One More Step Along the World I Go
December 2015
Sierra Leone
"One more step along the world I go, from the old things to the new, keep me traveling along with you!" These words are from a hymn we have just learned to love, both words and tune; it is sung here often for special occasions. We walk together from Christmas into the New Year with our Sierra Leone family in one hand and our family and friends around the world in the other.

One More Step Along (with lyrics) youtube.com

**Upline**

Since Thanksgiving we have found our schedule FULL of activity up and down the country attending district conferences, children's retreats and drama camp focusing on stigmatization, the United Methodist Women's and Men's annual conventions, listening to many stories shared from the experiences of the rebel war and Ebola and a desire to renew the vitality of the church.

People here say the Ebola was worse than war; in war you know who your enemy is and you can run away. But now "Ebola don-don" as we say in Krio, and it's time to celebrate health and God's goodness, especially making the effort to ensure all are able
to be together again. And, yes, we eat, especially enjoying the major delicacies here; rice with potato Paramount Chief, in this case, the Bishop.

Distinct, Different and Dynamic District Conferences
On the subject of District Conferences, we do them quite differently here in Sierra Leone. So far we have been to five of nine; Taiama, Moyamba East, Kabala, Moyamba West and Makeni. The rest will take place in January. Each of these District Conferences are more than meetings...they are all-day events much anticipated by all the United Methodists in the Districts. We are part of the Bishop's entourage (Kip says it's the only time in his life that he has been part of an "entourage"). We are treated with great respect and admiration in far greater proportion than we deserve. We worship, sing, report, sing, debate, sing, pray, dance and sing, argue, sing and bless potential new candidates for ministry. Then we sing and pray and eat! The depth of relief, thanksgiving and emotion following the Ebola crisis of 2014/2015 finds few words but great passion, a tangible appreciation and celebration of life together.

Glimpses of Christmas in Sierra Leone
And each was to go to their own village to be counted as directed by the government ...Mary and Joseph? No, Nancy and Kip as part of the government's census in Sierra Leone carried out during Advent by teachers who are on holiday.
Christmas came quietly - we put up garlands and a shiny star, aware of those around us with far less, sharing gifts of homemade butterscotch, brownies, oranges, our own home grown bananas, some of our twenty seven chickens and bags of charcoal. Late Christmas Eve Nancy came downstairs for water and realized that one of the security guards sitting on the front veranda wearing an old suit jacket several sizes too big,
trying to get warm. Cool winds in December actually make it sort of cold at night here. She wrapped both of our two night guards in blankets since they had no coats and made sure their thermos of hot water for tea was filled and reflected on the shepherds keeping watch on that first Christmas night. With the full moon, light was all around and it was indeed a 'silent night', wrapped in love.
World Food Program has set up tents in former Ebola Treatment Camps to ensure food is available in the provinces where hunger has taken a big toll. The dry season is upon us. Grass is high and rivers are low, passable where there are no bridges.

We give thanks to God that we narrowly escaped serious injury on the way home from the conventions - our car was hit by an oncoming lorry that swerved to miss a slow vehicle and lost control, hitting us broadside just behind the driver's door shattering the driver's window, rupturing the rear wheel and caving in the rear door. Christopher and Nancy felt the impact and sat covered in shattered glass, sighing relief in shock. We were quickly in the good hands of the police, the insurance company and all supporting us with their prayers; the car will soon be repaired and back on the road, a miracle of grace.
Ebola's deadly effects strongly dented the UMC's health care initiative, forcing the Conference to close all their clinics and several of their hospitals. The post-Ebola era will feature a new clinic at Yonibana in Moyamba District thanks to a significant offering by the 2015 Virginia Conference. These funds will cover the rehabilitation of a former church into a clinic with the former clinic turned into a residence for a CHO (community health officer) supplied by the government. A triage unit, a toilet, and a well complete the complex which will take two months to complete. Kip is the project manager.
Susquehanna Conference Partner Churches are Making it Happen!

Old Wharf UMC, made of of panbodi (corrugated iron) is building their church right around the old church, this time with block.

This and That

Inflation has increased significantly since 2013, now averaging almost 9% per year...a meeting of US citizens at the embassy here was a real eye-opener on the subjects of Ebola response and security...Christmas carols sound strange in 88 plus degree weather, sweating through all verses of

"In the Bleak Midwinter, frosty wind made moan, snow lay fallen snow on snow..."

....we attended three weddings in five weeks and none lasted more than three hours; all had been married previously in "traditional" marriages but sealed the relationship with a church wedding in each case...the Harmattan (a fine dust that blows off the Sahara Desert and coats West Africa with a blanket of rust-colored powder-fine material) is back and laundry increased though water is a precious commodity to conserve... the rainy season "don lef wi" (has left us)...oranges are for sale everywhere and fresh squeezed juice for breakfast is the norm...our banana tree yielded a huge bunch of bananas, just in time for Christmas...with a second one soon to ripen...
...many Muslims celebrated alongside Christians on Christmas Day here, another way that Serra Leoneans can teach the world about religious tolerance...we celebrate that mission teams are returning to Sierra Leone beginning in January, resuming relationships sorely missed during the Ebola crisis...this is the first Christmas that we have been away from family...though it feels strange we celebrated new traditions and made good use of WiFi, Facetime and text messages...we are all connected in this small world we live in...

...in recent trips to other parts of the country we have blessed three newly constructed wells and four sets of toilets - hands extended by all present accompanied by prayer (see picture); each of these is an incredible blessing to each village, all provided by the United Methodist Church of Norway and the Norwegian government...Nancy drove
our Land Cruiser for the first time on a very bad road (and she did well!)...if you are a visitor to a remote village (as we often are) you are the entertainment for the day, which challenged us immensely when we were very early to the village of Mamaka and for some reason saddled with babysitting all the children in the village for five hours (note to future: Kip is not too good at this although he has now taught every child in this village how to make windshield wipers with your fingers). Everyone had a good time as we waited for the key officials to arrive to commission and celebrate a new village well, the gift of clean running water...

Christmas morning we rose early to make hot cocoa and rolls with scrambled egg for our guards before joining friends at church to sing 'Joy to the World' and other carols interspersed with the Scriptures, all dressed in colorful Africana clothing. Yes, there are angels all around. No tree, no commercialism, no extra stress except for missing family and friends at home. We give thanks for you all and the many expressions of love you sent this Christmas season.
May the peace and grace of Christ flow abundantly into and through all our lives in 2016, causing us to live joyfully.

We love and appreciate every one of you.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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