

# The Providence Pilgrim.

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A journal concerning Liberians in the United States and abroad.

WINTER 2005



## Captain's Corner Nathaniel Koliyah

In this second issue of the Providence Pilgrim, my message to my fellow Liberians and friends of Liberia is the need of Christian maturity. Defining Christian maturity in a sermon on the 23rd Psalm, Pastor Eric Molicki told the congregation of Trinity Presbyterian Church that "...maturity in the Christian life is never about growing more independent. In fact just the opposite. The more we grow and understand who God is, the more we grow and understand what He's done for us, the more we become dependent upon Him."

Before making this profound fundamental statement, Pastor Molicki was quick to point out that the 23rd Psalm is misunderstood as a Psalm of sorrow or death. Rather, the 23rd Psalm is a Psalm of confidence in God. Oh, how I wished that many Liberians were privileged to hear this sermon expounding the true meaning of this Psalm.

I was one of the Liberians who was lucky enough to flee the country when the civil war was raging. I heard many sad stories, one of which pertains to the misunderstanding and misapplication of the 23rd Psalm. It was told that when the rebels had made life and death decisions for their captives, those on the death list were made to recite the 23rd Psalm as their final words. After this, there was no turning back, as the rebels killed them. Oh, how I wish this weren't true.

Thank God the war is over! However, as one analyst put it- "...the absence of war does not mean the existence of peace." I am inclined to believe that Liberians and friends of Liberia should cling to the true meaning and teaching of the 23rd Psalm, now and forevermore, for the obvious reasons.

It is believed that King David authored the 23rd Psalm at one of the difficult times of his life. In spite of his challenges, David declared his confidence in God. Liberians and Liberia have been ravaged by fifteen years of devastating civil war. Even though the war is over it leaves behind huge challenges. These challenges are humanly impossible to meet: rape victims may be next door neighbors to their abusers; orphans may see murderers of their parents; homeless will see their homes occupied by soldiers; the future of

the child-soldier remains uncertain. Given these problems, Liberians and friends of Liberia need to cling to the Lord as Liberia's Shepherd. There are many ways this is done. One way we at Trinity exercise this Christian maturity is by prayers and supplications. Will Liberians and friends of Liberia pray for Liberia? Shall we with David declare the LORD is our Shepherd. Amen.

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## Fourth Annual Liberian Dinner



Trinity Presbyterian Church of Providence, Rhode Island proudly celebrated the fourth Annual Liberian Fellowship Dinner this year on October 15th. In addition to Trinity members, those in attendance included staff of the International Institute of Rhode Island, friends and other well-wishers. The event began by dining on sumptuous Liberian and American cuisine. The celebration continued with Pastor Sherwood's homily on Psalm 87. The homily was followed by a condensed version of "Liberia, An Uncivil War". This documentary sketched causes and players of the war, as well as scenes of the war's end. The evening closed with prayer. We encourage continued prayer echoing themes of prayers at the dinner: for Liberia's youth, especially the 'child-soldiers'; the election and its consequences; good governance; forgiveness and reconciliation among Liberians; the Church in a time of restoration, healing, and recovery for Liberia.

Provided below are excerpted comments from a few participants who kindly sent written responses (others gave verbal words of encouragement):

From the beautiful, indigenous clothes to the scrumptious Liberian meals, ... a wonderful event... it helped me to understand further the dear people who have emigrated here. ... refugees for months... Their faith in God is solid and true - tested in the fire of suffering. I thank God for their friendship and their testimonies of God's faithfulness. ... Almost every night now, Nathan and Nicholas, our two sons (5 and 2 years old), pray for the people of Liberia as well as for the Liberians who are here in America. ... the Liberians here have now

impacted our family in many ways, and have broadened our vision of the world! (Alice Molicki, high school math teacher, now full-time mother of 2)

"great time of fellowship. ... wished we had had more time to talk about the different foods... what other sorts of food they would eat in Liberia. ... But, my heart was disturbed. ... I was angered by the enormous waste that corruption, crime, mismanagement and a decade of war had wrought upon the country. ... what I left being reminded of was the brokenness of man and the inherent difficulties in societies which those broken men create. ... The people of Liberia need reconciliation... They need peace, peace between men, but they desperately need the foundation of true peace between God and man that only Christ can bring. Since the dinner my prayers for Liberia have been far deeper, more frequent, informed, and by the grace of God those prayers will be used to bring reconciliation to Liberia."-(Rob Cox, associate pastor of Trinity)

"...the selections from this documentary revealed how little I really knew. It made me ashamed, of my own ignorance, of our government's non-response and finally of the inhumanity with which we can treat other humans. This is true as much for the West turning it eyes away as it is for the callous and vicious Liberian killers themselves. ... Christ looked at others with compassion and then acted... he saw pain and suffering as an opportunity for God's glory to be revealed... have we done/ can we do the same?" (Randall Van Schepen, Asst. Professor Roger Williams)

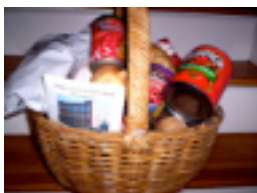
It was a lovely feast with incredible food and a loving atmosphere. It was a blessing to be able to spend a highly educational evening with a joyous and welcoming community and to be able to come together in closing to send out thoughts, prayers, wishes and hope collectively to mid-election Liberia. The staff and volunteers from the Refuge Resettlement Department of International Institute-RI found the event highly informational and the film and discussions helped crystallize our understanding of the Liberian civil war. (Laurie Wood, Internat'l Institute of RI.)

Trinity began the Liberian Fellowship Dinner in 2002 as a time of prayer and supplication for Liberian brothers and sisters and the nation and people of Liberia. When Liberians began worshipping at Trinity around 2001, the

congregation quickly became aware of their circumstances, especially a cruel civil war that continued to trouble their country. The congregation decided to actively identify with their Liberian members in prayer and sharing. The Liberian Fellowship Dinner is one setting where the congregation of Trinity and invited worshippers focus exclusively on Liberia. We hope to see all of you at the next Liberian Fellowship Dinner in October 2006 at 72 Clifford Street, Providence.

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**Thanksgiving Baskets Distributed on Behalf of Trinity**



An objective of the Liberian Outreach Team is to encourage members of the

Liberian and West African community in Providence to be involved in a gospel preaching church. We are using such occasions as Thanksgiving and Christmas to minister to physical needs of Liberian friends and neighbors of some members of Trinity. We hope to use these and other opportunities throughout the year to assist these families and to encourage them to become or continue being involved in a gospel-preaching church. It is with these tokens of our concern that we want to extend a welcome to these families to fellowship with us here at Trinity. Thanks to all of you who have contributed directly to this outreach. The food distributed at Thanksgiving fed more than 60 people.

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**Joshua Milton Blahyi , ex-General -Diana Smith**



Joshua, his children & sister-in-law

In my research on the [Liberian civil war] I came across the warlord widely known as “General Butt-Naked”, because he and all his soldiers fought nude for more power. I remember my passing cynicism when I read that he claimed to have found Christ and then became a preacher. Then I heard he was coming to camp. The next day ...I ... met a small group of people, who looked like they were in a Bible study. My host brother wasn’t there, and I only recognized one man, the General himself. Not knowing exactly how to introduce myself, I awkwardly and rather bluntly asked, “Are you the General?” “Ex-General,” the man said with a tentative smile. And so I sat down.

I had walked into a book-review session; they were editing his autobiography. I was invited to join in the editing process and so have since spent a large portion of my free time editing the 200 page book. It is a powerful story of a man who was the fetish priest of his tribe, who was initiated and controlled by their ancestral god. From the age of 11 he performed monthly human sacrifices, always offering the souls of the people captured to nya-na-oweh, who in turn made him impenetrable to bullets and took him on a ‘soul journey’ for four hours every night. It was at his command that he fought nude.

So many times in [reading] the book I had to suspend my disbelief that these spiritual warfare, having physical realities in the way described, actually happen in our world, and I wonder how very ignorant I really am to the spirit world. Eating certain foods, walking barefoot, saying careless words; the list of things that made people vulnerable made me very grateful how much the Lord protects his innocent (and ignorant) children. The General was eventually brought to salvation through the concerted prayer and radical boldness of the Evangelical Soul Winning Ministries – those people are intense! I wish we were all as bold in the Spirit of the Lord to confront the evil in our world today.

Brother Joshua has a new name now, and appears very low key, always wearing shorts and football (soccer) jerseys. ... During one review session when (I thought) rather boldly asked if he was making any retribution or what he planned to do to correct for his ways, his answer was encouraging. He said he had returned everything that he had stolen, but that there was no way to replace the value of human life. He said although he knew he was forgiven by God and made right in Him, he always apologized profusely for his actions and the other warlords like his own. Then he admitted that the decision to forgive was always in the hands of the victims, and he couldn’t make them forgive him. He said that it was necessary for him to face court, but that he hoped that he wouldn’t have to be imprisoned as that would curtail any good that could come out of his life.

Just as I’m still editing the book, I’m still processing how I feel about the rather abstract idea of Justice in this particular situation. It was very interesting to be in a discussion about whether Liberia would choose a Peace and Reconciliation Commission like South Africa or a War Tribunal like Rwanda with one who clearly will be called to either one. It makes interesting food for thought ... Diana Smith is a junior at Wheaton College. She recently completed her internship at Buduburum, a Liberian refugee camp in Ghana.

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**Liberia: Elections Update**

Liberia has held an historic election, with another first for Africa- a woman president. On the 23rd of November, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and her vice president Joseph Boakai were declared to have won the run-off election held November 8.



Joseph Boakai and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf

Nonetheless there are lingering questions. In a field of over 20 candidates, did George Weah receive the highest percentage of popular vote because he was a celebrity? Or because his wealth was not obtained from the people of Liberia? Were the voters foolish to vote for one with so little formal education? Were some voters making a statement to the educated ruling class that has historically served them so poorly?



George Weah

Was Ellen carried in the run-off vote by alliances with former leaders and military elite? Or was it a case of technology- with Liberia’s neglected highway infrastructure a helicopter was better than a Hummer? Will Ellen’s admission and apologies for her role in the civil war impact how her government deals with Taylor and other villains of the civil war? Will the new government be able to personally resist the riches offered by Liberia’s mines and forests? Will the “Iron Lady” properly handle pressures from the EU and the USA?

This newsletter plans to provide a more detailed discussion of the election as a subsequent supplement. Although the questions may linger for months and years, we must hope and continually pray that this opportunity to rebuild Liberia will not be squandered or lost. Pray that a new standard of integrity and service will be firmly established with this new government. - Sam Clark

Providence Pilgrim is a publication of the Liberian Outreach Team of Trinity Presbyterian Church, PCA.

**Captain Nathaniel Koliyah  
Editor Beth Clark  
Outreach Team- Sam Clark, Rob Cox,  
Christic Marblow, Gabriel Wehjala**