

Greetings sisters and brothers of the EES/EHS alumni association! I am honored and humbled by your invitation to have me speak tonight. I want to thank Musulynn Massaley Travers and H. Momo Fahnbulleh for inviting me to deliver the 2016 keynote address. My wife, Janet, and I, have enjoyed the blessing of finding our friends and students from EHS after over 40 years of not knowing what had happened to you. A special thanks to Dr. Cyril Broderick for finding me on Facebook, and to Feweh Sherman & Bill Paasewe for inviting us to be a part of the alumni association. And, through you, we have reconnected with our old friends from the EHS faculty, Torre Bissell and Marilyn Robertson

My wife and I are pleased to be able to celebrate our 51<sup>st</sup> wedding anniversary with you tonight. Fifty years ago, we celebrated our 1<sup>st</sup> wedding anniversary as newly-arrived teachers at St John's Episcopal High School. When we arrived at St John's, as Father Robertson was assigning classes for us to teach, he told us that graduates of the Episcopal High School were expected to be ready to enter colleges and universities in America and Europe upon graduation. Thus, teaching was to be rigorous and with high expectations. Many of you here tonight bear witness to the success of the education you received at EHS. A teacher can have no greater satisfaction than the success and happiness of his or her students, and we celebrate with you. When we left St John's in December of 1968, we carried you all with us. Our time at St John's left an indelible mark on our hearts and souls, and we carried the music of Africa with us. The opportunity to work together as a team and the joy of that experience has become the foundation of our marriage. When we returned to the United States, we continued to do the work we learned at St John's...we worked with delinquent youth, parented two fine children, took in three foster sons, enjoyed seven grandsons, and of course we continued to teach. Thousands of our students have heard the stories of our time at St John's. So, St John's was also the foundation of our careers. We thank you for providing our lives with a firm foundation. Even though we were not missionaries assigned by the Episcopal Church, we carried the loving spirit of Jesus Christ with us. We are blessed with a fine church family at the First Methodist Church of Maryville MO.

However, our work and your work is not done. I was privileged to

accompany Samuel Abdullai and Feweh Sherman to Liberia last month. We were hosted by the Most Reverend Johnathan B. Hart, Bishop of the Episcopal Church of Liberia. We were greeted by the members of the alumni association in Liberia...Dr. Eugene Shannon, Ernest Bruce, Gabriel Wesley, Nathaniel Davies and many others. For five days, we worked with the Bishop and his staff as we sought to define a clear future for the mission at St John's, including resurrection of the boarding school at EHS and the continued support of the elementary school. We worked together, worshiped together, ate together, prayed together, and travelled to Robertsport to consecrate buildings and connect with those keeping the work of the mission alive. My specific mission on this trip was to identify possible work projects at St John's for students from Northwest Missouri State University, where I taught for 33 years. Upon hearing of my reconnection with my Liberian friends, Matt Johnson, a young professor at Northwest Missouri State approached me with a proposition. He was interested in finding an African work site for his students studying emergency management planning. Matt was my student as an undergraduate, and had heard the stories of Liberia. We were ready to launch this endeavor two years ago but were delayed by the Ebola crisis. Since that time, Mr. Johnson has connected with a consortium of colleges and universities in America interested in joining our endeavor. A nursing school in Kansas City is a member of that consortium and is interested in sending nursing students as part of the team. We will be meeting over these next few months to examine possibilities. I am confident that the structure is in place to host these students in Robertsport, and we now have a clear picture of specific projects. These projects include: 1) replacing the asbestos roof at the high school with zinc, 2) rebuilding the water system at St John's, 3) connecting the buildings to a power grid, and 4) working through the hospital on programs dealing with water purification, health education, and vaccinations. I was pleased that the Liberian alumni association established committees to oversee the first three of these projects.

Upon my return to St John's, I was happy to see the elementary school and high school in operation. The Bishop consecrated buildings which will house computer and science labs. Some housing for mission staff is available...including our house and Miss Barnaby's cottage. However, we were disappointed to learn that no EHS seniors passed the national exam. In

my opinion, teaching at EES/EHA should be our primary concern. Hopes of rebuilding a boarding school at St John's hinge upon being able to provide a quality education. Currently EES/EHS teachers are paid less than government teachers, making recruitment of quality teachers in Liberia difficult. We need to build a structure that will provide quality education, and salary cannot be the only component of that structure. We need on-going teacher education, competent supervision of teachers, and new avenues for attracting teachers. Many of you are involved in education, and your expertise is needed. Those of you who plan to return to Liberia, consider donating your time to teaching at EHS. Some of you have children who would be excellent teachers at EES/EHS. Focus on providing in-country teacher training. Work with alumni in government positions, alumni in Liberia, and the Episcopal Church to coordinate this effort. When EHS was a superior school in Liberia, the teachers were educated in America and Europe. Many of us hoped that EHS students would return to take the place of expatriate teachers.

The alumni of Liberia and the United States seemed to coalesce around the dream of rebuilding the boarding school as a primary goal. Certainly, the framework of the boys' dorm is solid; ready to support necessary flooring and roofing. The study hall can be converted into a dining/kitchen area. The House of Bethany provides more formidable problems of access and renovation; however, that project is also possible. Renovation of Father Robertson's house might be a temporary boarding solution for women students. I enthusiastically support this dream; however, infrastructure improvements in water and electrical power and the improvement of teaching are prerequisites to fulfilling this dream.

Rebuilding your alma mater will take more than mere financial commitment from you. I challenge you to educate your home churches about the need. Look for funding from NGO's, the United Nations, and American foreign aid programs for support. For example, when I talked to an agricultural professor at Northwest about the 500-acre plot of land at the mission, he became quite excited. He has overseen similar projects in East Africa and is aware of many sources of support for such projects. I intend to do presentations not only to my own church, which has sent mission teams to

Malawi and Haiti, but also to the Episcopalian Church in my home town. An Episcopalian contractor recently oversaw the one million dollar addition to our church. He and his wife have experience in Botswana. Our assistant pastor was once on a mission trip to Liberia. All of you have connections that can be used. As you begin this exciting endeavor, remember that communication and teamwork are important. Create a network of communication that includes the alumni associations in both countries and Bishop Hart's office in Monrovia. Be willing to incorporate new ideas and opportunities into planning. For example, Dwight Harvey, the superintendent of schools of Grand Cape Mount County, suggested turning Brunot Hall into a hall that could be rented out for events...such as weddings. The foundation of Brunot Hall is also solid. As the paved road reaches Robertsport and Robertsport connects to the power grid, new opportunities will emerge. The memorandum of understanding signed in Monrovia last month has laid the foundation to launch your efforts.

I am now an old man...my time, energy and resources are limited. However, nothing will give me greater pleasure than to watch you achieve your dreams. And, my wife and I will be with you as long as we are able. God bless you as you do his work.