

St. John's Alumni Dedicate 3 New Buildings to Alma Mater

Wed, 08/17/2016 - 01:51 tjohnson

By:

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The Alumni Association of the St. John's Mission Episcopal High School and Episcopal Elementary School in Robertsport, Grand Cape Mount County, has consecrated and turned over to the Episcopal Church of Liberia three newly constructed buildings for use by the school.

The first building dedicated was the Catherine Cowan "Chemistry" Barnaby Science Laboratory, named in memory of the late American Missionary, Ms. Catherine C. Barnaby, who contributed immensely to Liberia's education system.

As an outstanding Science teacher at St. John's in the 1940s to early 1960s, Ms. Barnaby produced scores of Liberian scientists who following their graduation matriculated to universities around the world, including Cuttington College and Divinity School, (now Cuttington University) and the University of Liberia as well as leading universities in the United States, United Kingdom, Israel, Germany and elsewhere. Many of them became medical doctors and specialists, engineers, Science teachers, academicians and other professionals.

The plaque on the Barnaby Building reads: "Dedicated to the Missionary Math and Science Teacher, Catherine Cowan Chemistry Barnaby, because of her untiring, faithful and unwavering dedication, integrity and commitment to excellence and devoted service to teaching young Liberian students. She lifted every student to a higher level. The students and the world are better because of her."

Other buildings dedicated were the Emmanuel Shaw II Technology Center and the Bowen Cottage Hall, named in honor of a former student and a great professor of the school, respectively.

The alumni idea to construct those buildings was based on the belief that high school alumni associations are usually more active than those of colleges or universities. The St. Johns Alumni Association members present said they were keen on the idea of giving back to their alma mater.

They said the Alumni Association was engaged in organizing social events to raise funds in order to contribute to the school's infrastructure and the provision of educational and other materials.

During the ceremony held last weekend on the school campus in Robertsport, the Most Rev. Dr. Jonathan B. B. Hart, Bishop of the Episcopal Church of Liberia and Archbishop of the Interim Anglican Province of West Africa, consecrated and took ownership of the projects.

He expressed gratitude to the alumni for the buildings.

“As Bishop of the Episcopal Church of Liberia, we take ownership of these properties and facilities for use by the church and we want to commend the alumni for the partnership,” Bishop Hart told the gathering.

He acknowledged that the Episcopal Church is facing many challenges in running its schools. However, Bishop Hart said, the Church as an institution is trying to overcome those challenges, particularly with support from the alumni associations and other partners.

The Bishop urged alumni in the Diaspora to emulate the good example of the St. John's alumni by giving back to their alma mater.

Samuel A. Abdullai, Sr., President of the St. John's Alumni in the Americas told the Daily Observer that the association is willing to assist in ensuring that the Episcopal schools in Robertsport are restored and once more become distinguished educational institutions in the county.

“We strive to mobilize and engage all the alumni in the spirit of giving back, and to collaborate with the Episcopal Diocese of Liberia to provide quality education to young Liberians,” Abdullai said.

As graduates and former students of the St. John's, who now reside in the United States and Liberia, the alumni share a common vision for the institution and are willing to help the school, said Mr. Abdullai.

St. John's, the House of Bethany (residence of the female students), and the Episcopal High School in Robertsport serve as the culminating points that combine to create a prominent source of highly educated, disciplined, patriotic, and Christian young men and women who will be ready for higher education in Liberia or abroad, Mr. Abdullai declared. “We will pool our resources to restore those institutions to the position of prominence that they enjoyed prior to the extended period of civil unrest in the country.

“As products of those institutions, we realize our indebtedness not only to them, but also to Liberia,” he added.

“We acknowledge that while these institutions were largely created by missionaries from America the benefits of whose largesse of a good Christian education we are currently reaping, it is incumbent upon us as Liberians now to give back to the very institutions that are largely responsible for preparing us for survival in the world today.

President Abdullai further intimated, "Within the next five years, we will continue to give of our time, our money, and our services, to rebuild our institutions and ensure that every child residing in the location of those institutions is given the opportunity to education that is as good as or better than what we had."

He said the alumni envision that within the next five years, all institutions will be operational, that the Episcopal Elementary and High Schools in Robertsport will be reopened and fully staffed, and that the House of Bethany and St. Johns' will reopen for boarding students.

Mr. Ernie Bruce, president of the alumni local branch, also lauded the late Miss Barnaby, who shaped the minds of many young Liberians in the sciences.

Alumnus Bruce disclosed that the technology center was built by LoneStar GSM Company, Bowen Cottage was provided by the family, while the funding for the Barnaby Science Lab was provided by her grandson, who plays in the National Football League in U.S, in partnership with the alumni association.

Meanwhile, the alumni have invited the public, particularly individuals who want to add the names of their parents or other relatives to the Memorial Wall for a donation of US\$50 for their deceased to be memorialized. The proceeds will be used to facilitate other ongoing projects being undertaken on the campus by the alumni.

"There is no limit as to who can be memorialized on this wall: Parents, uncles, aunts, etc.," said Alumnus Feweh Sherman.