

Grace Orphanage

Working with Orphans, Widows and Widowers, Strengthening Communities in West Africa

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Greetings Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

Welcome to our first edition of **Grace Connection**, Grace Orphanage's quarterly newsletter. I will cover in this edition my recent trip to Togo, West Africa.

The Republic of Togo

The **Republic of Togo** is a country in West Africa bordering **Ghana** to the west, **Benin** to the east and **Burkina Faso** to the north. It extends south to the **Gulf of Guinea**, on which the capital Lomé is located. The official language is French. **Ewe** and **Kabye** are the two main local languages. Togo is one of the poorest countries on earth.

Togo's size is just less than 57,000 square kilometers (22,000 square miles). It has a population of more than 6,100,000 people, which is dependent mainly on agriculture. 65% of the population lives in rural villages dedicated to agriculture or pastures. Togo is a sub-tropical, sub-Saharan country. Togo gained its independence from France on April 27, 1960.

Togo's economy is heavily dependent on both commercial and subsistence agriculture, which provides employment for 65% of the labor force. Cotton, coffee, and cocoa together generate about 30% of export earnings. Togo is self-sufficient in basic food goods when harvests are normal, with occasional regional supply difficulties. In the industrial sector, phosphates mining is no longer the most important activity, as cement and clinker export to neighboring countries have taken over. It has suffered from the collapse of world phosphate prices, increased foreign competition and financial problems. Togo's Gross National Income (GNI) per capita is \$380 (World Bank, 2005).

2009 Missionary Field Trip to Togo

I was the last one of a group of missionaries from **Middle Smithfield Presbyterian Church (MSPC)** who went to Togo late February/early March 2009. Led by **Pastor Jeff Brower**, the Team includes **Wayne Lanese, Carolyn Lanese, Komi Klu, and Diane Whitcomb**. Komi and Diane were in charge of Microfinance and medical supplies and clinic, respectively. Wayne led the Audit Team whereas Carolyn coordinated the Music Ministry. I was in charge of Education. Pastor Jeff was, off course, responsible of spiritual growth.

I arrived in Accra, Ghana on February 25th after over 11 hours of direct flight. I spent a couple of days in Accra meeting with local leaders and businessmen before heading to Lomé, Togo. The four-hour road trip to Togo was uneventful.

Upon my arrival to Togo, I headed straight to the village of **Agome-Tomegbe** where most of the orphans

live. Agome-Tomegbe is about 10 miles from Kpalime, the nearest biggest city.

My Trip to Southern Togo

First, I met with **Mr. Martin Dagadzi**, the local Children's Sponsoring Program Coordinator. We reviewed the program and discussed how to make it the most efficient and effective possible.

Then, I met with **Mr. Woye** and **Mr. Papapi**, respectively the School Principals of the Presbyterian and Government Elementary Schools. The topic of our discussion includes the orphans' performance at school and wellbeing, and the challenges they were facing.

Third, I had a private meeting with all the orphans to know them better, learn about their concerns, hope and aspirations. All of the orphans agreed that their parents or guardians gave them lunch money every weekday. Some of the kids mentioned that sometimes, they did not have soap and had to wash their school uniforms in the river without soap. Most of the kids have one uniform and wash it on Wednesdays (there is half-day school on Wednesdays) afternoon and on Saturdays or Sundays.

The kids would like to be ministers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, teachers, or builders when they grow up. I promised them we would do whatever it would take to help them accomplish their dreams and their God-given potential.

I also met privately with the parents and guardians. They explained to me how they spent the money they received and how teachers and principals can work together with them so that the orphans succeed in school.

Lastly, I had a group meeting with the Program Coordinator, the two school principals, the orphans, and their parents and guardians. I brought forth the concerns and suggestions made by the various stakeholders. This brain storming helped us identify ways on making this program a success.

My Trip to Northern Togo

My trip to Northern Togo was made possible, thanks to **Pastor Luther Degbovi**, Togo Evangelical Presbyterian Church's Synod Clerk. The Synod Clerk is the second-in-command at Togo EP Church, just behind the Moderator. Pastor Degbovi provided me with a truck and a chauffeur. Also, he allowed **Dr Bertille Maditoma**, a Minister in Charge of the Division of Children, Women and Social Services at Togo EP Church- to accompany me.

By contrast to Southern Togo which has a sub-tropical climate, the northern part of Togo is more arid and characterized by a gently rolling savanna. There is no doubt life in Northern Togo is much harder than in Southern Togo.

I visited the following villages and cities: **Kara, Kpagouda, Pya, and Sotouboua**. The District Inspector, District Pastor, and District Secretary assisted us greatly.

The orphans, their parents, the school children, and the neighbors gave us a truly authentic and warm welcome. I had a one-on-one and open conversation with the orphans and their parents. Some widows advised they had to rely on reselling vegetables on road side markets, hair braiding, selling firewood, or farm on lands they do not own in order to take care of the orphans.

After talking with they widows, God gave me the idea to start an **Assistance Program for Widows and Widowers (APW)**. In addition to assisting financially the orphans, helping the widows and

widowers become self-sufficient will be a good way of taking care of the orphans, in the long run.

Some of the kids have serious medical problems. Some of them are traumatized by the loss of their parents. In particular, one of the kids -a six-grader-became introverted and started stuttering suddenly when his father-a minister at the local Evangelical Presbyterian Church- passed away suddenly after a short illness. This child was in a dire need of psychological treatment but did not see a doctor, because his mother could not afford it.

Water and firewood -the main source of energy- are scarce in Northern Togo. Sometimes, women and children had to walk up to ten miles each way in order to get water or firewood. Most of the wells dried up during my trip to Northern Togo.

No electricity or running water

All the villages I visited have no electricity, running water or medical facilities. Malaria is rampant. Diabetes also is on the rise. Painkillers, malaria pills, anti-diarrhea pills are luxury villagers could not afford. A fever, a stomach ache, a foot infection could quickly become fatal, especially for the little ones.

Despite all this hardship, local people are quick to smile and are eager to give you everything they have in order to make you feel “at home”. African hospitality is truly amazing.

Christmas 2008

Thanks to your generous support we bought new clothes for all the orphans in December 2008, just in time for Christmas. You may have received the picture of the kids in their new outfits by now. Also, they sung Christmas carols.

Thank You Note

All the orphans, their parents and guardians, the school principals, the Program Coordinator in Togo, and I would like to extend our heartfelt thank you to all the sponsors who came to the rescue of the orphans in time of need. “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” **Mathew 25:40**

Next edition of Grace Connection

We will cover the educational system and the state of orphanages in Togo in the next edition of Grace Connection. Stay tuned!

Until then, may the Lord richly and abundantly bless you.

Koffi Klu

Your Brother in Christ,