

The CrossRoads Connection



A Youth and Young Adult Ministry of
St. Andrew United Methodist Church

Friends at Tubman-Gray

By Marilyn Foster



“Every step I take, I take with you—you make me move, Jesus; every breath I breathe, I breathe in you; waves of mercy, waves of praise, everywhere I look, I see your

face. Your love, it captures me, oh my God, this love—how can it be? Na, na, nana, nanana, na, na, nana, nanana.”

These are the words to a song taught to me by 13-year-old Ben Titoe, a student at W.V.S. Tubman-Gray School in Gbarnga, Liberia. (Gbarnga is pronounced “Bonga”.) Ben shares the same interests that many of our St. Andrew Junior Highers have - sports, music, church, friends. He is outgoing, hard working polite and a real pleasure to be around. He lives with his mother and two younger siblings (3-year-old brother Cyrus and 9-month-old

sister Annie) in a three room shelter adjacent to the school. His father died not too long ago, so there is no longer a father-figure in his life other than the older boys and teachers at his school.

Ben loves soccer, and I watched him spend a lot of time on the playground playing soccer with a group of boys. But they were not playing with a soccer ball. From what I saw, soccer balls are rather scarce. Instead, the boys were playing with, of all things, a washrag. It was one our work team brought, a washrag compressed into a ball then covered in a black and white plastic to look like a soccer ball. We had about 60 washrags donated, all looking like sports balls—footballs, baseballs, soccer balls and basketballs. The soccer ball rags were the most popular. And instead of opening up the package to get to the washrag,



Ben Titoe and his little sister,

most of the kids just played with the “ball”.

chipping in

In order to make money, his mother makes a cornbread-like bread and sells it outside the school to students and teachers at lunchtime. She is not the only one out there; there are other women with steamed corn on the cob or palm nuts or candy. There is not a school-provided lunch program, so children with money buy something from these women. Children without money go hungry. The women/mothers compete with each other for these meager dollars, but they still compete.

Ben’s home, the three room shelter, actually belongs to Gbarnga School of Theology (GST), and because GST is relocating from Monrovia back to Gbarnga, all the families that have been living in those shelters will have to find other places to live.

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Our VISION: The CrossRoads Youth Ministry of St. Andrew United Methodist Church embraces and supports the youth and young adults of our community and their families, seeks to inspire and guide their spiritual growth as Disciples of Jesus Christ, and then, empowers/challenges them to serve each other, the church and the whole world.

Have you ever just had 'one of those weeks'? Well, between returning home from Africa, going back to work, life in general, and folks preparing to go on the Senior High mission trip, reminders got misplaced and articles just didn't get submitted for the newsletter this week. As editor, I apologize to the congregation for not having a lot of CrossRoads information to share, and promise to return to an informative and picture-filled format with the next issue. Thank you for understanding! — Marilyn



A while back, the young youth were challenged to rewrite the 23rd Psalm, with a twist.

They were posed this question, "Instead of a shepherd, with whom would you compare God?" Below is what Clay Murphy wrote:

"God is my safari guide. He tells me which way to go and not to go. He keeps me away from the hungry lions and leads me to the bounding antelope. God carries bug repellent to keep the mosquitoes carrying the West Nile virus away."

Chipping In

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Where Ben and his family will go is definitely a concern. More than likely, they will rent a room from someone looking for boarders, probably the four of them sharing the room for sleeping. Rooms go for about 200 Liberian Dollars (equivalent to about \$3.50), so I doubt his mom will rent two rooms.

Laundry is done outside, either with a washboard or just in a bucket and hung outside to dry. It's the rainy season in Liberia now, and it was my experience that the clothes never really got all that dry. They did get the sour odor of mildew.

Cooking is done outside as well. Most of the families I met had two metal stands that would hold the hot charcoal in the bottom then the pots would go on top. Rice is an every day staple. Greens of one type or another are also served daily. Chopped sweet potato greens or cassava greens, cooked down with hot peppers, a little salt, a little palm oil, maybe some bony fish pieces or chicken feet if they have it. Mix it all together, and you have your meal for the day. Your one meal for the day.

So what kind of chance in life will Ben have? That is yet to be seen, but we have to pray that he will overcome his extreme poverty. It is obviously important that he stay in school and get an education. Otherwise, he really won't have any chance.

Ben is a unique young man, but his story is not. There are many other students this article could have been about...Emmanuel or Tebbeh or Eric or Genesis or Matthew...so many children, so many stories to tell, so many in need.

Parents pay for their children to attend school. At Tubman-Gray, the tuition for an elementary student is approximately \$50. Junior High tuition is approximately \$75, and Senior High tuition is approximately \$105. That's not per semester, it is PER YEAR.

Through Operation Classroom, scholarships are available to help kids like Ben receive an education. Tubman-Gray starts classes again in September, and scholarships are needed now. If you are interested in sponsoring Ben or a student like Ben, contact me at 765-420-0452 or fosters.midwest@verizon.net, and I will provide scholarship information to you. ✝

Mission Trip Update

Rumor has it that our fifteen Senior High youth group members and their six leaders took a bit of a break from their hard work to go white water rafting on Wednesday, followed by a pizza dinner! Sounds like they are enjoying their experiences...

Remember, you can always access the CR calendar on the Web at thecrossroads-umc.org



See YOU at the CrossRoads