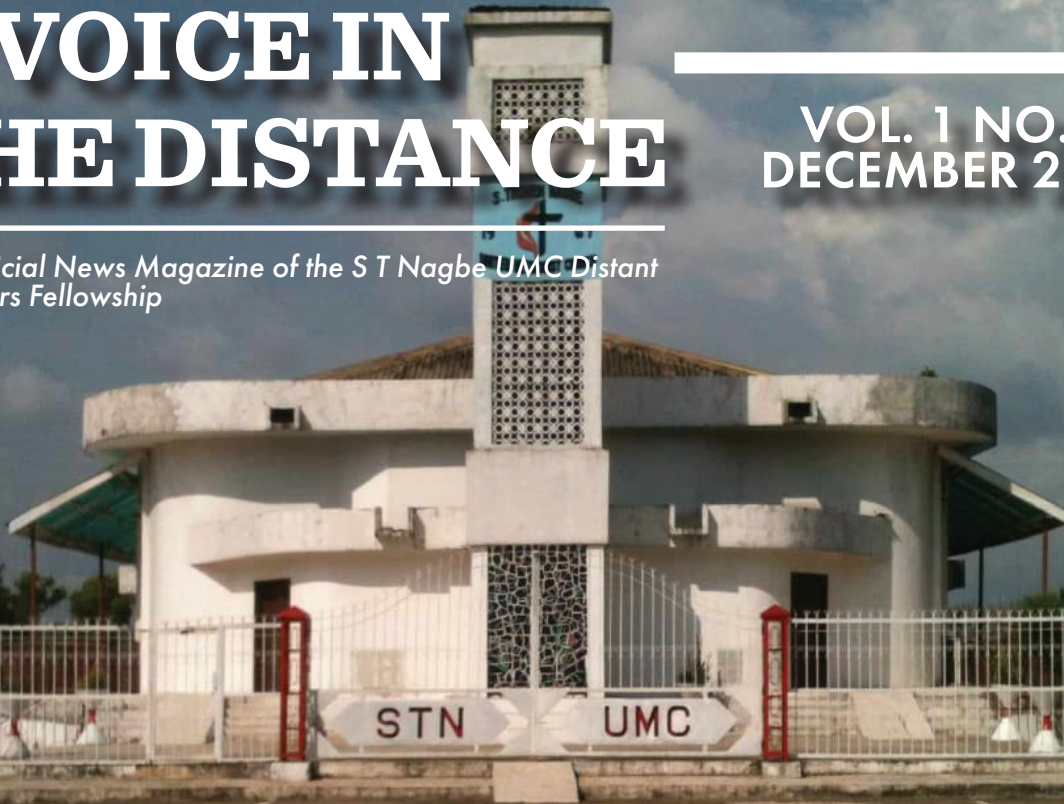


A VOICE IN THE DISTANCE

VOL. 1 NO. 1
DECEMBER 2023

The Official News Magazine of the S T Nagbe UMC Distant Members Fellowship



PASSING THE BATON

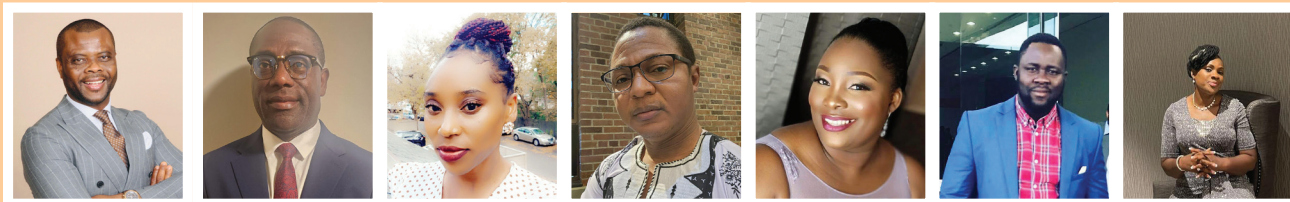
Former US President Obama used a metaphor to describe leadership as a relay race where a team of runners passes the baton to the next runner until the end. This metaphor has proven true in the S. T. Nagbe UMC Distant Members Fellowship.

In 2022, the General Assembly was held at Portland Avenue United Methodist Church in Bloomington, Minnesota, to elect new officers for the Fellowship. The journey leading to 2022 was unpredictable and precarious due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Buster Dweh was initially elected president in 2016; and then in 2018 for a second two-year term that was scheduled to end in 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused public events to be suspended, thus leading him to remain in the position longer than anticipated. President Dweh kept the Fellowship active through frequent telephone calls and online Zoom meetings.

Eventually, the US Government reduced restrictions on social gatherings, allowing Fellowship members to travel to Bloomington Minnesota for the General Assembly. Although there were sad moments with the passing of Florence Carr-Nelson and others, the Fellowship was able to celebrate the lives of the deceased while commemorating the living.

At the end of the General Assembly, a new group of officers was elected. Dartor Bolo succeeded Buster Dweh as President, Harry Tarpeh became the Vice President, Tessa Monyou Paye-Zulu as secretary, Dax Tuah, as Assistant Secretary, Albertine Austine as treasurer, and Olivia R. Browne was elected chaplain. Hence, the baton was passed on from the previous leadership to a new set of leaders who continue to administer the affairs of the Fellowship.



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Message from the President



Dartor Bolo
PRESIDENT/STNUMCDMF

To the people who constitute the S T Nagbe UMC Distant Members Fellowship, on behalf of the entire Fellowship, please accept our warmest greetings. May the joy of Christmas and the gift of Emmanuel—God with us—give us the confidence to face 2024 with hope. This hope is born of our faith in the Living God. Thus, as we enter the New Year 2024, we affirm that God, who started a good thing in the Distant Members Fellowship, will see it to fruition.

Brethren in the household of faith, during this Advent season, we have come to thank you for the DMF's journey in 2023. We started this journey from the city of ten thousand lakes of Minneapolis, Minnesota, to the Windy City of Chicago, down to the city of Brotherly Love of Philadelphia, and all over the United States. We thank you for one year of stewardship and for entrusting us with leading this Fellowship. As we pray together, we are confident that we have a strong connection and a bright future in Jesus's name.

The journey in 2023 was one of mixed emotions. There were tears of sadness when some of our members lost their relatives, their jobs, went through painful marital issues, and even became sick. We continue to pray for comfort for all who experienced any loss and a speedy recovery for all members who are affected by any illness. At the same time, there were tears of joy and celebration when some of our members had the opportunity to regularize their immigration status in the US; thus, they are now working and moving freely in and out of the US. Additionally, some of

our members were first-time home buyers in the US, some graduated from college, got new jobs, and because of this and so much more, we are grateful to God for the many blessings.

As a fellowship and team, we accomplished a tremendous number of goals in 2023. Notably, we added 20 new members to the DMF's database and would like to thank the Membership Team headed by Daysely Zulu and Dr. Jatu Sonii Karpeh. Also, we renovated the Mildred Page Hall at the local church in Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa. We raised fourteen thousand one hundred and eighty-seven dollars (\$ 14,187.00) from food, license plate holders, and popcorn sales. We are incredibly grateful to the heads and co-heads of the regions who partnered with Executives throughout the year. We applaud Sis. Annette Kpoto, Aunty Musu Kennedy (Northeastern Region), Sis. Eunice Taylor, Sis. Albertine Austine, (Central Region) Sis. Nanela Warner Taplah, Bro. Eddie Harris (Southeastern Region), Bro. Roland Tolee and Sis Dorothy Miller (Southwestern Region) for their exemplary roles as leaders and members of the Fellowship.

Brenda Bedell of the program team and her co-chair, Florence Fonderson, launched and implemented the following new programs: The Mother's and Father's Day virtual celebrations, the Ugly Sweater Contest, the Secret Santa Gifts exchange, the Walk for Cause, recognition of DMF Special Laity of the Year, mission trips, and the virtual Thanksgiving Service were highlights of the year.

Sis Brenda and Sis Florence, we realize that our strengths alone did not facilitate all these accomplishments. Therefore, we must acknowledge our Spiritual Growth Committee, headed by Min Olivia Brown and Rev. Henry Dolopei, who have always been praying and lifting the Fellowship and its undertakings before the throne of God.

Moreover, we established two new partnerships in 2023. We partnered with the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Chi Chapter and the Greater Detroit District conference. Through these partnerships, we provided food for two orphanages in Liberia and received a generous gift of US\$1,000 (One thousand United States dollars)

towards the renovation of the Mildred Page Hall. May the good Lord bless all our partners.

To you, all the members of the DMF, you are the true champions and MVPs of this Fellowship. You were faithful with your gifts, time, and service to the Fellowship throughout 2023. Additionally, you attended meetings, paid your membership, project, regional, and benevolence fees, and fasted and prayed for the Fellowship. You orchestrated these efforts because you care to cater to the less fortunate in society to fulfill the mission of the Fellowship.

Throughout the journey, our foot soldiers led the Fellowship in planning, strategizing, and implementing programs, and we owe you our sincere thanks, love, and gratitude to many of them. We are pleased to recognize and honor Rev Levi Williams, Brenda Bedell, Florence Fonderson, Min. Olivia Browne, Daysely R. Zulu, Dorothy Miller, Annette Kpoto, and Mth. Rose Bropleh. We will mention your names whenever we tell the story of the DMF.

Furthermore, we thank the Communications Team for making this newsletter possible. Congratulations!

As we end the journey in 2023, we sincerely apologize to those we hurt. Please find it in your hearts to forgive us, and we would like to extend an olive branch to you and welcome you back to the DMF as we are stronger together.

Family, we thank God for what we have accomplished together in 2023 and invite you to join us in Philadelphia in 2024 for the DMF General Assembly. This gathering will be a time of celebration, appreciation, election of a new corps of officers, and crowning of the King and Queen of the DMF. Finally, I want to admonish you that what we do for ourselves alone dies with us; however, what we do for others and the world remains. Let's work while it is yet day so that our Father in Heaven will someday say, "Well done, you good and faithful servant."

At this juncture, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!

Your Humble Servant,
Dartor Bolo
President, STNUMCDMF

2023 Project with the local church

Numerous local churches worldwide rely on their members' tithes, offerings, and donations to support their staff and ministries. Some churches explore creative ways to supplement their financial support. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath have left many struggling to make ends meet, including Liberians. This situation has led to adverse economic conditions that have affected all aspects of society.

Local churches have also experienced hardships and have had to find additional means to supplement their annual budget. In response, the S.T. Nagbe Distant Members Fellowship decided to step in and help the local church in Liberia. The Mildred Page Hall was the original sanctuary during the building's construction. When the congregation moved upstairs to the current sanctuary, the space became a fellowship hall. Eventually, it became a prime rental venue for workshops, seminars, wedding receptions, and funerals.

The Hall needed an upgrade to remain competitive, as other rental venues in the Sinkor area of Monrovia, where the church is located, had been constructed. After consulting with the local church's leadership, the Distant Members Fellowship agreed to renovate the Mildred Page Hall. This project offers operational support and financial planning to help the church generate funds to complete a multi-purpose building. The building will cater to physically challenged members such as the deaf, blind, and handicapped. Additionally, it will provide warm meals to less fortunate community members and generate capital for its maintenance and sustainability. The estimated cost of this project is US\$32,446 (Thirty-two thousand, four hundred forty-six dollars). This project implementation is an exciting time for the Fellowship and the local church as we look to the future with faith and hope.



Mildred Page Hall Before

The Future Mildred Page Hall

The Value of Partnership

The Liberian Civil War, which lasted from 1989 to 2003, claimed the lives of over 200,000 people, leaving scores of children as orphans. The compassion of Liberian Christians led to the creation of several orphanages to care for these children who had lost one or both parents. Among these orphanages were the Frances Gaskin and Love A Child orphanages.

It is commonly said that "if you want to travel fast, travel alone, but if you want to travel far, travel together." This adage applies especially to partnerships like the ones established by the Fellowship. The Distant Members Fellowship (DMF) had the pleasure of partnering with the Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) Sorority to provide meals for two orphanages in Liberia, thus sharing the love of Christ.

The Fellowship was fortunate to form partnerships and work with Habitat for Humanity, SERVE, Northern Virginia Family Service, Chosen 300 Ministries, and the Greater Detroit District Conference. These valuable partnerships enabled the Fellowship to fulfill its mission of caring for others.

Celebrate Advent 2023 with STNDMF

Opening Happiness

One weekend, Lee decided to spend quality time with his family. Besides doing yard work, housework, and strolling in the neighborhood, they watched a couple of movies together on one of the streaming services. Lee was even more motivated by an order he had recently received. A day before the weekend, Lee received a popcorn order from the Gold Popcorn Fundraiser of the Northeastern



*Annette Choko Kpoto / Chairperson
Gold Popcorn Fundraiser*

Region of the STNDMF. The Northeastern region organized the popcorn fundraiser under the leadership of Annette Choko Kpoto and Musu Kennedy. Lee ordered a few bags of popcorn that arrived at his home just before the weekend, just in time for family movie night that Saturday.

Annette and her leadership team of the Northeastern region have been instrumental in raising much-needed funds for the Fellowship. The Northeastern region covers **Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.**

The popcorn sale successfully raised **over \$5,000.** Not only did the Northeastern Region identify a fundraising program to help the Fellowship raise funds, but they also made it possible for Lee, his family, and numerous others who participated in the purchase to enjoy some quality time together while opening bags where happiness had been popped.

Mission Trips are the Gospel in Action

For Christians, embarking on a mission trip is crucial to following Christ. These trips provide believers with a short-term opportunity to venture out into the world, whether it's a different community within their neighborhood, city, state, or even further afield. The goal is to demonstrate the Gospel of Jesus through actions rather than words alone.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus told the apostles that when the Holy Spirit gave them power, they would become his "witnesses in Jerusalem; in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Mission trips give volunteers opportunities to live out their faith in service to others and, in that process, grow as believers to get closer to Christ and deepen their understanding of the Word.



Chosen 300 Ministries

In our desire to live as faithful servants of Christ, the Distant Members Fellowship (DMF) undertook mission trips to Delaware, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Virginia in 2022 and 2023. These trips involved service to others through home repairs and feeding. As a result of our visits, the DMF volunteers demonstrated the love of Christ to the beneficiaries, who praised God and expressed appreciation to the Fellowship.

The mission trips were organized to allow members to volunteer within their regions. The Central Region, under the leadership of Eunice Davis and Albertine Austine, comprises Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin; they drove to Indiana, where they spent the day doing house repairs and yard cleaning of one of our members. On three different occasions, the Northeastern Region led by Annette Kpoto

Cont Page 5

Annette Choko Kpoto, 2023

Special Laity of the Year

Every Christian church consists of two distinct groups: the clergy and the laity. The clergy are ordained and assigned to preaching the Word, administering the Sacraments, and providing spiritual guidance to congregations and the wider church. While the clergy receive regular attention, the church's laity, or non-ordained members, play an indispensable and vital role in the church's sustenance, growth, and expansion by advancing the Gospel and the Kingdom of God.

The laity has played an essential and critical role in the Methodist Church since its founding in England in the early 1700s. John and Charles Wesley, considered co-founders of this dynamic Christian denomination, have looked to the laity to provide the needed catalyst for growth.

According to the Board of Discipleship's website, Laity Day (formerly Layman's Day) was established in 1928 to celebrate the laity's participation in the priesthood of all believers. Laity Day is now a global celebration, and the Liberia Annual Conference celebrates it annually as part of the worldwide Methodist connection. During this celebration, one layperson is recognized for immensely contributing to the church's mission and ministries.



Annette Choko Kpoto

Laity Day is always a joyous occasion at S. T. Nagbe UMC, our home church in Liberia. To enhance the celebration, the local church in Liberia asked the Distant Members Fellowship to identify one person within the Fellowship for recognition as Special Laity of the Year.

Annette Choko Kpoto was the 2023 Special Laity of the Year which is a well-deserving honor. As the team leader of the Northeastern Region, Annette has demonstrated unparalleled dedication to Christ, His Church, and the Fellowship, an extension of that church. During the year, Annette, a chef by training, collaborated with others to organize sales that generated thousands of dollars, opened her home to the Fellowship for meetings and Bible study, and showed unbridled compassion to individual members. It was no surprise when members of the Fellowship overwhelmingly voted to celebrate Annette. Just as Annette's name is registered in the hearts of the members of the Fellowship, so it is written in heaven and the Book of Life.

Bible Quiz

- Which book is a book of a prophet
A. Song of Solomon
B. Ecclesiastes
C. Psalms
D. Jeremiah
- The prophet who refused to go to Nineveh was
A. Micah
B. Jonah
C. Isaiah
D. Malachi
- Which book comes last in the Bible
A. Revelation
B. Galatians
C. The Acts
D. Malachi
- How many books are there in the Bible?
A. 39 B. 66 C. 27 D. 12
- Did you not know that I must be about my _____ business? (Luke 2:49)
A. People's B. Family's C. Mother's D. Father's
- The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all _____ (Revelation 22:21)
A. Always B. Amen C. Yes D. And also with you
- Which of the following is NOT one of the first four books of the New Testament?
A. James B. Mark C. Luke D. Matthew
- Blessed are the _____ for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:3)
A. Mourners B. Children of God C. Disciples D. Pure in heart
- In the book of Job, who is the Accuser of God's people?
A. Elihu B. Satan C. Bildad D. Zophar
- A literary genre in the Bible that deals with the Last days is known as
A. Prophetic gestures,
B. Apocalyptic
C. Apocrypha
D. Epiphany

Answers on page 11

Mission Trips are the Gospel in Action (Cont'd from page 4)

and Musu Kennedy comprising Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. They traveled to Delaware and Virginia, where they spent separate weekends doing home repairs for a member and volunteered at two service centers that catered to the unhoused and those experiencing food insecurity.

These mission trips manifested a desire of our Fellowship to be not just hearers of the Word but doers. In obedience to Christ, as we have received power from the Holy Spirit, we shall continue to be witnesses for Christ in our own "Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This act of service is one way to express the Gospel in action.

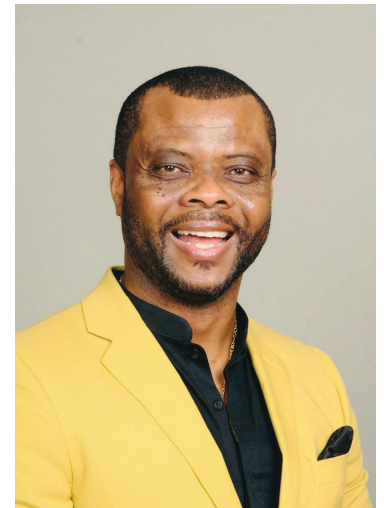
The Lead



Rev. Blidi Nimely
*Senior Pastor
ST Nagbe UMC*



Rev. Fredrick Emile Simbo
*Associate Pastor
ST Nagbe UMC*



Dartor Bolo
President



Albertine Mamie Austine
Treasurer



Olivia R. Browne
Chaplain



Brenda Bedell
*Chairperson Program
Committee*



Florence Fonderson
*Co-Chair Program
Committee*



Musu Kennedy
*Co-Chairlady Northeastern
Region*



Nanela Warner Taplah
*Chairlady Southeastern
Region*



Eddie Harris
*Co-Chair Southeastern
Region*



Roland Tolee
*Chairman Southwestern
Region*

Leadership



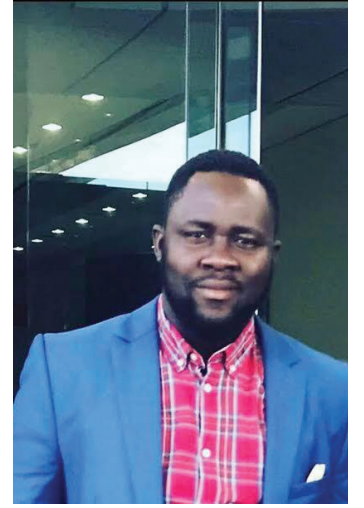
Harry Tarpeh
VP Operations



Tessa Monyou Paye-Zulu
Secretary General



Dax Tuah
Assistant Secretary



Marvine B. Tchitche
Financial Secretary



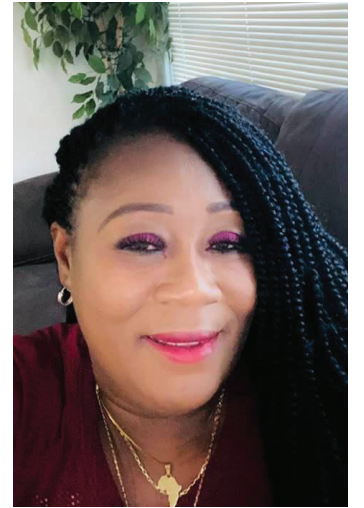
Dwanah S. Dwanah
Chairman Finance Committee



Elm Mathews
Co-Chairman Finance Committee



Daysely R. Zulu
Chairman Membership and outreach



Annette Choko Kpoto
Chairlady Northeastern Region



Dorothy Miller
Co-Chair Southwestern Region



Eunice Taylor
Chairperson Central Region

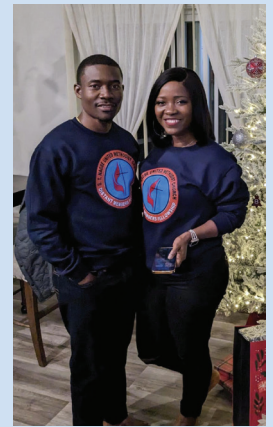


Dr. Jatu Sonii Karpeh
Co-Chair Membership and outreach



I Ezax Smith
Chairman of the Board

The Year In Pictures



*Christmas
2023*





Northeastern Regional Food Sale



Mother Rose Brophleh frying kala



Northeastern Regional Food Sale



Mission Trip, Delaware



Welcoming ceremony for New Members into the STNDMF



Love the Child Orphanage, DMF Mission Project



Fellowship Time at one of our gatherings

The Year In Pictures



The ambassador of the DMF, Sis. Thelma Miller during Mildred Page Hall Renovation



King William Papie Buxton And Queen Teplah Kamneh Tanumn



Dr. Jatu Sonni Karpah Graduation Celebration



Distance Member Fellowship General Assembly

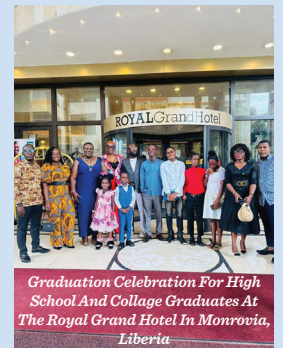


DMF prepares meal for Northern Virginia family service



Mission Trip, Indiana

Southeastern Region Food Sale



Graduation Celebration For High School And Collage Graduates At The Royal Grand Hotel In Monrovia, Liberia

Southeastern Region Mission Trip



Mission Trip



Mission Trip, Delaware



Mission Trip, Delaware



Central Region Gathering at the Portland United Methodist Church Minnesota



Visitation and Outreach

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

Peacemaking is Hard Work

By Rev. Levi C. Williams, Th.D.

“Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

On October 7, 2023, I heard the troubling news that the militant Palestinian organization, Hamas, had carried out a raid on Israel, killed hundreds, and kidnapped over one thousand men, women and children. This news was unsettling. Having studied the biblical and secular history of Israel and visited Israel many years ago, I was painfully aware of the uncomfortable dynamics of life in Israel between the Muslims and the Jews. If you throw into that mix of Christians who view Jerusalem as the spiritual capital of their faith and the resultant frequent flow of Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem, Israel is a cornucopia of socio-political, religious, and emotional entanglement.

October 7, 2023 marked 12 years to the day when three women, former President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee (from my home country of Liberia), along with Tawakkul Karman, a female civil rights activist from Yemen, had won the Nobel Peace Prize on October 7, 2011. The Nobel Committee recognized them “for their nonviolent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights to full participation in peace-building work” (<http://www.nobelprize.org/>). As one who lived through different phases of Liberia’s brutal civil war that lasted from 1989 to 2003 and recounted in my book, *Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death*, I know of the long and bitter struggles Liberians endured, and what it means to live in an environment of social tension.

The protracted conflict in Israel makes peace elusive, yet those of us who follow Jesus Christ must commit ourselves to the pursuit of peace. Jesus called those who embrace peace, “blessed” and “children of God.” Being a peacemaker means following peace and working to keep it as a stable and permanent part of a community or nation. Peacemakers open themselves to misunderstanding and misinterpretation, likely leading to persecution and death as in the case of Rev.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The work of peace is extremely difficult. It is stressful and can wear a person out, even taking its toll on your health. Peacemakers can be falsely accused of being bias, and they may even be attacked, yet, Jesus directed all who follow him to become peacemakers because this will show we are truly God’s children. Jesus himself was a peacemaker; through his atoning death, he restored the broken relationship between humans and God leading Paul to write in 2 Corinthians 5:19, “...in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (NRSV).

As the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Israel unfolded during the ensuing days, it was natural for me to gravitate to a support of Israel, but I thought about the Palestinian civilians who did not participate in the attack but suffered the consequences of Israel’s retribution. This was a different generation of Palestinians. It is possible to encourage Muslims, Jews, and Christians to live together peacefully in Israel and everywhere in the world, after all, “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1).

Getting to the place of convincing all that it will benefit them to share one state or have two states coexisting side by side, is not going to be easy. Jesus demonstrated by His own mission to reconcile God and humans, that peace is hard work, but it is worth it.



Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Answers to Bible quiz on page 5 1. D 2. B 3. A 4. B 5. D 6. B 7. A 8. B 9. B 10. B

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A SERVICE OF BEING ALIVE AND THANKFUL

The traditional name of the festival is Thanksgiving. Many American Millennials (those born in the 1990s) call it "Friends Giving." The Distant Members Fellowship called it "Thanks-Living" and celebrated it on Sunday, November 19, 2023. It was indeed a glorious event. With as many as 30 members in attendance, the Program Committee sponsored the Program. Brenda Bedell and Florence Fonderson once again showed their brilliance in their organizational skills.

Inclusive of the traditional liturgical elements of an opening prayer and scripture reading, those in attendance were blessed by the angelic voice of Margaret Cephas, who sang an inspiring song of praise and gratitude about the goodness of God. Rev. Henry Dolopei delivered a touching homily that brought Psalm 100 to life in a powerful way. The worshipers were further elevated by the testimonies of three of our members who bore witness to the existential power of God in their lives, as those listening identified with the

narratives similar to what they, too, have experienced about the goodness and love of God.

The service ended with a summary description through an audio-visual presentation by President Bolo describing the blessings of God in the activities of the Fellowship. Throughout the worship experience, there was an atmosphere of true friendship as members exchanged pleasantries in an environment of congeniality. When the worship service ended, it was clear there was a genuine expression of real Fellowship with each other. Those in attendance manifested an attitude of gratitude to the Creator and Provider. This service of Thanks-Living was indeed celebratory and memorable.



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