



Ghana Visit - Chandler M. Ralph

Dear Friends

What a wonderful trip my husband and I had to Africa and specifically to Cape Coast, Ghana. We left at noon on a Sunday and arrived in Accra, Ghana at around 6:30 PM Monday evening. On Tuesday, we were picked up by Sister Liz and her driver, Joseph. We took off towards Cape Coast about three hours away. We were struck by the number of people in small shacks by the side of the road selling everything from coconuts to coffins.

About half-hour south of Cape Coast, we took a left off the main road and up a dirt road to the site of the maternity hospital and the fistula hospital. The road is rough, but passable. The site is on a hill overlooking the Ghana bush. It was just a beautiful view from almost anywhere in the hospital.

There are three buildings on the site: there is an intake building for patients arriving for the fistula operation and where they can spend a bit of time pre-surgery to gain strength for surgery. The second building contains the operating



rooms and the recovery ward. There are two operating rooms and a 48 bed ward where the women will recover from the fistula surgery.

The third building is the outpatient building and houses administration/lab/pharmacy. In addition, the outpatient building will have clinic services available to ambulatory patients. A brick walkway connects all of the buildings.

Essentially the hospital is not operating at this time. We were somewhat discouraged because it looked like the fistula hospital has been empty too long and that it was starting to deteriorate.

We looked across the valley and workmen were constructing the staff housing. The staff housing will provide housing for a physician and their family and also additional space for nursing staff. The Helen Ptochia Foundation sent approximately \$30,000 last July to help fund the project.



Front & Center is Sr. Elizabeth Burns. Standing next to me in the back row is Sr. Liz's driver, Joseph.

During these first few hours I learned that Sister Elizabeth Burns, RSM, who we have been working with over the past six years, will be leaving Ghana and returning permanently to St. Louis, Missouri which is her home base when she is in the United States. We are greatly saddened by this, but I think she is quite ready to return to St. Louis and to many of the sisters who are very good friends of hers. Of course, this left a big question of how we would proceed forward and who we will work with. Sr. Liz certainly had the foresight to arrange for a meeting with Cardinal Turkson's staff of the Cape Coast Diocese to discuss the future of the hospital and how we can work together going forward.

The following morning (Wednesday) I met with Fr. Ignatius Oyinlolah, Secretary, Office of the Cardinal, Archdiocese of Cape Coast. I spoke with Fr. Ignatius for about an hour about the plans going forward for the fistula hospital. He indicated that when the physician housing is completed, the Diocese will recruit a physician and then they can start up the fistula hospital. They will dedicate the hospital on November 30, 2009, finish the staff housing, recruit a physician, start up the fistula hospital, and then hold an official opening. He indicated that they currently run three hospitals in the Cape Coast diocese and that they are experienced at

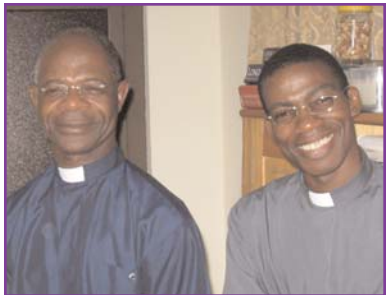


A View of the Fistula Hospital.

Adirondacks to Africa ... With Love

running health facilities. He seemed very genuine and committed to this project.

The next individual we met was Rev. Fr. Hilary Aidoo, financial administrator for the Archdiocese and Secretariat of the Archdiocese of Cape Coast. Fr. Hilary spoke to us about starting up the fistula hospital and that the Diocese will be responsible for working with the government to assure that the fistula hospital becomes operational. In asking the gentlemen when they expected this would be, I did not get a direct answer except for "soon." I do believe that this is the culture of Ghana and to push further was counterproductive.



Left to right:
Rev. Fr. Hilary Aidoo
and
Fr. Ignatius Oyinlolah

Next, we visited with the Auxiliary Bishop, Most Rev. Matthias Kobena Nketsiah. He also is very committed to carry through on operation of the fistula hospital. We then met with Msgr. James Robert Myers, who is Vicar General and Assistant to the Cardinal. Fr. Myers spoke very eloquently about the problems of fistula facing African women, particularly in Ghana, and I got the clear impression that he was dedicated to the hospital and he thanked us most sincerely for the donations we have sent in the past.

Unfortunately, we missed His Eminence Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson because he was in Rome at the time of our visit. I did receive a document entitled the "The Cardinal Turkson Fund for Health and Education". I will share a paragraph with you from the document: The Mankessin Reproductive and Child Health Center and Fistula Hospital Project.

"As part of this apostolate (ministry duties) and service to humanity, especially to the underprivileged, poor and outcast, Cardinal Turkson is presently developing:

- A Reproductive and Child Health Center, and
- A Fistula Hospital

at Mankessin to repair fistula and to provide maternal and child health care for women and children. The Mercy Reproductive and Child

Health Centre and Fistula Hospital at Mankessin are the second facility in the whole of Africa.

The first is in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where about 200,000 cases exist. The center itself has been completed; funds are currently being sought to construct accommodations for doctors and nurses who will work at the facilities.

When completed this facility will provide maternal and child health care services for pregnant women and children, provide obstetrical fistula repair and treatment services for women inflicted with the condition, and also serve as the training center for doctors who wish to work in the field of fistula repair and treatment in Ghana and the west African sub-region".

So all in all I think it was an extremely successful visit and believe that we have a responsible conduit working with the Diocese staff in Cape Coast to channel the monies we raise to the fistula hospital. If you wish to learn about other health facilities run by the Cape Coast Diocese, visit

www.archcapeghana.com.

I wish all of you a happy holiday season, and look forward to an exciting year in 2010.

Very truly yours,

Chandler M. Ralph

Chair, The Helena Ptochia Foundation



A picture of yours truly standing at the desk in the 48-bed recovery ward.

During this holiday season,
please consider a gift to the
Helena Ptochia Foundation
to help our forgotten African sisters.

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