

Kalamazoo First Presbyterian Church Report of the Mission Trip to Ghana, 1-16 July 2014

Carole Birch, John Petro, Joyce Petro, and Ray Wicks represented Kalamazoo First Presbyterian Church on a presbytery wide mission trip to Ghana, 1-16 July 2014. This trip also included George Barfield and Rev. Doug Petersen from Benton Harbor First Presbyterian, and Rev. Gail Monsma, Brad Whaley, and Kat Whaley from Marshall First Presbyterian. This was the ninth mission trip to Ghana from our church, beginning in 1991, and the fifth presbytery wide mission trip to Ghana, beginning in 2005. The trip was delayed one day due to severe weather in the Chicago area on Monday, 30 June, resulting in an abbreviated historical tour. Fortunately, most of the trip followed the original schedule planned for the trip. A summary of the trip follows.

Enslavement to Redemption. The brief historic tour provided by our tour guide, Nana Gish from Blessed Assurance Travel and Tours, began with a visit to the Elmina Fortress on the Guinea Coast, established in the early 16th Century by the Portuguese to support the gold trade and soon thereafter it became a major slave dungeon to support the lucrative slave trade, mostly under the Dutch rule. As we paused to reflect on the injustices of the slave trade, we were all very moved when George Barfield played on his flute the melody for *Amazing Grace*. We visited the Ashanti King Prempeh II Jubilee Museum in Kumasi as well as nearby craft villages. Although the Volta River Bridge near the Akosombo Dam was closed for repairs, an efficient ferry service provided reasonably quick passage across the river in both directions. Before leaving the Volta Region on 15 July, we visited the Wli Falls and the Tafi Atome Monkey Sanctuary near Hohoe. We returned to Accra and visited the W.E.B. Du Bois Memorial Centre to reflect on the life and work of this early civil rights activist and founder of the NAACP before going to the Accra Airport to begin our trip back to Michigan.

Visit with Sokode partners. When our tour bus approached Sokode Bagble Saturday afternoon, 5 July, a marching band and an enthusiastic crowd met us and escorted us to the Sokode Bagble EP-Church, where we were greeted by many dignitaries and friends, including Sokode District Chief (Togbe) Christoph Bansa (visited us in June 2006), Sokode District Pastor Rev. Daniel Buami, Ho-East Presbytery Moderator Rev. Sammy Amoako, Vida Ahiati (visited us in 1999), Rev. Dinah Abbey-Mensah (visited us in 2002 and 2003), and Lydia Adajawah (visited us in 2007, 2010, and 2014). The Sokode Bagble EP-Church, treated us with fantastic hospitality during our three-day visit in the village. During this same time, the travelers from Benton Harbor and Marshall received the same wonderful hospitality from the nearby Sokode Etoe EP-Church, Benton Harbor's partner congregation. We were pleased to learn that the Marshall folks will recommend to their session that their church establish a congregational partnership with an EP-Church in the Ho-East Presbytery.

The four of us from our congregation attended the worship service on Sunday, 6 July, at the Sokode Bagble EP-Church. We were pleased that the former Sokode District pastor, Rev. Alice Ankutse, participated in this worship service. On Sunday afternoon, all nine of us had a joint celebration near the Sokode Bagble EP-Church with many representatives from the Sokode District and some from the Ho-East Presbytery. We presented a copy of our new Presbyterian hymnal, *Glory to God*, to our partner congregation. A meeting was held with 15 of the 24 students that have received senior secondary school scholarships provided by our church each year since 2003. A framed Citation of Appreciation from the scholarship recipients at Sokode Bagble was given to us. We were shown the nearly completed manse near to the chapel.

On Sunday evening, we met with the session of the Sokode Bagble EP-Church and presented \$1,500 in cash to the session treasurer, who signed a receipt for the money. When we suggested that the money be used for continued construction on the new primary school building, the members of the session responded unanimously that they would prefer that the money be used to complete the new manse, which will be used to provide housing for a new pastor they plan to call. The four of us fully understood and gave them our blessings in this endeavor.

Before breakfast on Monday morning, 7 July, we came to the site of the new primary school building under construction in the Sokode Bagble Village to witness a local work crew prepare a sand base for the floor of the building. Men filled large wash pans with sand, which the women carried on their heads to the construction site. The job was completed within one hour.

After breakfast, we first met with the local chiefs and elders. The rest of the morning was spent visiting the teachers and students in the Sokode Bagble primary schools. We were very pleased with the classrooms in the two primary school buildings that our church has helped build over the past 12 years. Unfortunately, a much older primary school building was in very poor condition. We trust that the new primary school building under construction will be completed as soon as possible, so that it can replace the one in poor condition. We walked several hundred meters to the new junior secondary school building, which had recently been built with money from the regional educational ministry. Sadly, the resources available for the junior secondary school teachers were grossly inadequate.

A farewell celebration with prayers, singing, and a brief homily by District Pastor, Rev. Daniel Buami was held in the evening. We were each given a Kente stole from the Sokode churches.

On Tuesday morning, 8 July, our hosts took all nine of us from Michigan to Kpetoe, near the Togolese border, to watch Kente weavers at their work and to purchase some of their beautiful weavings. After returning to the Sokode District in the afternoon we gathered our luggage and were taken to the Kekeli Hotel near the EP-Church Headquarters in Ho, where the 13th Ghana Mission Network meeting would begin with the evening meal.

The 13th GMN meeting. A total of 53 folks, 26 from the United States, including Rev. Joshua Heikkila, PC(USA) West Africa Liaison, and 27 from Ghana, attended the 13th Ghana Mission Network meeting hosted by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, from Tuesday evening, 8 July, through Saturday morning breakfast, 12 July. Our congregation and our presbytery together supported the cost for nine EPCG partners to attend this meeting. Comfortable housing and delicious meals were provided in the Kekeli Hotel. The sessions were held in a nearby air-conditioned conference room. American congregations and presbyteries presented their partnership reports. The EPCG, the PCG, and the Ghana Prison Ministry also presented reports. Special sessions were held on clean water, bore holes, sanitation, and general concerns of the six American-Ghanaian partnerships represented at the meeting. A break in the program provided us an opportunity to visit a nearby prayer and retreat center. The EPCG treated everyone attending the GMN meeting to a delightful closing dinner celebration at the Sky Plus Hotel situated on a hilltop overlooking the city of Ho. The Ghanaian Churches in North America plan to host in fall 2015 the 14th GMN meeting in Columbus, Ohio.

The Ho-East Presbytery. It was a pleasure to meet with Rev. Sammy Amoako, the new moderator of the Ho-East Presbytery, and with many of the members of the Ho-East Presbytery Executive Committee. We discussed several possible joint undertakings, including an expanded senior secondary school scholarship program throughout the Ho-East Presbytery, and a honeybee project that was given to us in detail at a subsequent meeting with Vida Ahiati. We also briefly discussed the possibility of a few members of the Ho-East Presbytery coming to Michigan in 2015, probably at a time when they could attend the 14th GMN meeting, to be held in Columbus, Ohio. Some of us visited the recently completed Ho-East Presbytery manse, where Rev. Amoako and family are currently living. Rev. Amoako mentioned that a wall around the manse was planned, but the estimated cost of \$15,000 seemed rather high.

The EPCG Headquarters. We met briefly with the EPCG leaders, but did not have an extended conversation with them. We also met briefly with Presbyter Jonas Djodjodji, the new Presbytery Executive, who has replaced Lydia Adajawah, and toured with him the Ho Public WC facility, which is far from being completed. We received no additional information on the progress of the construction than what he sent us in the middle of June.

Trip Conclusion. Near to the end of our visit in Ho, we had a very productive meeting with Vida Ahiati, director of the E.P. Church Agricultural Training Centre, Akoefe-Avenui. Vida gave us a very reasonable proposal on how we could assist her with placing many more beehives in Ho-East Presbytery villages. We will bring her proposal to the Ghana Partnership Committee of our presbytery for careful discussion and probable action.

During our last two days in the Volta Region, Saturday and Sunday, 12 and 13 July, several families in the Ho area served as our homestay hosts. They took us to their churches for worship on Sunday morning and provided us with pleasant opportunities for building new friendships. On Monday morning, 14 July, our tour guide, Nana Gish, met us for our last brief tour to the Hohoe area and in Accra before delivering us late in the day on Tuesday, 15 July, to the Accra Kotoka International Airport for our flights back to Michigan. We arrived safely at the Kalamazoo-Battle Creek International Airport at 7 p.m., Wednesday, 16 July.

- John and Joyce Petro, Ghana Trip Leaders