

The Panguma Story

Imagine walking to church in the rain, then once inside, sitting in a pew filled with rain water; the winds blowing rain in all around you. The roof is in desperate need of repair, and there are no windows! If this sounds ridiculous, it might interest you to know that in a village church in Panguma, Sierra Leone, Africa, this is the situation for about 4 months per year, during their rainy season. Below is a synopsis of the plight of this village and its people.

By some standards, Sierra Leone is considered to be the poorest country in the world. During the "10 Year War", from 1991 thru 2002, rebel forces used the above referenced church as a camp, where they held the women and children hostage, forcing them to prepare food, and using their captives for whatever purpose they wanted. You see, Panguma is located very close to the diamond mines in Sierra Leone (reference the movie - "Blood Diamonds"). The rebels knew if they could take control of the mines, they would have available the resources needed to purchase limitless weapons/ammunition.

Rebels came to Panguma, killing and mutilating the men. Those who were able, fled to the jungle to survive, and many ended up in refugee camps in surrounding countries. The young boys, ages 8 - 15, were forced to become rebels. If they refused, these young boys were killed, or had their limbs and other body parts amputated.

During this period, education ceased. When the war ended, the remaining older generation were either displaced, or grossly disabled by the rebels, and incapable of doing the physical labor required to rebuild. As a result of the war, the younger generation missed out on schooling, and did not receive the education required to get a job and earn a living. Today, the majority of the damage inflicted during the rebel occupation still remains, and the people of the town do not have the means to afford the materials required to repair or rebuild.

In a nutshell, you now have the foundation for our February 2010 mission trip to Panguma. Camp Hill UMC is partnering with the United Methodist Conference in Sierra Leone. Our goal is to raise \$25,000 to cover the needed repairs to the Panguma UMC, and the associated primary school. We recognize the needs of this town are vast and we cannot possibly meet them all. However, what we can do is provide a beacon of hope for the town's people, through the reconstructive efforts at the church and school. They have been living with these conditions for over 7 years now. How frustrating it must be, day after day, to see the situation before you, and to know you cannot do anything about it.

Won't you please consider helping us to restore hope in the midst of extreme desperation? Contributions are tax deductible. Please make checks payable to Camp Hill UMC (417 South 22nd Street, Camp Hill, Pa. 17011), and annotated "2010 Sierra Leone Mission Trip – Repairs" Also available is the option to contribute on-line using our website 'www.teampanguma.org'. If you have any questions, please contact our church office, (717) 737-5631.

Thank you.