

January 5, 2018

Greetings from Liberia----where on January 22, there will be the first peaceful transition of power since 1947. We pray for peace and hope for the best for this country with so much potential and so many needs.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman president on the continent of Africa, is finishing her second six-year term. On January 22, George Weah, an internationally known football (soccer) star will be inaugurated, along with Jewel Howard Taylor, his Vice President.

The presidential race was a field of over 20 candidates who wanted to lead the country. George Weah and Joe Boakai, the current Vice President were the top two contenders. They competed in a run-off election on December 26, with Weah winning with a comfortable majority.

The overwhelming call from the media, the religious leaders, and the top two candidates has been for the whole country to remember the lessons of the past and work together for peace and a bright future for Liberia.

Statistics show that 75 percent of Liberia's population is under 30. That makes for a country ripe for development and also offers challenges of education and job possibilities after education. It is with that reality in mind that I share pictures and experiences with the young people of the Lutheran Church in Liberia.

It is in this context, that I celebrated Christmas 2017 by being part of a Christmas celebration at a farm near Totota. Over 300 children from the two communities by the farm were fed and gifted, as we gathered to sing Christmas songs and hear the Christmas story. I've attached a few pictures to show the faces of some of Liberia's children who are the country's biggest resource and also the biggest challenge. One of the main challenges is literacy and education. Almost all of the candidates for President held up these challenges during the election season.

It is in this context, that I was privileged to preach and preside over the Baptism of 9 young people between the ages of 4 and 20, and the Confirmation service of 11 young people at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church. They stepped forward in front of the congregation to in some cases, express their desire to become part of the Christian community and in other cases, to move into their roles as adult members of the Lutheran Church in Liberia, and we hope as responsible and interested citizens of Liberia.

It is in this context, that I welcomed the New Year with Watch Night Service, attended by people of all ages at St. Andrew's. For those of you who may not know the Watch Night tradition, it is a service that begins in the old year and goes into the New Year. Some churches pray and sing and testify all night long. At St. Andrew's we did all those things from 9 p.m. to 12 midnight. The singing of the Dialect Choir (indigenous language choir) and the English Choir (almost all young people), coupled with the sermon by colleague newly ordained Deacon Amos Voker and the testimony of members of the congregation made the hope for peace and hope for Liberia an important way for us as Lutheran Christians to come together to celebrate what has been and move ahead into what will be.

It is 2018 and as I write this, we are heading into the start of the Level I Evangelist Training here at LTBLLMTC. This is the main residential program here. We are beginning on Thursday with classes in Old Testament, Lutheran Confessional Documents, Early Church History, Family Life, New Testament, and Church Life. We are expecting 25 students from all over Liberia, and, this year, 4 students from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone. This international component is very exciting for us here in Liberia, and Bishop Momoh from Sierra Leone, who was here this past weekend, shared the excitement and hope of the evangelists from Sierra Leone and the church in that country.

In addition to the classes I just listed, we are planning to do some workshops and emphases on the Thursday in Black movement (check out [http://www.thursdaysinblack.co.za/.](http://www.thursdaysinblack.co.za/)) This is a world-wide movement and one the Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Liberia is promoting across the country. Last year at LTBLLMTC, we started this movement and by the end of the school year, 100 percent of the students were participating both in dressing in black and in discussions during class about domestic and sexual violence.

I can't wait to start teaching. I learn so much from the students here, and only hope that they learn as much from me.

Thanks so much for sharing in a bit of what we are "hoping" for here in Liberia. May God's spirit of peace and hope fill your hearts and lives wherever you are and whatever God is calling you to do.

God's blessings

Linda Johnson Seyenkulo

Curriculum Developer/Trainer Louis T Bowers Lay Leaders and Ministers Training Center

Associate Pastor, St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Monrovia

