



FRANCISCAN WORKS + LIBERIA MISSION | DECEMBER 2023

CHRISTMAS NEWSLETTER



Merry Christmas from all of us at Franciscan Works and Liberia Mission! We are so grateful for your prayers, generosity, and for the many ways you supported us during this special 20th anniversary year for Liberia Mission! May the peace and joy of Christ be with you this Christmas season.

We are thrilled to announce exciting new leadership changes for Franciscan Works and Liberia Mission, effective January 2024. John Young, the current director of Liberia Mission, will be returning home to the states after living in Liberia for over eight years. He will become the Executive Director of Franciscan Works. Mr. Joseph Kulah, Jr., current Assistant Director of Liberia Mission, will become Director of Liberia Mission and Mr. Flomo R. Kerkula, current Chief Financial Officer and former residential beneficiary, will become Assistant Director.

A Message From John Young

I have spent eight-and-a-half years living in Liberia. I served as a missionary at the Cenacolo Community for three years. After a short stint in the United States, one filled with an intense craving to return to Liberia, I began my five and a half year adventure at Liberia Mission as Communications and Operations Officer. I became Director of Liberia Mission in February 2020, shortly before the COVID-19 Pandemic. Grateful for my experience at Cenacolo during the Ebola epidemic of 2014, I did my best to be a leader. In a way only God can make possible, Liberia Mission crafts leaders not only out of its beneficiaries, but also of its staff and missionary servants.



Liberia Mission has taught me the importance of “God - Education - Work” and has equipped me with the tools to become a future leader for my own country and the world



Mr. Kerkula (left) and Mr. Kulah

at large. It has done the same for Mr. Joseph Kulah and Mr. Flomo R. Kerkula. Mr. Kulah began as a classroom teacher in 2014, and Mr. Kerkula came on the Mission as a residential beneficiary in 2008. Liberia Mission has made good, honest, and transparent leaders of them both, and I have full confidence in their abilities to lead Liberia Mission

throughout its next chapter. As for myself, I will join Franciscan Works as its new Executive Director. Ready to come home, I am also ready for this new challenge that lies ahead of me. After eight-and-a-half years of high highs and low lows, I unashamedly profess my love for Liberia and its people. In fact, I’m engaged to one.

Franciscan Works and Liberia Mission may be two legally separate organizations, but spiritually they are one combined sign of God’s love for the poorest of the poor in Liberia. I want to thank the Franciscan Works Board of Directors and all of the sponsors, donors, and benefactors who have given us the resources to carry out our mission. I also want to thank the people of Liberia: our beneficiaries, employees, and friends. There are so many others to thank as well-my fiancée, Keren!-but I will conclude with my gratitude to the Triune God; the Father who loves and cares for me; the Son who is my Savior and died that I might have eternal life; and the Holy Spirit, the love of the Father and Son who lives and moves through me, making it possible that I might be able to do anything that can be called “good.”

20th Anniversary Celebration

November 3, 2023, marked the official 20th anniversary of Liberia Mission! The students and staff celebrated with food, music, and swimming at Wulki Farm. The BIG celebration took place on November 5th. It began by putting God first: Fr. Varfee, a Franciscan Works Board member, concelebrated the Holy Mass with Fr. Yao, SVD, our dedicated parish priest. The chapel was packed with guests that included missionaries, prominent Liberians, and members from St. Francis Xavier Outstation and Immaculate Conception Parish. The younger residential students learned festive liturgical dances that are a feature of special Eucharistic celebrations.



After Mass, Director John Young made the official announcement that Assistant Director, Mr. Joseph S. Kulah, Jr. would ascend to the position of Director and Flomo R. Kerkula would become Assistant Director, while also maintaining his CFO duties—a shining example of the kind of leader Liberia Mission strives to cultivate for the country. Then, unbeknownst to all present, Director John Young proposed to his girlfriend, Keren Weedor, in front of a packed chapel! A local jazz band played music as guests found their seats for the outdoor program. After months of practicing, a group of students entertained the crowd with traditional Liberian cultural dances. As guests feasted on pork fried rice and barbeque (both made with meat harvested from the Mission's pigs and cows), students, dressed in traditional Liberian clothing and wearing Liberian make-up, told stories of love, loss, and the thrill of the hunt through the art of dance. Liberia Mission's 20th anniversary celebration was one for the books. All glory to God!



Residential Students in Need of Sponsors

This year, Liberia Mission welcomed four new residential beneficiaries. Although the children's backgrounds are filled with pain, grief, and injustice, Liberia Mission has been able to provide them with a safe and loving home in which they can flourish.

James (11) and Mary (13) are

brother and sister. The Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary brought Mary and James' case to Liberia Mission, which required immediate attention. On May 21, Mary and James became a part of the Liberia Mission family. Sister Anne and Sister Bridget, two Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary, had the opportunity to attend the 20th anniversary celebration, and they were so grateful to see James and Mary dancing, smiling, and living life to the fullest.



Dalubo (7) and James (11) are orphaned brothers. They

were living with their older brother, Samuel, who suffered a tragic car accident that left him paralyzed. Liberia Mission recently took them in as residential beneficiaries. **Please consider supporting these children as a sponsor!** Sponsors play a crucial role in the lives of students. When you sponsor a child, you provide them with stability through a Catholic education, a loving home, nutritious meals, medical care, and support as they grow. Visit tinyurl.com/FWSponsorship to learn more, or scan the QR code.



Feeding the Community with MannaPack Rice



Liberia Mission recently received a generous donation of MannaPack rice from the nonprofit ministry Cross Catholic Outreach! Aided by organizations that donate food, medicine, construction materials, and other much-needed supplies, Cross Catholic Outreach's goal is to ship containers, free of charge, to a partner's doorstep. The MannaPack rice is provided to Cross Catholic Outreach by Feed My Starving Children, a Minneapolis-based organization that fights global hunger. In September, Liberia Mission received 1,260 boxes of MannaPack rice. With each box containing 36 packs, that's 5,760 packs of rice. Each pack contains 6 servings, totaling 34,560 servings of healthy food!

In addition to feeding the students on Liberia Mission, it has been a blessing for the local community. Liberia Mission has already happily shared over 230 boxes to various individuals and organizations, including the poorest of the poor in their community. The students, house parents, and staff of Liberia Mission recently walked 45 minutes through flooded roads to Weah's Town, an isolated village, where they prayed with the residents and shared the rice. Thank you, Cross Catholic Outreach, for feeding those in need!

St. Anthony's Early Learning Center



Over the summer, renovations were made to Liberia Mission's former girls' dormitory to make way for an Early Learning Center! The old dormitory is now transformed into a safe and educationally conducive environment for the youngest students at St. Anthony of Padua Catholic School. The Early Learning Center officially opened on September 5th, 2023. The K-1 and K-2 students were moved into this new facility. Additionally, Liberia Mission now offers an "ABC" class which is comparable to preschool in the United States. This class gives children ages 4-5 the opportunity to learn the letters of the alphabet, colors, shapes, and other fundamentals that will jump start their educational journey. **However, we are still \$3,700 short of our fundraising goal for a playground on the Early Learning Center.** A playground helps children learn to share and gives them an outlet to be active and social. Please help us build a playground for St. Anthony's youngest students. We can already hear their laughter! Donate by visiting tinyurl.com/liberiamissionplayground or scan the QR code.



New Computer Lab

Liberia Mission's new computer lab is yet another example of how generously God provides for His children. The computer lab at St. Anthony of Padua School had descended into a regrettable state of operation. While the computer instructor, Mr. Emmanuel Beyan, was doing his best to teach students about computers, he was hindered by the fact that only a handful of laptops remained operational. The computer lab also required a much-needed, yet costly, physical restoration.

Our prayers were answered in the form of a \$15,000 grant from the Neeb Family Foundation that allowed Liberia Mission to purchase 45 brand-new computers!



Liberia Mission renovated the computer lab with a modern set-up that will provide computer literacy education for 4th–9th graders for years to come. They followed a common model used in computer labs throughout the country in which all students operate off a main server, and the instructor has control over and supervision of each student's workstation. The functioning computer lab differentiates St. Anthony of Padua Catholic School from all others in the surrounding area, equipping students with standard computer skills that can translate into jobs in their future.

The Mission also received electricity from the Liberian Electricity Corporation at the same time they received the computer grant. This allows the Mission to have reliable and inexpensive electricity provided by Liberia's brand-new power grid.

Teacher Spotlight: Enoch K. Nuah



Enoch K. Nuah is the Vice Principal for Instruction at St. Anthony of Padua Catholic School on Liberia Mission. He has had various teaching roles at St. Anthony's throughout the years, from Civics to Spelling. Mission Director John Young recently interviewed Enoch:

What do you love about teaching? I love teaching because of the impact it can have on the next generation. After the war, I knew I wanted to be a teacher in order to mold the next generation, which was in desperate need of education. I have seen all of this come true during my time at St. Anthony's.

What do you like most about St. Anthony of Padua? The working culture at St. Anthony's is encouraging. I love the punctuality of teachers, the serious leadership, and the periodic teacher training workshops on campus. The quality of the school, the educational system – everything is unique. I would not feel comfortable going somewhere else.

When did you know you wanted to be a teacher? During my junior and senior years in high school, I conducted study classes for my community. It was there that I developed my passion for teaching. Being a teacher is not so much about money—because the money is not much—but it's about service and sacrifice and making changes in the society.

Anything else? I want to also say thank you to the donors, benefactors, and supporters of our Mission and school. Through your efforts, our children get the best education. We the teachers and staff also earn the means to provide for our families. Thank you so much, and God bless!

New Security Fence for Girls' Homes

Liberia Mission's female residential beneficiaries have been living in their new homes for over 14 months now, and they love them! The location of the new homes are much further back from the highway and noise of Blacktom Town, but that also means that the houses are more isolated. Liberia Mission employs two security guards, 24 hours a day. However, the houses lacked a protective wall to maximize the beneficiaries' safety from thieves. Thanks to a generous grant, Liberia Mission recently constructed a combination concrete wall/chain link fence.



A chain link fence secures the porches so that students are able to enjoy nature while being protected. A concrete wall was built to separate the two houses, giving each its unique space. At the moment, the younger girls occupy one house, while our older ones occupy the other. In the future, Liberia Mission plans to move the male beneficiaries into one of the houses when the old boys' dormitory is renovated for another purpose. This requires each house to be suitably partitioned in such a way that male and female beneficiaries will be in completely separate environments.



The most important outcome of all is that our students can live safely in their new homes. We thank our donors, and we thank God for this wonderful addition to our Mission!

Support the Children of Liberia Mission this Christmas

Please consider donating to Liberia Mission's Christmas fund to provide gifts for residential students on the Mission, or consider donating clean water, medical care, food, and other necessities! Visit our Christmas shop for more ideas: tinyurl.com/ChristmasShop2023



Liberia Mission recently installed 40 solar-powered street lights all throughout the campus. Each 200W light comes equipped with a solar panel, sensor, and installation materials. During the day the panel charges a battery in the light; when the sun goes down, a sensor detects that darkness has fallen, and the light automatically switches on and lasts all night. When day comes, it switches off, and the process cycles again. These lights have had a huge impact on the Mission's security at night. The lights have been strategically positioned in locations that were previously pitch-black. Our night-time security guards are overjoyed that they now have a powerful ally in protecting our students and staff.



Additionally, our girls have a brightly lit path that guides them to and from their homes that are located at the back of the Mission's property. Their fears of walking in the dark have been alleviated, and they are so grateful to the benefactors who, through their generous donations, allowed us to purchase this much-needed addition to the Mission's infrastructure.



20 Years of Hope Virtual Fall Fundraiser Results

We can't thank you all enough for making our "20 Years of Hope" Virtual Fall Fundraiser a huge success on September 30th! With the generous support of numerous donors, we raised over \$65,000! For those unable to join us, and for those who simply want to re-live the magic of the event, we've included a link below to the recording of "20 Years of Hope" that was live streamed on 9/30/23.



tinyurl.com/20YearsofHopeRecording



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