

Mission Trip - 2003

Seven from NT-NL attend the Installation of the Rev. Tom Barnett as the first Bishop of the ELCSL

The histories of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sierra Leone and the Northern Texas – Northern Louisiana Synod have been interwoven from the very beginning of the ELCSL in 1988. We have been “journey partners” on the road of mission and ministry, companions in the walk of faith. That partnership took on another layer of meaning as seven representatives of the NT-NL Synod traveled to Sierra Leone in November, 2003, to participate in the Installation Service of the Rev. Tom Barnett as the first bishop of the ELCSL.

The synod’s delegation consisted of Bishop Kevin S. Kanouse and his wife Billye Jean Kanouse, Bishop Assistant for Leadership Stan Meyer, Pastor Peder Sandager (St. Luke, Richardson) and members Ed Lysen and Jennifer Seaborn, and Gail Srednicki (Advent, Arlington). The group traveled to Sierra Leone a week prior to the Installation which took place on November 30, 2003. Bishop Kanouse officiated and preached at the Service of Installation which took place in an historic old Methodist Church in downtown Freetown.

A Learning Experience



This was a first experience of Sierra Leone for all in the delegation except Bishop Kanouse. There was much to learn. Sierra Leone is the poorest English-speaking nation on earth. It has been ravaged by war; its economy is struggling to rebuild. The difficulty presented by 1.5 million people living in a relatively small coastal area – profound congestion, adequate housing, educational opportunities, public sanitation, infrastructure (especially water

and electric power), and transportation – was evident at every turn. Life is a daily challenge for the people of Freetown.

But signs of renewed life were also evident. Reconstruction of war-damaged buildings has begun; the concrete superstructures of new buildings dot the landscape. Cottage

industry and one-person retail stands are prominent. Some lucky children walk to school proudly in their matching school uniforms. Our delegation was able to stay in a new motel (the Sierra Lighthouse Motel and Restaurant) which provided many familiar comforts. Everywhere people were welcoming, polite, and helpful.

The delegation managed to take in a number of special activities:

- A visit with David Sam Suale of the Lutheran World Federation.
- A visit with Bishop Humper of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- Visits with the pastors and staff of the ELCSL.
- A visit at an Amputee Center managed by the Lutheran Church.
- Visits to several ELCSL churches in and outside of Freetown.
- A trip to the beautiful beaches surrounding the Lord of the White Sands church.
- Thanksgiving Dinner (American style!) at the Barnett's home.
- A visit at the University of Sierra Leone.
- Some shopping in the "mall" made of shanties and lean-tos.

The Jubilee Center



Clearly the most exhilarating of the site-visits was the opportunity to see the work beginning on at the Jubilee Center. The dirt has been excavated – one shovel full at a time – in preparation for the foundation. Boulders have been rolled out of the way – all by hand – and turned over to workers who pulverize them with hand-held sledge hammers. The resulting gravel is carried back up hill to be mixed with the

cement for the foundation. It's all done with wheel-barrows, shovels, and pick-axes. It's back-breaking, slow, and demanding work that takes place in the incessant heat and humidity. But the results are beginning to stir the imagination and take on life. What a day it will be when another delegation from the NT-NL Synod travels to Sierra Leone to celebrate the dedication of this facility!

The Installation Service

After a week of looking, talking, watching, hearing, feeling, and sharing, the day came for the long-anticipated event. In the summer of 2003 Pastor Tom Barnett, President of the ELCSL, had been elected as the first bishop of the ELCSL. Pastor Phil Fenton of First Lutheran Church in Longview was our NT-NL representative at that assembly. The

Installation date was set for Sunday, November 30 in Freetown; Bishop Kevin Kanouse was invited to be the preacher and officiant for the service.

The day began with worship in four of the churches around the city; the three pastors in the NT-NL delegation preached in the various sites, as did the Rev. Clifford Lewis (the ELCA's Division for Global Mission director for West Africa). After lunch a parade formed at the ELCSL headquarters and marched to the Methodist Church following behind a full brass band. An unfortunate distraction occurred as the parade reached the church; some hecklers tried to disrupt the event and harm Bishop-Elect Barnett. The hecklers were attempting to advocate for the amputee program and were mistakenly convinced that there has been mismanagement in the program. The disruption only briefly delayed the start of the service.

The Installation was a grand celebration of liturgy, prayer, song, and blessing. The youth choir performed as did a trio of three young blind men. Judicatory leaders from around the city were present. And even as the sounds of the city swirled around and about, we were reminded of the ever-present love of God enlivening our mission and giving power to our ministry. Bishop Barnett was encouraged to see first to the feeding of the flock as he took on the tasks of Bishop. Following the service, a dinner was given in Bishop Barnett's honor. It was a day that will be remembered.

Other Scenes from the Photo Gallery

The Jubilee Center will overlook Freetown



St. Mark Lutheran Church



The Kanouse's and the Barnett's



The Parade Reaches the Church for the Installation

