treasurer's report under SLI Advance Special #8030
- Email Kristin Brown, Initiative Treasurer at treasurer.sli@gmail.com. Include the amount and purpose for the donation.
- Funds for wells for a partner church or any Sierra Leone Church in need of well repairs can be sent to the Initiative in the same manner quoted above.

A special thank you to Higher Information Group LLC, 400 N Blue Ribbon Ave, Hbg. for printing this year's newsletter.