



Welcoming Ceremony



My Team: Carol Kessler, Sharon Snell, Ginny Logan, Kim Bonar, Janet Kleckner, Kay Bergen



Children in the Kindergarten 2 class



Children loved having their pictures taken



Nancy Tefleh (Esther's mom) teaching a class



Francis and Ester Tefleh with me



Above: Digging a well



Nancy Tefleh cooking dinner

Congregation member Kay Bergen traveled to Camphor Mission in Liberia (Africa) for a mission trip in March of this year. She had eventful trip with lots of ups and downs but hopes to return next year! She agreed to share the story of her trip and some photos.

From Kay: I traveled with five other people who had been to Camphor Mission many times in the last 12 years. I had first been to Camphor Mission ten years ago, in July 2013, at the suggestion of former congregation member Jean Forbes. When I returned from that trip, Pastor David Wilcox, Tina, and I decided to sponsor a child at the Camphor Mission school through the Holy Grounds fund. We chose Esther Tefleh, the daughter of Nancy Tefleh, one of the teachers. We began sponsoring her as a fourth grader in 2015. Esther graduated in 2020 from Camphor Mission and wanted to go on to High School but needed a sponsor to continue. At the time, we did not have enough money in the Holy Grounds fund due to the church being closed due to COVID restrictions. I decided that I would continue the sponsorship myself. Esther was set to graduate this year, and when I heard about a mission group traveling to Camphor Mission in 2023, I was excited at the prospect of meeting Esther and talking to her in person. Although we had communicated on Facebook Messenger, it was not the same as being there. Before leaving for Liberia, I discovered that Esther was pregnant and probably would not graduate this year. But that didn't stop me—I wanted to tell her I would support her in any way I could. She gave birth to a girl on April 16, 2023.

The mission group met at the Cleveland Airport at 11:30a on March 4. We all had two suitcases, but most of us would come back with only one. We filled the extra suitcases with shoes, clothes, six phones, and nine computers to give to the people there. We flew to Dulles, then on to Brussels, and from there to Monrovia, Liberia. They are 4 hours ahead of us. We arrived there at 8:15a on Sunday, March 5, so we had been traveling for more than 24 hours. We then had a two and ½ hour drive to Camphor Mission.

Camphor Mission is a United Methodist Church School, grades kindergarten through nine, for the surrounding villages. The children can elect to stay on campus or commute from their homes; it is a tuition-based school. If you live on campus, the tuition is \$575; if you come from the village, it is \$70. Looking at the picture of the children in the K2 grade, you will notice that they look older than we would expect. That is because the school children start at a much older age when they can safely walk to school. The school currently has 160 students, with 15 of them living on campus, nine boys and six girls. The rest of them walk to the school, with some walking for over an hour. Our group helped the teacher with their classes during school hours and interacted with the children. After classes, some of the children would come to the Guest house, where the group was staying, and we would give them coloring books and crayons to work on, and often we would have treats for them. They also loved getting their pictures taken. On Friday, they held a welcoming ceremony for our group in the Church. On Friday, I started to get sick with a bout of diarrhea. I decided to forgo the planned trip to the Atlantic Ocean to swim and stayed with Esther, who had come from Monrovia, to spend the weekend with me. We visited her mother, and Esther went to the Clinic for some medicine and enjoyed the time spent together.

The group dressed in our Liberian outfits on Sunday, and we went to Church. During Church, I got sick, and they had to take me to the Clinic. They decided I needed some medicine and an IV because I was dehydrated. On Monday, I was no better, and the nurse (Solomon) came to the guest house and gave me another IV and more medicine. Janet, our leader, decided that I needed to go to the hospital, so on Tuesday, we left for the hospital. Team member Sharon, her Liberian son Gabriel, and Solomon were in the back seat, and the driver and I were in the front of the truck. It was the most frightening ride I have ever had! The driver was doing everything he could to get me to the hospital. I am sure he was going over 90 MPH, and when we got to Monrovia, he was always trying to pass the person in front of him, and we had a lot of close calls. We finally arrived at the MMM hospital. I was in the emergency room, and they got me started on an IV. The Doctor was from Belarus. He decided I needed to stay in the hospital for testing and observation. I was there for two nights and three days. On the third day, my blood test showed I had Typhoid. He gave me some antibiotics and said I was strong enough to go home on the regular flight with my group. I missed the last week at Camphor Mission; however, I did get to go out with the group on the last Saturday night we were there. We had 17 that met for supper at a restaurant. Esther and her brother were both there. The group went to Church Sunday, but I stayed at the guest house and just rested. We left Liberia at 8:00p their time, and I arrived home at 7:30p on Monday, March 20.

I have lots of pictures and some videos, I'd be happy to share them with anyone who is interested!

