

SPEECH
TO
21st Liberian Conference

August 31st, 2019

**Topic: Liberia Needs
You Now - Giving Back**

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Presented by:
*The Rev Trevor R. Babb, Rector Christ
Church New Brighton*

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President Samuel A. Abdullai, Board of Directors, Officers and members of EES/EHS Alumni Association of USA it is with great joy and humility that I greet you my brothers and sisters of the diaspora on this your 21st Annual Conference. I thank you for this kind invitation to address this body as your key-note speaker.

While I see this as an honor, I am reminded of an old English book I read long ago which helped to outline how to give a speech. It was speech making 101 which said, “Get up! Speak up! Then Shut up!” I will endeavor to follow that order as I address you on this evening.

For those who do not know me, I am Fr. Trevor R. Babb, rector of Historic Christ Church New Brighton, Staten Island and native of the Land of Sea and Sun – Barbados (Just return from there a week ago). I am here with my lovely wife Marcella of thirty-six (36) years and a few members of our Liberia 2020 committee who are helping to create the framework for our mission trip in 2020 and beyond of which I will say more in the body of my speech.

As a Barbadian, I am keenly aware of the unique connection between Barbados and Liberia and understand that ongoing linkage in your development as a nation. I bring this connection as a basis of my passion and engagement with the Liberian Community as we partner in the rebuilding of your nation through the lens of education which has been integral to the hallmark of the citizenry of both nations.

It is in this context that I address this conference on the subject: Liberia Needs You Now – Giving Back!!!

Historical Connection – Mine and Christ Church...

The history of Liberia from its humble beginnings is one of pride and progress which was severely ruptured by the civil wars from 1989 to 1997 and again in 1999. The impact of these wars has devastated the fabric of your nation and cast every social, political and cultural norm into chaos. This chaos has now been exacerbated due to a very anemic economy and in many ways unstable political leadership which has left one of the most important area of development in limbo. That area is education which has immediate and future impact for economical and developmental growth. I have heard the stories of many who were able to escape the civil wars with the barest of resources and barely with their lives. These persons have been very much in the forefront and leadership of trying to bring awareness and consciousness to the fact that Liberia Needs You Now and the burgeoning need to Give Back!

There is a saying which goes like this, “If you do not know your history, you are bound to repeat it!” A history of war and its devastation must never be repeated and we who understand that past must do all in our efforts to change it NOW! You ask how? Believe me, I understand your struggle for renewal and have been very

open to the possibility of partnership. Christ Church New Brighton understands your struggles and we began a partnership under the leadership of the late Rev. Charles Howell. In my tenure as rector for more than two years, I am inviting the church under my leadership to do more as we make education the centerpiece of a mission to Liberia in 2020. We will partner with any and all organizations in an effort to give back to Liberia and to help build upon its most precious resource for economic and social development, its children – the future leaders in the restoration of a wonderful nation.

The Concept of Giving Back

What does it mean to give back? Unlike a certain political leader of a certain political persuasion, all of us have had others pour into our development to make us who we are. In other words, we have not reached to the level we are all by ourselves. This existential reality must be an integral motivator for the idea of giving back. Liberia needs you now is a call of urgency and gratitude. Urgency because the future of your nation depends on you - on us with the help of God; gratitude because of what you have received from the fruit of her vines. Whether the vine was education, religion, or simply the nurturing of family all of you have been the beneficiary of Liberia's socialization for your personal growth and development. As you contemplate the current status of your nation and the need for its re-development, especially in the area of education where its future leaders,

locally and globally will evolve the call is for a movement of giving back. This movement cannot be fully effective without you. Its impact; its reaches; its success will depend on you; on us. The question that is and will be paramount is not whether you will give back, but how much and how much are you willing to sacrifice? It is this collective sacrifice that will provide the fuel for the movement of re-development in the area of education to which my focus is because I believe it is the foundation to help in shaping a new Liberia. As President Kennedy once uttered, “Do not ask what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country” is most apropos in this context and for such a time as this.

Why is it Needed Now?

If education be the most basic framework for the development of a nation and if this most precious resource is to be developed in our children then the future of a nation rest on how well it educates its citizens. This fundamental foundation cannot be denied the open and ready minds that beckon our help to be fashioned into the leaders and state-persons we envision.

It was this calypsonian philosopher by the name of the Mighty Sparrow who said in one of his classic calypsos, “Without and education in your head, ya better off dead!” In this utterance he has equated education with life and all that makes for procuring life. Nothing will be sadder for all of us than to live in a land of regret by

not doing anything now to propel a generation forward into greatness through the educational provisions we can make available to ensure their success and the success of generations to come. A nation – Your nation is depending on you and us to make it so. Can you imagine what it will mean to little John or Andrew or Sandra or Marva to know that we thought enough to invest in them because we believed in their greatness and valued their humanity? Can you imagine when they grow into the man or woman of means what they will think and do for the next generation? We therefore must be part of a movement that will have an eternal impact where generations will be the beneficiaries because of the seeds we sow now.

Christ Church Plan for 2020

I have asked the parish, which is being led by a small committee whose chairs are Mrs. Susan Fowler and your own Fehweh Sherman or Bill Sherman as he is known by most of us to join me in a mission to Liberia in 2020 with a focus on education working with St. John's Elementary and High Schools to provide educational resources to these schools that will help them to live within the culture and context of a 21st century educational system. As we develop these plans we recognized that there are some basic infrastructure requirements which must be in place to make our efforts effective.

Our plan currently is to engage in an exploration mission in early 2020 to hear from and fully assess with those on the ground in Liberia what is most helpful for their educational endeavors. While this will be exploratory the intent will be then to formulate a bigger operation for 2021 to begin the hard work of rebuilding. 2021 will not just be it, but my long vision is to establish a partnership between Historic Christ Church New Brighton and St. John's Elementary and High Schools as an ongoing mission with exchange visits triennially that is sustainable even after I am no longer the rector of Christ Church.

Based on firsthand experience through our visit in 2020 and the providing of some basic resources we will then be able to create the plan of action that best fits the schools and the administration there.

What started out to be a simple project of providing computers for the computer lab at the schools has morphed into a need to supply the power that runs the computers and other essentials at the school.

Here then is a framework for our engagement in 2020 and beyond:

- Exploratory visit in 2020 with at least five (5) to seven (7) person to get a lay of the landscape and the pragmatism of our efforts.
- Use this first trip to take requested basic school supplies

- Engage in a broader mission in 2021 to begin infrastructure re-development for the computer lab and other supporting services.
- Have the resources in place for a grand celebration by the end of 2021 or early in 2022.
- Plan for an exchange visit of Liberian Students and faculty to American in 2025.
- Continue this revolving exchange every three (3) years to review and update the relationship based on the needs and challenges of the day.

This ambitious outline to strengthen and sustain our relationship in the education of your citizens will need the help of all.

It is this context that I now invite your support and participation in this audacious endeavor individually and collectively. Liberia needs you now, so let us together
GIVE BACK!

Invitation

How can you give back? I invite you to commit to a pledge of \$3,000.00 over three years for the sole purpose of purchasing and sustaining the supply of educational resources for St. John's Elementary and High Schools. Christ Church will be the custodians of these funds managed by a small committee. With a thousand pledges

we can raise \$3,000,000 in three years to keep a source of readily available funding for the education of Liberians and the development of a nation.

Conclusion

Thank you again for your kind invitation and your patience in listening to me on this the celebration of your 21st Annual conference. May we together build the Liberia that can be and secure a future that makes Liberia a nation where education is not a privilege for a few but the rights of ALL. Have a stimulating and engaging remainder of your time together. Be blessed!