

December 25, 2009

Merry Christmas from Zorzor, Liberia! It is hard to believe we have been in Liberia for two weeks already. Our first worksite for Day Memorial Lutheran Church at Harrisburg, Liberia is going well. The warehouse, which will hold our tools and later be turned into a school, is at roof level and should be done well before the New Year. We would appreciate prayers as the next part of our work there depends on the container getting released from port so we can set up a tent city for the eventual fifteen missionaries who will start arriving on January 6, 2010.

Since we were caught up on our work we (Butch & Jim Foster and Gary and I) decided to celebrate Christmas with our friend, Edna Johnson, at Curran Lutheran Hospital in Zorzor, where we were stationed last year. On our way to Zorzor, we stopped at Sanoyea, the site of our next work project. While there Gary was thrilled to meet a graduate of the Tuition Sponsorship Program (TSP) now a contractor who has already helped Sanoyea build a school and will be working along side Gary as we renovate their church and parsonage. We praise God that we are able to see some of the fruition of the TSP program as graduates are beginning to help rebuild their own country one hospital, one school, one church, one home at a time.

As Butch and I were sitting on different pews talking about the project we noticed a group of children who had come to see what was going on. At first they stood at a distance, and then I noticed them standing at the back of the church. Since no adults were shooing them away, their next move was to sit on various pews around us until one brave little boy was sitting on the very edge of the arm rest of the pew I was sitting on. He quietly slipped off the arm of the pew and onto the seat next to me and slowly but surely wiggled over until we were barely touching and then, success!—he was right next to me. I rewarded his efforts and began to talk with him and we eventually found out everyone's name, what grade they were in school and what their favorite subjects were. Butch then asked them if they knew what was special about Christmas. I was expecting answers like Santa Clause coming or gifts being given, but was surprised when they instantly answered that they get to wear clothes on Christmas! Edna later explained to us that in Liberia on Christmas day it is the custom to give your children new clothes and then they spend the rest of the day visiting with their family and friends. Butch asked the children if they knew about the baby Jesus and we were blessed to have the opportunity to share the Christmas story with them.

We were honored to be able to help Edna decorate her home for Christmas, complete with a new artificial Christmas tree that has lights that play Christmas Carols! She treated us to a traditional Swedish Christmas Eve dinner (or as close as you can get in Liberia) and we celebrated services at St. John's Lutheran church where Christmas Eve is a meditative time of reflecting on what the arrival of the Christ Child means to us.

Gary and I wish each of you a very Merry Christmas and pray you have a blessed start to your new year 2010. We thank each of your for your prayers and support for the work projects and the teacher training and TSP programs we are privileged to do to the glory of God and in the name of the child whose birth we celebrate on Christmas day. God bless, Deb & Gary