

September 2018

Letter #99

Summer in Akrampa

Dear Friends,

As children in the USA head back to school, I'd like to give you an update on summer in Ak-rampa and what that looks like for our school children, teachers and myself. This summer I was blessed to attend a Pastors' Retreat for 6 days. It was in the town of Takoradi, the second seaport of Ghana, 171 miles from Accra. God Bless the congregation of FLC for my new vehicle that made this possible! (The old Jeep would never have allowed me to travel that far.) This retreat was organized for Pastors from all churches and denominations who are in Rural Ministry. It was an opportunity that I did not want to miss. The Retreat was a refreshing experience, to learn from the facilitators and to share the experiences and the challenges that all Pastors face. A couple of our shared challenges are the poor road networks in the rural areas (like Akrampa) and the acute lack of logistics for ministry. I gained a lot of information to help our mission in Akrampa.

The summer months (June, July, August) fall into the rainy season for Ghana, and during this period the schools are allowed to go on vacation so the children can help their parents and families on their farms. Students will return to school in September. The children who help their parents on the farm are a real help and blessing to their homes. The lands on which they eke out their living have over the years suffered so much degradation because of deforestation by individuals or groups. The deforestation has caused a great loss of topsoil. The trees provided shade that protected the minerals in the soil and the root system held together the structure of the soil for it to be productive.

The children who are available during vacation provide valuable & important help. Some of the aging parents that are failing in strength are unable to till the land, (going below the topsoil to loosen it for cultivation); or to remove the intimidating stumps and rocks. This is needed to condition the soil for the cultivation of crops and the production of food for the home and the community. Of course, during the weekends the children work on the farms, but it is when school is on summer break that they have more time to work on the land.

Some of the children use the opportunity the vacation avails to find some menial jobs so they can make money for themselves for when school opens for the new academic year. These children try to provide for themselves because their parents are unable to finance their education. Since the beginning of the 2017/2018 academic year, the government instituted "fee-free" education for all school going children, but provision of needed materials like books and clothing are still the responsibility of parents. Some of the children seek employment with people who take on children for all kinds of labor needs: farm hands, peddlers of commodities on the streets, and house chores for some households.

Sometimes when these children find that they are making money, they tend to drop out of school and stay on the jobs. We do NOT encourage this, but sometimes these children then become part of the phenomenon I have mentioned in earlier articles, known as "street children." It is very sad.

The teachers are also off from school during the summer. Some of the female teachers may do some trading of goods, and the male teachers may work for a private employer or tend to their own farms. But they all look forward to the beginning of the school year. Their main occupation is teaching and they love it. Their salary is paid by the government during the term that school is in session.

I think that our very first raised school garden for this season has scored a 70 percent success. That, for me, is quite significant. The children now know that food can be grown not only in the bush, but also close to home. Teaching the children to create a new way to garden is wonderful. It is a technique that could help them at home, and as we taught it in the classroom it became a good tool both for students and teachers. My disappointment is with the 10" okra seeds that I brought from Waco, Texas during our last trip to the USA. It started well, and we had a couple of buds that grew to the 10" sizes but that was all. We didn't get any more. The beans, peppers, and tomatoes however brought smiles to the children's faces. The children are excited about it since this is the first time they have seen a garden created in a box that is producing fruit (food). We hope next season to have stronger seeds and

a more complete crop. Also, possibly another raised garden box for more food and more learning opportunities.

Summer vacation ends September 8th, and the students will return to school for a new academic year, which ends in early July. This will be the 2018/2019 academic year and becomes the second year of the introduction of "fee-free" education in Ghana. In preparation for the new year, Mercy and I will go to the market and buy the commodities like rice, oil, sugar, beans & rice and stock them for the appropriate time. Then we will be ready to feed the students breakfast.

In the last three years, the children in our primary school have been blessed with the provision of new school uniforms at the beginning of the academic year. This year, I didn't request giving for uniforms. There were two reasons for this: repairs to the school were more important, for the safety and security of the children, and as I looked at their current uniforms I thought they were still in good shape (except for new students in the kindergarten who have started school without uniforms.) I will write you soon about the Endowment Grant that blessed us with these much needed school repairs.

Each year since the breakfast program began, the population of the school has increased. The Kindergarten classes are where most of the new students are added. We may start this school year with close to 400 students between our K-6th mission school and the government-built junior high. Each year it is more of a challenge to feed the growing school population. We pray for your continued support of BOTH the General Ghana Fund and the Ghana Meal Fund!

Notwithstanding these challenges, school reopens with optimism and great joy of having all the continuing children return to school and new ones being added. The school is still growing strong and popular in the community as a result of the Meal (breakfast) Program and their participation in other local school social and sporting events.

Thank you!

Peace,

Pastor Ben

