Congregation of Christian Brothers
West Africa District

(GHANA, THE GAMBIA, LIBERIA AND SIERRA LEONE)

Wan Pot News

Monthly West African District News Publication

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"Be messengers of life in a time of death"

Pope Francis

The Gambia 1988

Ghana 2001

Liberia 1969

Sierra Leone 1985
EDITORIAL COMMENT

The Editorial team brings you Easter blessings as we continue to experience the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The month of April has been relatively quiet in terms of ministries and normal live activities. COVID 19 pandemic still remains a threat to the human race. Government restrictions, curfews and lockdowns seems to be the only strategy to curtail the spread of Corona virus pandemic. It is imperative that we reinforce deepening brotherhood in communities. Some communities have already created new ministries for themselves. Farming and gardening has now become the only active ministry for most brothers in West Africa District. In this edition, we will read much about the brother’s lives in communities and the unprecedented impact of COVID 19 on the lives of teenage girls, vulnerable people and countries in the world.

We wish all the Sierra Leonean Brothers and the entire people of Sierra Leone a happy 59 independent celebration.

We would like to thank all who contributed to our March. Your contributions are what makes Wan Pot very special. Kindly continue to communicate what happens in your area via the email addresses at the bottom of the last page. Wan Pot is an excellent forum to keep ourselves connected as well as our many Brothers and friends globally.

We have already joined in fellowship with our global community in the results, the side effects and aftermath so far in the Corona Virus journey. This is to say that in the already existing prevailing depths of poverty, just when one might assume things are as bad as they can get in inner Freetown city, new depths and bottoms of hardship are reached which will kill just as surely as the Covid itself. When daily, families whose incomes barely provide the basic necessities for food and water now find themselves unknowingly caught up in the global economy squeeze, the ways and means of earning that daily subsistence now disappear. The hike in prices and the little job gone render many totally powerless to cope.

We hear of the cushioning coming into play in the more developed countries with the government subsidies and packages for the newly unemployed, where social welfare systems or bank account reserves may assist or deter the fearful fates. In Sub-Sahara Africa, families have never known such supports, none exist now in this moment of Covid 19 crisis. Many are in dire if not fatal straits. And this is what is happening before our eyes. The scramble for daily existence for the hidden majority in the hidden dens and sheds, where the poor can no longer support the poor, what can people do? We get reminded that we are in a war, another war, different from the 11-14-year war, different from the Ebola war, yet now appearing just as deadly. Suffer first, become homeless, beg steal and borrow and finally die from exhaustion, despair or hunger itself. And we know that just now, the ever-present reality is that this global catastrophe has not hit Africa yet in real terms with numbers of deaths etc., has not hit the countries and communities in
which we Brothers and Communities live and work.

The extended family system and compound friendships are being extended to breaking point and beyond, can no longer sustain, and the widening gaps and cracks now appearing are beyond repair. More victims are appearing on streets and beaches, pathetically looking for any means of rescue or relief for selves and children. Desperation has crept in, and some who in normal circumstances would never lower themselves to new ways of living/survival to support their children, are now driven to extreme measures.

We live in a society here of no housing ownership, the perennial pressure of finding the rent payments for landlords. Now the landlords themselves are rendered poor with unemployment, lockdowns and curfews are caught up in the fear syndrome, the need to stock up, gather in money for the next expected emergency. They cannot extend the usual compassion of time for rent payments. Hence an unprecedented number of evictions, a whole new poor being born.

So, in this declared State of National Emergency restrictions now existing in West Africa, what are we Brothers, Communities, church and religious supposed or expected to try to do, knowing their own somewhat precarious, dependent budgets. We live and minister in these very places, so will now be challenged to reflect as communities on what is possible, it is to our door step from the school and/or local communities they will come in increasing numbers. We will join in the global reflection, see the human spirit answering to challenges in ways never before imagined as new heroines and heroes emerge everywhere with ingenious and inspired ways to help the neighbor. People seem to lose their fears of the here and the hereafter, there is a shedding of crippling dependencies, addictions and conditioning in all areas of life as people emerge in newer and freer ways to act. A hard act to follow, but to some degree we will get carried along in this global spirit where people everywhere are reaching out in service and support. The great positive, the human spirit, many seem to be reborn. Out of every crisis, at whatever level of human nature, new ways of thinking and action often follow. We see it happening locally and globally. We Brothers and communities are faced with the challenge that now every day is a day when we face this day's realities. How can we best help in the situations we meet in today’s march? We might like to take out the crystal ball and look into the future, that is human, and we do live in hope. We are with you all in that hope also just as we are in each day's journey of mysterious destiny.

Hamilton Community- Br. Alysious Sefoi

Following the time, we all have stories to tell.

In this changing fortune of time; I bring you affectionate greetings from Hamilton Community. We are keeping well and I hope you are all healthy and in the right state of mind. There is so much obscurity, confusion and chaos in our world at the moment since the outbreak of Corona virus. If I may so express it, we all have sacred and unique stories to tell. We are going to have more stories to tell as individuals and as nations. Let us learn to tell stories in a broader perspective and in a better way. Let us listen, hear and tell our stories.

It has dawned on us the best of time and the worst of time to seek God and to pay attention to the voice of God in the noisy confusion and chaotic demands of our lives. Covid-19, a virulent disease and a no respecter of persons has triggered a reality of despair, hunger, separation of families, an epoch of belief; a wave of spiritual awakening, seasons of light and that of darkness, and death. Before its outbreak, everything was before us and now nothing
before us except the choices to consciously choose life over death by any means possible. Some are infected but all are affected. Previously, I think we were all going in one direction but now many ways and paths are open to us to live life meaningfully.

God gave us the freedom to gently move and have our being in this world. However, corona virus, a global pandemic has forcefully subjected us to suspensions, emergences, restrictions, lockdowns to name but few. Consequently, this has resulted to economic hardship and inflation of prices and a deeper poverty that is staggeringly eating into every fabric of our societies, communities and nations. It seems we have been ushered into a probable fortune of uncertainty. What has certainly paid off is that there is love bonding humanity in this changing moment of time.

We have expended couple of months now in struggling against the rapids of this chaos or in effecting the rugged passes of the corona virus pandemic, in a quest of an opportunity to exhibit courage, patience, love, faith and hope in a meaningful way. As a community carrying out precautionary measures to prevent ourselves from Covid-19, we have community living structures in place; praying and sharing together, reading books, journaling, watching news, gardening etc. Apart from ministry to the wider church community, every other facet of our community life seems to be in full swing, perhaps better than it was.

**DLT VISITED HAMILTON COMMUNITY ON APRIL 1st 2020.**

On the 1st April, 2020 we were privileged to receive the presence of the three DLT members in our community. Br Abu Kargbo, community leader welcomed the three brothers. Significantly, the leadership team has prioritized their visitation to Brothers communities this year like the past five years to share brotherhood, pastoral care and presence, listening carefully to our stories as a community and to also check on our well-being especially at this difficult time in our world. Not only that, their visit has also been to find out if there has been any significant shift in the vision of our community from how it was six years ago when they took up office to now that they are on the brink of leaving office. The reason for this is to find out if there has been any change or improvement in the quality of our life in community against the numerous reflections and cluster meetings they have had to facilitate/promote in respect of the brothers. They encouraged us to develop a positive mindset and apparently be more of brothers in our weaknesses. As a community, we are committing ourselves to make progress and not perfection and to help and support each other to grow spiritually, emotionally, psychological, socially and physically.

We are deeply indebted to DLT for their visit and support to us especially at this time of the global pandemic. Thanks to them for affirming us in faith living. Whatever ways we conceive God to be in this global pandemic, let us thank, praise and seek Him in prayer. God will continue to carry us in the palm of His hands always. May every human being be peaceful, happy and light in body and Spirit. May every human being be free and free from injury. May every human being be free from anger, afflictions, fear, and anxiety. May God grant us the grace to love humanity unconditionally. May God grant healing to the sick and the rest of mankind. May the repose of the souls of all faithful departed have eternal rest. Amen

With a spring of hope, we are here experiencing and waiting to see what God will continue to do in and through us and around us. Shalom to all of you. Stay safe.

**Edmund Rice Community, Blama- Br. Emmanuel**
It has been a sad moment for us all as a result of the world pandemic COVID 19. Nothing seems to happen in our lives as Brothers. As we sit in our various Communities doing nothing because of the coronavirus. No effective ministry nowhere to go and the cases a just increasing every day. As doctors, nurses and other governmental bodies are trying to save lives, so they themselves are also putting their own lives at risk. There is fear, hanger, frustration, slowness and pain in the lives of the people in the world and that is the sad reality for us all. And the most disturbing thing is, there is no vaccine that can cure this disease and thousands of people are dying every day. While most countries are under the state of emergency and lockdown for weeks and month without nothing to eat for a day. Our movement of survival for each day has end up to social distance, were in we can no longer have good relaConship with our friends, family members and good neighbour. And the poor and vulnerable are struggling every day to survival. So what is our hope while we are all lockdown in our various homes doing nothing? We all know it can be sad and hopeless when nothing is happening, and that can lead to emoConal stress which is not a good sign for our health.

So where can we go now, and what can we do as the struggle still continue for us all without no hope. We have to challenge ourselves as Brothers so that we can be part of the problem, as we all know many hands can have a solution. As we now have questions for reflection from our leaders, it will be also good for us to suggest ways on how we can also be part of this pandemic. If we cannot do it now when do we want to do it, when all what we hear now is hospital, infection and death of the coronavirus. Sensitisation can be our ministry and also providing necessary materials that can help to prevent people from the virus. Out of our own humanitarian feelings and our call as Christian brothers we have to be part of what can be of a help. We all know that covid19 is real and at the same time we are aware of what is happening so let be part of it. As I will always say, it can be done in our communities, with small groups of people, in our schools and also with our ERN members. Let also don’t forget our preventive measures, washing of our hands, avoiding large groups, social distance, touching of our faces or object in public places, the signs of fever, coughing and sneezing and let stay at home. Even with what we are all going through now, we still have to give thanks to GOD for his guidance and protection in our lives. And this is also a moment in our lives that we have to be strong in our prayers more epically for those that are infected and to those that have died. May our good GOD bless us.

ACCOMPANIMENT WORKSHOP FOR AP BROTHERS AND THEIR ACCOMPANIERS IN BO 5th -8th MARCH 2020

The Personal Growth Program Team (PGP) in WAD organized the first Accompaniers and A P Brothers' workshop in 2020 for two days in the Bo formation community. The workshop was a willingly anticipated one as manifested by Brothers during and after the workshop.
The invited facilitator, Sr. Antonia, who is from the Missionaries of the Holy Rosary Sisters, did the first session of the workshop. After a reflective prayer organized by Br. Peter Amara Kabia PGP coordinator, he introduced Sr. Antonia to the brothers as being the facilitator for this all-important workshop. Sr. Antonia on her part proffered that she is always superfluous with joy at the possibility of working with the Brothers in any function. The first session for the workshop was only for the invited Accompaniers. Sr. Antonia facilitating the second session with AP Brothers began her presentation by saying that humans have different selves to which the spiritual self is an integral part. She also reiterated that religious are lucky given the plethora of religious opportunities available to them for the nourishment of their spiritual lives.

On the second day of the workshop, the session was for both the Accompaniers and Accompanees. This was facilitated by Brs. Charles and Abu. In their presentation made a close observation on the harvest of a similar workshop two years ago in Hamilton. Abu read quite briefly and clearly, all that was proffered by the Brothers during that workshop two years ago. AP Brothers were delighted to discover that such key feedback made by them two years was kept and being used as reminder to their last commitment by the team. Brs Charles and Abu further emphasized on the importance of accompaniment as being not a cajoling exercise. The presenters further pinpointed certain values that accompaniers and accompanees needs to uphold- honesty, reality, faithfulness, commitment etc. Listening is key on the part of the companion commented by the presenters. Being able to paraphrase key points shared by an Accompanee is important.

Br. Peter, PGP Coordinator shared the accompaniment agreement sheet to both the Accompaniers and Accompanees. There was a ten-minute reflection on the agreement shared to allow brothers digest the details of the agreement. Brothers were then invited to make necessary comments regarding the agreement. From the feedback of the group, it seemed the brothers (AP) who are the key people in accompaniment sessions accepted the prerequisites enshrined in the agreement. Profound thanks to the DLT for their usual support in realizing the positive outcome of this workshop. Their commitment to Brothers' spiritual wellbeing is admirable and relentless. May God continue to bless them as a team in your endeavour to give their best to the Brothers entrusted under their care.

“Do not abandon yourselves to despair, but remember we are Easter people and Hallelujah is our song.” (Pope John II). As the whole world now experiences fear, uncertainties and anxieties brought about by this pandemic – Covid -19. It is good to remind ourselves of the statement of who we are especially during this time of celebrating as we live to witness the presence of the risen Christ in our hearts. The Easter Tritium was unique in its form of celebration as a community here in Gbarnga. Brothers in the community open up to the new invitation of moving away from the normal practices of our church. Each Brother participated in the daily events as we journeyed with each other and with Jesus our liberator who has shown us the new model of being human.

Gbarnga Community, Liberia
Brothers gathered around the Easter fire.

On Easter Saturday, five Brothers gathered around the fire as we remind ourselves of the Easter story. This recalls the burning desire of Mary who went out joyfully explaining her own Easter story with joy. Like in our African settings, we gather around the fire to explain our scared stories. The Brothers shared their scared stories of family origin, vocation journey and what is that spirit filled energy that keeps each one of us attracted to witness in the world the Charism of Edmund. Brothers used this moment as a time to reflect and internalized each unique story and see the resurrection experience in it. Climaxing the night, toasts were made to the health of the brothers, their parents and the people we work with. All was done in the light of the resurrection story. As we broke our lives open by sharing our sacred life stories and journeyed with Jesus during the Easter Tritium, the Paschal Mystery which bore the fruit of the resurrection now made significant meaning for us.

Greetings from our side – Makeni to be precise. The two brothers here, Joseph Abdulai, Joseph Turay and I are fairly in good health. The month of April has been a challenging one, especially of watching news on the trend at which the COVID 19 is destroying lives of people around the world. As I write this note, Sierra Leone Health Surveillance on COVID 19, has recorded 61 confirmed cases, 6 out of this number have recovered. As I stated earlier, our minds and hearts have been disturbed by news of some of our Brothers been at the edge of the Pandemic, especially our Brothers in Australia. When this whole thing (COVID 19), we thought it was just for a month, but here we are – nearly six months, the great nations cannot find a solution to the health problem. All our main social and religious places are closed down to the public. This has spiritually implication on our faithful and even ourselves – because the usual interactions have been banned.

We are grateful for the flow of communication from the CLT, PLT and DLTs down to community level. It is a trying moment for us all, especially looking back at how the Congregation Chapter came to a halt and that further paralyzed the Province Chapter. However, we are hopeful that thing will return to normality. We are also grateful that we were fortunate to have an exclusive Holy Mass during the Easter Festive.

At community level, a lot of emotions were shared as we reflected on our present situation. Emotionally we felt that the situation is like been at a war front were firing is coming from all directions and nowhere to seek shelter. A moment of fear of been infected by the virus. Powerless like Job in the Bible, we don’t know what formed the COVID 19, whether it was man-made or natural. As a community, since we are spending more time at home now, there are couples of things we have put in place and
doing. We decided that our workers take a break for a month we are doing our cooking and gardening.

Brothers of the Noel community in action at their newly established ministry site amidst COVID 19

At this point in time, we have decided to engage more the mind and body into agricultural activities within the property. It is planting season in Sierra Leone and we are hoping to plant groundnuts, maize, cucumber and other vegetables. As medical experts would say exercise of the body will keep you active and alert. During our gardening we share fun but not forgetting the precaution of social distancing. So as of now we are all healthy and looking after ourselves very well. We make phone calls to check on our parishioners and people we work with at the ministry sites. We sometimes feel vulnerable, especially when we are realised that some of the people at the ministry sites need our support whether moral and material.

We extend our thanks and appreciation to the wider Edmund Rice Network, friends, benefactors who are making sure that our mission to the world is possible. May God protect us from this deadly virus.

In this difficult moment, the set of people almost forgotten are the teenage girls whose parents are poor and rely on street peddling to survive. What is their source of living in the middle of all the government restrictions, curfews and social distancing? Br. Paul Mendy Principal of St Ambrose academy shares his frustration and also suggests some possible ways of averting the unforeseen effect this would have on teenage girls.

Limited Intensive Care Unit capacity, very few ventilators, and majority of people whose incomes and lives would direly affected by the strict social distancing measures seen in other countries. I am afraid that the teenagers would be the victims of this Coronavirus pandemic. It was reported in June 2015 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone that, "Children in Sierra Leone report that exploitation and violence against girls has increased during the year-long Ebola Epidemic, resulting in rising cases of teenage pregnancies." The vulnerable girls from poor homes have no choice but to bend to the will of their abusers.

As a teacher and a principle, I am deeply worried about the teenagers with series of lockdowns. Some of the children coming to school lived on one meal per day basis on what their parents manage to get from their sales in the market. There are no bye-laws or measures put in place to safe guard girl child in Sierra Leone during this Pandemic. I managed to chat with few students at the senior level and they told me that they the impact on them is very huge. The students further suggested to me that the government needed to put in measures that can prevent teenage pregnancy and address the issue of food, money and livelihood gaps exacerbated by the Covid 19. I am also...
foreseeing many families would lose their livelihoods during this crises and may not be able to afford to send their children back to school.

The closure of schools in any outbreak or pandemic always increased girls' vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse by both their peers and by older men. In many occasions girls are often at home alone and unsupervised. Sexual exploitation may happen in the context of selling sex food and families struggled to cover basic needs. As the pandemic continue to threaten, some families may choose to marry their daughters off, falsely hoping this would offer them protection. The government might succeed in minimizing teenage pregnancy by applying lessons learnt from Ebola to Covid 19.

As the government of Sierra Leone prepared for indefinite school closures, policy makers and practitioners can look to lessons from past crises to address the specific challenges faced by girls. I therefore call on the government to protect progress made in favour of girls’ education base on the few points of action. The government should Work closely with teachers, school staff and communities to ensure inclusive methods of distance learning are adopted and communicated to call for continued investments in girls’ learning. My education professor at Iona College once said, “In contexts where digital solutions are less accessible, consider low-tech and gender-responsive approaches. Send reading and writing materials home and use radio and television broadcasts to reach the most marginalized. Ensure programme scheduling and learning structures are flexible and allow self-paced learning so as not to deter girls who often disproportionately shoulder the burden of care.” The government of Sierra Leone is partial doing that at the moment those in remote villagers are yet to have access to this service.

The school was able to conduct second term exams and all the report cards were issued to the children before the closure of all the school in Sierra Leone. There was Science Lab building project going on in the school. Thanks to the district Leadership Team for realizing the funds for the project.

Updates from St Ambrose Academy.

Science lab project at St. Ambrose Academy.

The funds were the balance money left from the bore and toilet project sponsored by St. Ambrose College in Manchester. The contractor has completed the foundation. The work has stopped at the moment for the mere fact that the contractor also feared not to gather his workers coming from different angles from Freetown. The brothers in Calaba Town are all in good form. Our spiritual gurus, Bros; Prince and Charles have been resourceful during the holy weak. The community had Stations of the Cross and breaking of the break on Holy Thursday. The community is always in touch with the wider community and there is also concern for our brothers in other parts of the world. Our teaching community is always in touch with our students and teachers in making sure that they are safe and stick to WHO precautionary measures.

THANK YOU MESSAGE

We express our sincere thanks to all who contributed to our April Edition, 2015.

CONTRIBUTION
We continue to ask our valuable readers and contributors to send their contributions to Bros. Joseph Gomeh and Jojo Karimu
gomehjoseph64@gmail.com and karimujojo@yahoo.com respectively