

# GRACE NOTES

News from and about Grace Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan

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## MY RETURN TRIP TO LIBERIA



I was surprised to be visiting Liberia from March 14-26, 2010. The purpose for my visit was to assist the Christian Health Association of Liberia in planning for their future. I received a call from Dr. Gwenigale, the Liberian Minister of Health requesting that I assist the organization that I had helped develop from 1982-1988. While uncertain of my ability to help, I was excited to re-visit a country and organization that had captured the hearts of our family.

Liberia is located in West Africa on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. Liberia was never colonized, but it became the home of many freed American slaves in the early 1800's. The returned slaves controlled the government of Liberia for many years until a coup occurred in 1980 and a sergeant in the Liberian Army seized power. Liberia has twenty-two different tribal groups and English is the only shared language. The past twenty years have been filled with conflicts, war, and bloodshed. Fighting occurred in many parts of the country leading to many deaths, many refugees, and the movement of peoples away from their homes and communities. With the assistance of the United Nations, peace was restored in Liberia in 2006 and a new president was elected. About 3.2m people live in Liberia with about a third of them living in the capital Monrovia.



*Children on Oldest Congotown Road*

I had last seen Monrovia during a visit in 1994. At that time, I saw the destruction of war. A curfew was imposed and the country was divided. Visiting Liberia in 2010, I was surprised to see very few signs of the destruction of war. New buildings were being constructed throughout the city. The city population had tripled. The streets were crowded with taxis and people. The shops were filled with goods that could be purchased with Liberian dollars or US dollars interchangeably. Cell phones were a common tool for communication, despite the lack of electricity. (When we lived in Liberia in the 80s, it was very difficult to communicate by phone.)

Despite the signs of prosperity, I was struck by the fact that most of the residents of Monrovia are very young. Unemployment is very high with each person trying to make a living by selling a few items or offering a

service. Underlying all the busyness, I wondered about the experiences that so many children and adults have faced in the past fifteen years. How many had seen loved ones killed or wandered aimlessly looking for a place to live or something to eat? How many young children were forced to serve as child soldiers and kill innocent civilians? The pain lies just below the surface.

I had an opportunity to visit the Baptist Church in Oldest Congotown. This is the church that we attended when living in Liberia. While I did not recognize many, it was great to see the



*Ippel's house*



*First Baptist Church, Oldest Congotown*

church filled with young people praising God and putting their future in God's hands. The Ippels and Bruinooges lived on the same road as the church. I thought of our children as I walked down the road. I stopped to visit the house where we lived and was invited to see their efforts to rebuild after the destruction of war. The Bruinooge House appeared to be unlivable, just a shell of what it once was.

I hope that my trip was of some value to the Christian Health Association of Liberia. I know that for me it was an all too brief opportunity to once again open my eyes to see how so many people in our world live. They spend their lives struggling to survive for another day, to make the life of their children just a little better than their own. Please remember to pray for the people of Liberia and for all of God's people who struggle to survive for another day.

*Paul Ippel*



## CADETS

The end of March we went to the Pinewood Derby Race sponsored by the Cadet organization. It was our first year. Our cars were very basic and our presentation table was simple. We learned a lot and it was fun to watch the races, at least the first 50 or so any



way. Some of the cars were amazing; there was an Oscar Meyer Wiener Mobile! We met some counselors from other churches and got lots of ideas for projects and games.



May 1<sup>st</sup> we are going camping with the Grand Rapids Cadet Council. Plymouth Heights and Alger Park have invited us to camp with them so we can share their camping equipment. So all we will need are a few tents and some



sleeping bags. So if anyone has any that Cadets could have or borrow they would be greatly appreciated!

And check this-- Do you like BBQ? Grace Cadets Club #3352 is going to have a fundraiser for fabulous secret recipe BBQ sauce. Watch for it – coming in May



Mary Nasca

## CHILDREN AT THE TABLE



As you know, the Elders have been working on a couple of proposals that were initiated through the Worship Committee, both having to do with Communion. The first proposal has to do with the frequency of Communion. The second has to do with children at the Table.

At our April 14 meeting, the elders passed the motion to allow baptized children, under the direction of their parent(s) to participate in Communion. The process will be simple. According to the proposal:

Any baptized child who indicates to their parents that they love the Lord and that they want to participate in communion is eligible. Parents inform an elder or the pastor of their child's desire to participate, after which an elder and/or pastor and/or other Grace Church member would meet with the child and parent(s). This does not have to be a long meeting and may take place in the child's home or at church before or after worship. The object is neither to instruct nor to test the child's knowledge but simply to hear the child's expression of faith in whatever manner is appropriate for that child's level of development.

The elder or pastor will report to Council at their next meeting. The expression of faith will be entered into Council's minutes and be reported in the bulletin and announced during the next service at which communion is celebrated.

Every fall the church secretary will supply the elders with a list of children who have not yet made known their desire to participate. The elders or ministry staff are urged to contact the families of these children to express an invitation to receive the sacrament. We are excited about this initiative and believe it is consistent with the direction of the CRCNA. We are eager to have all of God's children, old and young alike, gather at His Table of Grace. So, with delight, we invite any families with children who desire to participate in the Lord's Supper to contact an elder or Pastor Jack.

Bob Crow, President of Elders