

Dear Friends,

In the first week of October 2017, as this *Lectern* arrives at your home, I'm pleased to announce that my wife, Julie and I will be in Texas! We're looking forward to being able to visit with old friends and also the chance to make new friends. Then by mid-October we will be back in Ohio to see everyone at FLC and our other Ohio friends. Julie has not been back to the USA since 2003. We are both excited to spend time with all of you!

In my September article, I described the excitement, the joy and celebration of achievement that took place in Akrampa, as a result of the first ever Graduation Ceremony for the students. In the past the school has had to send children above 6th Grade to a junior high school outside of Akrampa, a distance of almost 5 kilometers. In 2015, the government decided to put up a block of classrooms to start a junior high school on the same compound in Akrampa, to prevent the children from having to walk to school along the main highway. Several petitions helped to make this a reality, and to stop the children from becoming victims of traffic accidents.

A little bit of going back into the history of the development of the Akrampa School, I believe should bring my readers into perspective. Our mission together began in 1994 after I returned home from Ohio. Pastor Jimmy came to Ghana and dedicated the Mission in 1995! Our school started with 18 children, a motley of ages, with some even too old to be in Grade 3, yet desiring to be in school. In Ghana, children may start primary education at 5 years old, but most people send their children to start when they are 6 years of age. I noticed a few of the children who would cry, running after their friends and brothers and sisters when they left the village to go to school in the big town, an indication that they also wished to go to school. For me, it was sufficient reason to provide the village with a school of their own. This was the beginning of the first ever school in Akrampa.

So, we built a shed, from sticks and branches of the palm trees and Mercy Abbeyquaye was the first teacher. In Ghana, female teachers are respectfully addressed as 'Madam'. This is how Mercy has become known to all in the village. Nobody called her by her name, only addressed as 'Madam'. She was asked to do this because she was a retired teacher and lived in the vicinity, while I lived in Saltpond, and couldn't come early enough myself, to teach. Mercy is still one of the most important people in helping our mission school and breakfast program run efficiently.

This 'infant' school under the 'palm branches shed', at various times admitted some older girls - one of whom was 21 years old at the time - who really wanted to 'catch up' with what they thought was missing in their lives because they never went to school. All of them, unfortunately, couldn't stand the challenge of sitting among students who could actually be their children, so they left school to go and get married!!

The shed school 'population' began to increase, and we had to do two sessions in that structure for two distinctive classes - Kindergarten and primary (1 & 2) raising the necessity of adding on the classroom, and changing the structure from palm branches to a real cement building. This we did, by ourselves: the men and fathers making the bricks with the women bringing the water and sometimes to replenish the sand for the bricks with loads of it carried in big pans on their heads. The first three-room block for the first three classes of the primary was built over three years (1999 to 2001)- a room per year. Then we had to add three more classrooms to have a complete 6-room block for the primary school because we didn't want the tiny children to walk the over four kilometers to school in the town, risking their lives on the highway. In 2005, Pastor Woody came to Ghana and dedicated the School with the Bishop of the Anglican Church and local authorities.

By the close of 2007, we had a building of six classrooms that made the primary school. And now, Akrampa has its own junior high school so the children can receive a full basic education all on the same compound. So Akrampa school has reason to celebrate its existence, culminating this year in the first Graduation Ceremony of Junior High School students.

We give thanks to God for his mercies and provisions, and we are grateful for the continued support of First Lutheran Church of Lorain, Ohio, and our many other friends from Ohio and Texas. We could not do any of this without you. The people of Akrampa and I pray that your love, prayers and financial support will continue for many years to come.

Blessings,
Pastor Ben