

January 10, 2008

Curran Lutheran Hospital, Zorzor Liberia

Hi All,

We have officially been in Liberia for one week now and I am slowly getting acclimated to the rhythm of life here. Gary and I are staying at Jim and Butch Foster's missionary house (in separate rooms, of course). Attached to our house is Edna Johnson's missionary home. Edna is a long term missionary who has been here 3 years volunteering as an administrator and jack-of-all-trades here at Curran Lutheran Hospital.

Paul is staying right across from us in the missionary guest house with Robert who is a Liberian and warehouse manager for Gary and Jim on this project. On January 17, they will be joined by two other missionaries who are coming to join our team and will stay through to the middle of February, after Paul, Gary and I have left. Jim and Butch will be here until the beginning of March before they head out and eventually back to Montana.

It is amazing how fast we have become family. I get up early enough to get my devotions and some study time in. At 7:00 A.M. we set the table and sit down together for breakfast which usually consists of bread, a half a grapefruit, a banana, juice and the ever present peanut butter jar for added protein. We each take turns praying at our meals thanking God for food to eat and the day before us. By 8:00 AM we head off for the day's work. So far I have learned how to chip tile, paint, saw through metal piping, frame doors, and white wash (although I think I get more on me than on the ceiling). It reminds me a little of our church's "Haven for Hope" days and the clergy Habitat day. I am definitely learning new skills here!

At noon, the bell is rung for lunch and we all gather as Gary leads us in prayer. The meal is always rice with something (emphasis on something). There is a sauce put on top of the rice made of cassava leaves or potato greens, etc. and mixed with what we call "bush meat." You can always pick out the fish, but the meat in it is whatever was killed in the bush that day...then it's back to work until 4:30 or 5 PM depending upon what your particular project that day is. Then it is home to a bucket bath which feels really good at the end of the day. A little time to chill before preparing dinner (the electricity does not come on until 6:30 PM and goes off again at 10:00 PM) and then dinner of fresh fruits (Liberian grown pineapples which are delicious, bananas, avocados, etc.), bread and whatever canned or boxed food we have. Edna and Butch do an amazing job of creating good meals out of what we have. Then we sit and enjoy dinner and share the day's activities before getting ready for bed.

I am enjoying getting to know the Liberian people. Every person that walks by me as I am working in the hospital says thank you no matter how many times they have walked by me before! The team has been rebuilding Curran Lutheran Hospital since 2006. It was destroyed in the Liberian civil war and they have been rebuilding it ward by ward. This year we are working on the Medical-Surgical Ward and you can tell the community is very happy to have us here.

The Liberian people are beautiful. Maybe because of the way they carry things on their heads, they all move very stately and have enormous smiles when they greet you. Unfortunately because it is a third world country, we also have to keep guard on all of our equipment or it will be taken and sold. Part of the incentive for the Liberians working here is not just the idea of having a job and the pay that comes along with that, but also for the lunch that is provided as it is the main meal of the day and for some, their only meal of the day.

Liberia has slowly been rebuilding itself after 14 years of civil war that devastated the entire country. It is easy to see God's hand working in this country as a lot of the rebuilding is being done by volunteer church groups, like the team I am now serving on. God has moved the hearts of people who have the talents to come rebuild what needs to be done. I am thankful I have an opportunity to be a part of this team and to see God's hand moving and helping to heal Liberia. Thank you for prayers, I can feel them each day as you continue to be in my prayers. God bless, Deb