

Dear Friends,

As the end of November draws near we are approaching the American holiday of Thanksgiving. Julie and I have had the pleasure of spending a few Thanksgiving holidays in Ohio with our friends throughout the years. While this is obviously not a holiday we celebrate in Ghana, I have come to love the traditions of it while here. This year, I thought that I would use my November article to **give thanks** for some of the **blessings** that have occurred during our 2024 trip to Ohio.

As most of you know, the main purpose of our trip to Ohio, this year, was to help with my medical care. And we were so grateful to Mercy Health (Lorain) for facilitating the Laminectomy Surgery on my lower back, on Aug. 29th. And as always, so thankful to **Pastor Jimmy** for hosting us in his home for almost 5 months.

For many years now, my eyes have been monitored by both American and Ghanaian doctors for slowly progressing cataracts in **both** of my eyes. The cataracts were at first small and not impacting my vision or daily life. But as many of you may have personally experienced, once the cataracts reach a certain point, they can be very detrimental to even basic vision. While in Ohio, Julie and I have both been blessed to receive eye care from **Dr. Eric Stocker, O.D.** in Amherst. During my check-up with Dr Stocker a couple months ago, he noted that my cataracts had reached a point where surgery to correct them was very necessary.

There were many challenges ahead of us in the way of hoping, praying, planning and trying to look for a way for me to be able to have cataract eye surgery while still in Ohio, and on such a short time frame. There were many people that helped us, talked with us, made calls for us, networked for us, and overall lent a hand in helping direct our planstoo many to name ...*you all know who you are* ...**Thank you!!**

Through the immense help of one of my friends and business contacts from home, in Ghana - and through Dr Stocker - we were able to arrange for my cataract surgery to happen in early November.

On November 13, 2024, **Dr. William F. Wiley M.D.**, of Avon Ohio, preformed the cataract surgery on **both** of my eyes, on the same day. Although most people have one eye done at a time, we opted to have both of my eyes done at the same time because of the literal timeframe of Julie and I flying home the second week of December. The doctors agreed that doing both eyes at the same time would give me the best chance of healing correctly before going home. Dr Wiley did a wonderful job on my surgery and Dr Stocker has been taking care of my post-op check-ups. Thank you to both doctors for amazing care!

I'd like to thank our longtime friend, and Chair of the Ghana Committee, **Kristen Anthony**, for her ongoing help with my articles. As many of you know my vision has been only slowly coming back post-cataract surgery; but reading, writing, & typing have been exceptionally difficult while recovering and healing from this surgery. Kristen and I have worked together since the *very beginning* on my monthly articles. She is my Editor, and we brainstorm ideas together in an effort to try to bring the most interesting topics and stories to you each month. *For my article this month*, she is helping me more than ever, by taking care of the *physical typing*, since seeing the screen & keyboard is still difficult during my healing process.

During our 2024 stay in Ohio, Julie and I have been very blessed by both old and new friends. We always look forward to spending time with the people that we love, and we look forward to making new connections.

We'd like to **welcome Pastor Shari Ayers** as the new Lead Pastor of **First Lutheran Church**. Julie and I were grateful to be in Ohio when she started at FLC and to be able to meet her in person immediately. The Ghana Committee and I are looking forward to working with Pastor Shari to continue with the excellent work of the mission and for her help and partnership to push it forward into the future.

Pastor Jimmy and I made some new friends and saw some old friends when we went to **Trinity Lutheran Church** in Vermilion recently. Pastor Jimmy was guest preaching there, and they invited me to come along. I was happy to be part of the service on a Sunday morning. Pastor Jimmy and I used the Sermon Time to share a "dialog" with Trinity's congregation about the history of the Ghana Mission and also some of the new projects we have been working on in Akrampa. Thank you, Trinity Lutheran for the invitation and hospitality!

Pastor Jimmy has taken Julie and I on a couple of small trips during this stay. One of our trips was to Pennsylvania, for a few days, to visit with an old friend from FLC, **Dave Loboda** - it was good to see him again after so long. The other one was a short, one day trip to meet up with Pastor Jimmy's brother **Gary & his wife, Shirley** to share a lunch and conversation. We enjoyed both of the trips and the time spent with these old friends and family.

We grieve the death of our friend **David Champnoise**. He was a former member of the Ghana Committee and also part of the group who came to Ghana on a mission trip years ago. David loved Ghana, as a country, and always joked that he wanted to move to Ghana when he retired. He was an advocate for the children of Akrampa ... and we send our love and sympathy to his wife, Sue, and their family.

Our social calendar filled up quickly with lunches and dinners shared with our **many friends from First Lutheran**. We have always cherished you ... the many friends we have made over the years from our "Ohio home" church of FLC. Julie and I thank all of you for inviting us into your homes or meeting us at restaurants to share a meal and fellowship. Pastor Jimmy, Julie & I were also blessed to be able to partake of visits with numerous other amazing friends also; **Ruthe Kinsler, Christa Just & Carol Radefeld**. Thank you, Ruthe, Christa & Carol for the time you took to be with us, the love you shared, and the support that you always give to us personally and to the Ghana Mission.

No visit to Ohio would be complete without being able to visit our partner congregation of **Bethesda on the Bay Lutheran Church**, in Bay Village. We were so happy and blessed to be able to make 3 visits to Bethesda, and spend time with all of the wonderful people of the Bethesda congregation and with **Pastor Angela**. Thank you, Bethesda, for all that you do, and how much you love our Ghana Mission!

An extremely special visit for us during *this trip* came at the end of November, when we were invited to the home of our dear friend, **Stan Johnson**, from Bethesda. **Stan, your life of service** to others and to missions across the world is an inspiration to all who know you. We thoroughly enjoyed listening to you tell us the stories of your life experiences and how intentional you are in the ways that you serve others, love people, and care for those around you, especially the Ghana Mission. WE all love you, Stan. --Thank you to everyone! --Blessings, Pastor Ben Wilson