

**20th Annual Convention - Episcopal Elementary School and
Episcopal High School (EES/EHS) Alumni Asso. in the Americas**

August 31-Sept. 2, 2018

Speech delivered on September 1, 2018

By: The Rev. Dr. James T. Yarsiah

Convention Theme: ***"If not us then who?"*** addition: "If not now then when?"

Good evening friends, well-wishers and my fellow alumni. I am humbled and delighted to serve as Guest Speaker and Guest of Honor at this 20th Annual Convention of the EES/EHS Alumni Association in the Americas. I sincerely thank all of those responsible for my selection, most notably, Mrs. Ellen Clemons, President of the Georgia Chapter along with her corps of officers and members. I recognized the presence of Mr. Samuel A. Abdullai, National President, the officers, executives, board members, former teachers, former missionaries and friends of our beloved institutions. We extend special thanks and appreciation to all our distinguished guests and honorees for your support and patronage tonight. I am grateful to my darling wife, Ophelia and our son, Kenneth, my cousin Joseph and his wife Fata Ballah for accompanying me at this EES/EHS Annual Convention Dinner Ball.

Just a few trivia questions to help us reconnect to our alma-mater in Robertsport. For each correct answer, I will give an autographed copy of

my book as a prize. “Early Missionary Work of the Protestant Episcopal Church (DFMS) In Liberia and Their Differential Effects 1821-1871”

- What is the full name of the Episcopal Church that is located on campus? Answer: St. John’s Irvin Memorial Church
- What is the full name of the famous science teach at St. John’s? Answer: Catherine C. Banabay
- When was the Episcopal mission started in Robertsport ? Answer: 1878
- What is the full name of the Missionary Priest who served the Episcopal Mission for a long time? He is buried in Robertsport. Answer: Rev. Fr. Dr. Edgar Borling Robertson
- What is the full name of the last principal if the High School, prior to the Liberian Civil war. Answer: Mr. Delano Soni King, Sr.

Congratulations to all our winners.

As I deliver my speech, I ask each of you to kindly help me respond to our Convention theme. I will say: If not us, and your response is: “Then who?” And I will add: If not now and your response, “Then when?”

Let’s try it: If not us – ***Then who?*** If not now – ***Then when?*** (applause). These powerful words that constitute our theme, were writtenn by John E. Lewis, an international, award-winning author with eight books and countless short stories and articles to his credit.

The question/s: “If not us then who?” is a rhetorical question with an obvious answer. To be clear, a rhetorical question is one that you ask without expecting an answer. The question might be one that does not have an answer or it might also be one that has an obvious answer but you have asked the question to make a point or to persuade others.

Our theme for this convention does two important things:

1. It poses a question that has an **obvious** and **expected** answer. 2. It poses a question to **make a point** and **to persuade** each member (active and inactive). Let’s consider the first point: Our theme poses a question that has an **obvious** and **expected** answer. If not us **then who**? In fact, we should be personal and say: If not **me**, then who? Who shall support EES/EHS if not we who are graduates and former students? Who should promote the interest and solicit support for the Alumni Association? And the obvious answer is: **no one else will, if we do not**. EES/EHS are the institutions that nurtured and gave many of us the foundational education upon which we have built, to become professional and successful women and men, For example, I have been ordained as an Episcopal Priest for more than twenty-one years and I have served in several places around the world. It is therefore time that we give back and pay it forward in tangible ways (in cash and/or in kind). Gone are the days, when the missionaries would provide financial and materials resources to support the Episcopal missions in Liberia.

Speaking of individual support, I must commend our past and present leaders. During the last ten years, I have come to know two of our wonderful leaders: Mr. William Farewell Sherman, past president and Mr. Samuel A. Abdullai our current President. These visionary leaders, along with other officers and members, have kept this association alive for the past twenty years (applause). We must also applaud the active chapter leaders, current members and all of those who have continued to support this alumni association; and to solicit help from relatives and friends. I am a living witness to the passion that many of our current members have demonstrated by searching for former classmates/schoolmates and encouraging them to join us as we move this organization forward. I believe that this Association, like many others, does not mind the size of your financial or material support. But what matters is the fact that each member is active and that she/he is contributing to the success of the EES/EHS Alumni Association in the Americas.

2. Secondly, our theme poses a question to **make a point** and to **persuade** each member (active and dormant) to act now in order to keep EES/EHS operational and viable. “*If not us **then who?***” addition: “If not now **then when?**” This theme demands our immediate and swift actions to respond to the academic needs of the students and faculty at our alma mater. As graduates and former students of EES/EHS, each of us needs to do our fair share in order to support

the Alumni Association and the Association will instead undertake projects, including meeting payrolls for the teachers at these schools. Speaking about projects and developing the capacities of students and teachers at these schools, it was a pleasure for me in 2012 to partner with the EES/EHS Alumni Association in the Americas in order to ship brand new laboratory equipment and materials that were purchased with a cash donation of \$10,000 from one of our members. The equipment and materials were included in a shipment of a 40 foot freight container that Ophelia and I sent to Liberia as part of our Global Outreach Ministry to Liberia. The container arrived safely in Liberia and the laboratory equipment were successfully delivered to our local representatives at the time. I am glad to know that the Laboratory is set up and in use at St. John's. Since then, we have seen photos and learned of other projects that are currently in progress as we speak.

Implementing our Theme: If not us then who?

Over the years, I have observed that most organizations (at home and in the Diaspora) elect their corps of officers and then some members become dormant and passive, while others remain active and supportive. For those dormant and passive members, they expect the President/Chairman and officers to move the organization forward, to solve all the problems, to undertake projects and ensure success, without their help/input.

Some of those same people stand on the fence and become critical of everything that is done and initiated, for the good of the organization. Some may even adapt the crab syndrome, pulling others down so that they all may remain at the bottom.

For anyone who considers him/herself to be in the above category/ies, I appeal to you to change course and adapt a more active, positive and progressive attitude. For some of us who may have friends that have become passive/dormant, I ask you to encourage those friends to become active for the greater good of this larger body. There is saying that has become a cliché: “United we stand, divided we fall.” This would be the war cry of a famous soldier, but its actual first recorded use dates back to the Greek story teller, Aesop, who lived in the 6th Century B.C. This quote can be found as a direct statement in “The Four Oxen and the Lion.” It can also be found indirectly in “The Bundle of Sticks.”

Here is the story of “The Four Oxen and the Lion” that was orally told for many years. A lion used to prowl about a field in which four oxen used to dwell. Many a time the lion tried to attack them; but whenever he came near them, they turned their tails to warn each other, so that whichever way he approached them he was met by the horns of one of them. At last, however, they fell a-quarrelling among themselves, and each went off to pasture alone in the separate corner of the field.

Then the lion attacked them one by one and soon made an end of all four. United we stand, divided we fall.

“The Bundle of Sticks”: This short fable tells of a man whose sons often quarrel among themselves. To show them the benefit of working together, he brings them a bundle of sticks. He asks them to break the bundle of sticks. As expected, the brothers cannot break the sticks when they are bundled together. However, they can easily be broken individually. The moral of this story is written:

"My sons, if you are of one mind, and unite to assist each other, you will be as this bundle, uninjured by all the attempts of your enemies; but if you are divided among yourselves, you will be broken as easily as these sticks."

Friends, in unity, there is always strength. As alumni and former students, we can accomplish the goals of this organization and make great impact on the lives of students, faculty and staff at EES/EHS in Robertsport, Grand Cape Mount County, Liberia, if we remain united and support our leaders.

I must admit that prior to this 20th Convention, I admire the interest and connectedness demonstrated by the Chairman of the Planning Committee, who is also our Treasurer, Mr. William “Bill” Paasewe, the President, officers and members of the Georgia Chapter, Mrs. Ellen Clemons and others) and all those who participated in the regular

Sunday evening teleconferences. I am encouraged by what I experienced, with members contacting their former classmates and friends to join the meetings and to extend invitation to those they knew. Not only that, I am impressed with members volunteering to sell tickets, to pay their annual membership dues and encourage those who may be unable to attend to also pay their dues. I am also glad to see members are reaching out to those members that may be sick or are bereaved. All of the above are positive actions that should make each of us proud of our beloved EES/EHS and the Alumni Association.

As I close, let me leave each of you with these words. “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” We have to be our sisters and brothers keepers. For the past year, I have served as the Welfare and Concern Committee Chairman for our association and as I indicated during the Business meeting, I want people to inform me whenever they learn of any of our members who is bereaved or has health issues and wants me to reach out to these persons. We need to show love for one another and show that we care for people. We do not always have to call people only to ask for money and financial help. We should also call to check on people and inquire as to how they are doing. If we do this, our members will be glad to respond whenever we contact them for financial contribution. Remember, our theme says: **“If not us then who? If not now then when?”** I thank you and God bless.