

A message from Edie Wiarda, chair of the Liberia Task Force

May 2015

(see also the Missionary Newsletter)

To My Friends on the Ann Arbor District Liberia Task Force (including my beloved Chelsea Mission Team):

I have been holding back on communications until I knew the exact status of the John Dean Town Project. As you know, the midwife trainings had to be halted due to the Ebola crisis. I now have SO MUCH GOOD NEWS that I fear it may be information overload! I will aim to be succinct.

1. As of May 10, **the World Health Organization has declared Liberia to be officially “Ebola free.”** There are still pockets of Ebola in Sierra Leone and Guinea, so caution remains. My sense is that the major factor in the successful turnaround has been the Liberians’ own public health and information outreach, to which the UMC has been a key contributor. I am so proud of their work!
2. **As of May 19, 2015, the Ann Arbor District has sent \$46,554.72 for the John Dean Town Project!** This is more than 50% of our goal of \$80,000. THANK YOU!!
3. As of March 31, my dear friend, **Victoria Tomah has resigned from the UMC Health Department.** I will sorely miss her, but I am delighted that **Mary Zigbuo**, GBGM Missionary with longtime ties to the Detroit Annual Conference, has been named Interim Health Department Coordinator. Mary is already on top of everything, and we are in good communication!
4. Mary is just back from a full day visit to John Dean Town. She met with RN Rebecca Senyon and School Principal Jerry Giah on May 7. Rebecca and Jerry are **“prepared and happy to organize the resumption of TBA training (in consultation with County Health Staff) by mid June.”** So the JDT Health Project is back in business!
5. **THERE IS NOW A “CAR ROAD” TO JOHN DEAN TOWN!** See the attached Missionary Newsletter from Mary Zigbuo dated April 2015; it includes a photo of Bishop and Mrs. Innis next to the construction site. It also has a picture of Principal Jerry and Nurse Rebecca, along with a description of some of Rebecca’s recent work.
6. **I hope to organize another VIM group to JDT, mostly likely in January 2016.** I work FT, and I fear I will not be able to handle the trip organizing on my own. I seek someone willing to serve as the VIM Team Leader. This person needs to have completed the day-long VIM Team Leader training, or be willing to do so soon. Please contact me ASAP if you are interested in going, and let me know if that includes possibly serving as Team Leader.
7. **The next UMC Liberia Partnership Summit will be held at Nardin Park UMC, in Farmington Hills, on November 13-14, 2015.** All are welcome! I just learned at our annual conference that the plan is to have Liberia-specific information and discussions on Friday, and presentations on Saturday from GBGM regarding their “50-50” Mission Initiative. This is an intentional response to the types of concerns raised in the books “Toxic Charity” and “When Helping Hurts.” Saturday is meant to be relevant and of interest to those doing global mission work, not just in Liberia. See <http://www.umcmision.org/Get-Involved/Partnerships/In-Mission-Together> and <http://www.umcmision.org/get-involved/partnerships/in-mission-together/50-Partnership-Covenant>.

8. **Rev. Roosevelt Goah, DS of St John River has gently asked if it might be possible for him to visit us**, as Rev. Jacob Nathan did in 2012. I think this is a super idea, and I am reaching out to Illinois Great Rivers Conference to see if we might co-fund his travel and stay. Please note that I do not know if there are any DAC resources to help with this, and my Ann Arbor District budget allows me perhaps \$500 in discretionary funds beyond what we traditionally send to our partner districts for District Conference expenses. You may get a future appeal from me in this regard. I have great respect for Rev Goah; having him here to itinerate would be phenomenal.
9. At Annual Conference, it was announced that the **DAC has so far contributed over \$1.6 million to Imagine No Malaria (INM), thus passing our pledge of \$1.5 million**. I had a chance to speak with Rev. Jack Amick, DAC clergy now appointed to UMCOR global crisis response. He indicates that INM increasingly is focusing on holistic health programs – including maternal and child health initiatives – as the best response to malaria. That is, just giving bed nets doesn't cut it. What's required are fulsome efforts to do public health outreach, especially with maternal and child health at the forefront. The takeaway is that the JDT program is entirely consistent with INM; it's just that it is being funded directly by us and not using INM funds.

This is all wonderful news, but still seems small in the context of the great heartbreak and challenges faced by our brothers and sisters. As Rev Goah recently emailed me, "Things are really tough due to the Ebola crisis. Ebola crippled our entire economy and our human dignity."

Our Liberian friends are doing God's work. It is a great blessing to be able to support them.

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