

Trusting Jesus, that is all - Part 2

Dear Friends,

This article is a continuation - beginning with my articles from April and May of 2020. The global pandemic, Coronavirus (COVID-19), has been raging across the globe since late December/early January. I have been discussing its effects on Ghana -personally, as a nation, and for our mission - in my last few articles. If you have not had the chance to read April and May, please check out the 'Ghana Archive' on First Lutheran's website.

In the last two articles I tried to describe the Ghanaian situation regarding the pandemic so you would see the contrast of how we are being affected versus the American situation. The contrast zeroes with respect to the fact that this pandemic has changed the entire world, in terms of how it is affecting families, societies, and nations, yet causing particular problems and concerns from nation to nation. In the last two articles I tried to give you an idea about the mental and spiritual condition of myself, my family and the entire nation.

However, the contrast changes with perspective and data on cases and how the pandemic is affecting us economically and socially. As I am writing this article for you, Ghana's current data on COVID-19 is listed below. This information comes from an app that we use, that gives us minute by minute tracking of the number of cases worldwide and here in Ghana. Sadly, by the time you read this some of these numbers will have changed. We also know that the United States has done more coronavirus testing than any other country in the entire world, so your numbers will always appear higher.

Ghana

Confirmed cases - 9,638

Deaths - 44

Recovered - 3,636

United States

Confirmed cases - 1,920,904

Deaths - 109,901

Recovered - 526,000

Regardless of location, worldwide, the loss of any human life is **not** to be taken for granted, so we are concerned that your country is losing precious lives, even as my country is also losing precious lives.

Many of the lives lost are parents, fathers and mothers, who are leaving behind already vulnerable children. The children's lives will be so negatively affected that they are going to struggle to get back and some might not ever be restored. This is the reason why as a nation Ghana has called its citizens to prayer and fasting. That fast is continuing, nationwide, even though it is no longer under the government's initiative. The *faith communities of Ghana* (Christians, Muslims, and other faith based organizations) continue to encourage their adherents to prayer and fasting.

How has this pandemic affected our lives in Ghana?

Economy

Let me begin first of all with the economic situation. Unlike the situation in some countries where the local or federal governments are making provisions for stimulus packages for individuals or unemployment benefits, we don't have anything like that at all. And that is where Ghana is hit hard, economically, by the pandemic, apart from being affected by it, health wise.

Our economy, for the most part is the *subsistence* type, even though it has changed some with the times, to meet global standards. Many of our Ghanaian folk live on a day-to-day basis in the retailing business. The women will go to the market everyday; the artisans and apprentices will go out for daily jobs. So each day they need to have new job security.

I want to look at our challenges in some detail. In the recent articles I hinted that the lockdown and social restrictions will hurt our circumstance severely, and they have.

Social Distancing

Let me address this from my perspective of the typical Ghanaian attitude about **social distancing**. If you were to come into our terrain, into our situation (which will be similar in most third world countries) you will notice that people are literally rubbing and brushing against one another for space and in the meeting of our needs. The artisan, looking for a job or who has a job, and the woman who has brought her items to sell at the market, *has* to necessarily touch, push, somebody to get to get his/her daily sustenance. Simply put, social distancing is something almost 80% of Ghanaians have difficulty adhering to. Lives are hurting so much.

Food Needs

When I go to Akrampa I see the pain in the eyes of the people. They are hoping that I will give them food - as some institutions are doing for some communities by their policies of social interventions - but I am unable to do so. They view this as insensitivity, when they look back to all the years of social interventions that we have provided for them. I explained that you are also *suffering under the pandemic*, and that has raised issues for you as well. The mission budget currently cannot feed the entire village, and has only ever had a plan in place to feed the school children.

This pandemic has made things worse in regard to food need, such that some institutions have lifted their social intervention policies and brought food into other communities. The purpose for this move was in response to the reasoning that people were using for ignoring the COVID-19 protocols and restrictions. Many say that if they stayed home they would starve and die.

This is a major challenge to our Mission. In my reports to the Ghana Committee, I report that sometimes money is given to distressed and vulnerable homes in Akrampa so they can bear the burden of sending their children to school. This gesture has only benefited a handful of homes, the really vulnerable, and in the end the children from those homes will continue to come to school to secure their future. This is a different issue that we now face. Now all of the homes and families in Akrampa have become seriously vulnerable.

Health

Before the pandemic people with symptoms of the common cold, malaria and similar health issues were received at the clinics and treated accordingly. The situation is **not** the same since the pandemic.

I am personally an example of the changes. In the last month, I have had issues with cold and malaria, which stressed me out severely. Because of the symptomatic challenges & similarities I was given the wrong medication and but for the timely intervention of a pharmacist, I would have suffered serious consequences.

Many health institutions are paranoid because some of our front line health care workers in the hospitals, are being affected by coronavirus (as I read happening all over the world). Because of this you are either turned away or hastily attended to, resulting in my unfortunate experience. This has led to the locals, like the people of Akrampa, to resort to alternate treatments or staying home, not knowing what to do. The health situation is confusing and I am helpless because even I don't have any solution, since it involves money and I don't have it.

Social issues

Under this topic I'd like to discuss funerals/burials, marriages, baptisms, and other related social events. Burial ceremonies are now restricted to 25 people or less, and the same applies to marriages. Burial services are no longer done in churches, nor in undertaker/funeral homes. Indeed, since restrictions were placed in place in March, corpses are now taken to the cemetery directly from the morgues. And services are done graveside. I assisted in one such ceremony when I was invited by a ministerial friend. At the cemetery there were less than 10 family members, and even there, my friend asked the family to spread out and not to be too close to him. He insisted that he alone should stay at the grave and do what he needed to do. I was about 2 meters away, as well. I was invited by him to say a prayer as he did the committal.

For christenings and baptisms the new guidelines say that the priests should not touch the babies, the parents alone should carry their own children. The Christian Council of Ghana is also advocating that baptisms be suspended until further notice.

Marriages (weddings) may be held in churches, but with only 25 people or less. Normally, in the Ghanaian situations, the marriage starts in the family home before it is brought to the church for a matrimonial service. In the family home, for the traditional ceremony, it's a huge thing where family members travel from far and near to participate in the 'giving away in marriage' of the sister or brother. Marriages are usually very large and very happy celebrations. These restrictions have almost cancelled the ceremonies. Many marriages have been put on hold: whether in the family or in the church.

If you are interested in learning more about what social gatherings looked like in Ghana BEFORE the pandemic, please see the online 'Ghana Archive'. Scroll down the Archive and look for my articles from February, March, April, May and June from the year of 2015.

Transportation

On this topic I am looking at public means of transport, not individually owned cars. Ghana uses small (to large) buses to transport people from place to place. Many of the buses are small like ford buses that before the restrictions carried not more than 15 passengers. For any such vehicle with that capacity they are now being asked to take about a third of the full load, so for a 15-passenger bus it has to have 5 passengers. The owners are distressed by the cost of operations, and are complaining that the cost of the fuel and time spent has not changed but now they are not able to make the same profit with far less passengers. This has led to many of them breaking the law and the authorities will not arrest them, even though they are putting the passengers at risk.

For the same reason of the cost of fuel in their operations, the vehicles that transport food, and other goods to the market are charging more - some twice as much - for the freight and the consumer ends up paying more.

This is affecting us all so much, especially with the salaries remaining the same.
I can only say, we are trusting Jesus, that is all.

Updates

Please keep our mission in Akrampa, and all of Ghana in your prayers.

If you have missed any of my articles or fallen behind in reading our mission news, please see the First Lutheran website to read all of my articles.

www.firstlutheranlorain.org >Outreach >Ghana Mission >Ghana Archive

Blessings, Pastor Ben