

Dear Friends,

In part 1 of this article describing our trip to the USA, I mentioned that one of the reasons for Julie and I to return to Ohio was for us to join the First Lutheran Congregation to move into the new building & to begin worship services and other celebrations. We were so honored to help with the moving process and join the congregation to worship for the first time in the new building on November 19th! We had so hoped to be present for the Dedication of the Building and be part of the Pastor Jimmy's last Sunday with the congregation on December 10th. It made our hearts sad to miss Pastor Jimmy Madsen give his valedictory sermon and the farewell reception in his honor, to signal the beginning of his retirement from his ministry in the church.

But we had to leave without being part of the Dedication, and Pastor Jimmy's retirement party because we needed to return to Ghana on November 26. Julie's leave from work expired November 27 and we couldn't afford to have her penalized for not reporting back to her secretarial job at the school in Accra.

This trip to the USA, although shorter in duration than we wished, did bring us great joy. It began on October 2, 2017 in New Braunfels, Texas, where we were able to renew our friendship with the Magnesses, the Reinhardts, and other members of the Men's Bible Class of St. Paul's Lutheran Church of New Braunfels. These are friends I met 2013, who love Akrapa and the mission, and I was so happy to see again. We had other adventures in Texas which I wrote about in my last article.

Back in Lorain, Ohio, at First Lutheran I was invited by Pastor Rosy Rivera, to preach at the main service on October 22nd. The next Sunday, the 29th I was invited to do a presentation at the Sunday School after the worship service. This was well received by our congregation who asked many thoughtful questions. The days to come were spent visiting old and new friends who made us feel so much at home with the warmth of their company.

On October 24th, Julie and I were able to meet with the Ghana committee, and begin making some future plans for the mission in Akrapa, Ghana.

Many wonderful visits followed, starting at Shorehaven Lutheran Church, Euclid, Ohio, on November 5. This is the Church of Christa and Alan Just, who have been partners of the mission since 1994. We spent some time with the Justs and returned to Lorain, after doing a presentation at the church during Sunday School. I also gave a Mission Statement during the offertory time at the main service. In the coming days Julie and I attended Bible studies of friends and other social events.

Since 2009, we have had friends from the congregation, and the Pastors of The Chapel, in Sandusky. We were honored by an invitation to visit with them on November 11th. This is where Kristen Penton Anthony, co-chair the Ghana committee and husband, Logan, attend church. We shared the mission with both old and new friends, and were graced by their continued interest in what God is doing with us in Akrapa.

November 12th was a great day at Bethesda on the Bay Lutheran Church, where I preached at both services and did a presentation for their Sunday School class. We enjoyed meeting their amazing Pastor and congregation very much.

On November 17th, Michelle Milchen graciously hosted a (pre)Thanksgiving dinner in her home for Julie and me, the Ghana Committee, and members of Church Council who were able to attend. Pastor Norva Ross and her daughter Brittney joined a group of eight to visit Ghana in the summer of 2008 and has since been a friend. We joined her church at an 'appreciation service' held in her honor on November 18th.

Other members of the Ghana Committee, congregation, family and friends from the community lovingly picked us up, took us to their homes or out to amazing lunches and dinners at restaurants, or to Bible study. I wish I could name each and every one of you, but know in our hearts that we thank you and love you!

The days suddenly ended, and we finally had to say goodbye to friends and to First Lutheran, to return to Ghana. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Ghana Committee and every single person who gave or helped in any way, for the opportunity they afforded us to come to the USA and share the Mission of Akrapa, Ghana.

Blessings, Pastor Ben & Julie