

Technology center becoming reality in Ghana thanks to UMCSC

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By Jessica Brodie

ORANGEBURG—This Christmas, schoolchildren in Abesewa, Ghana, are getting the kind of present they once only dreamed about: hope and a future, in the form of a 6,000-square-foot technology center.

And while their present won't technically be ready until after final funds can be raised, they can see it, standing there on the rural street in their tiny African village, a promise and a dream just waiting for fruition.

“It's happening—there are bricks being laid as we speak!” said Orangeburg Congregational Specialist the Rev. Jim Arant, whose district is making the technology center possible. “We're excited about it, and we know we're going to make it. It's not just a hope but a dream, and it's going to transform the lives of people.”

The Orangeburg District of The United Methodist Church is partnering with The Methodist Church of Ghana to build the technology center and library in Abesewa, which is in the Ashanti Region of the northwestern African nation.

“My understanding is this may be the only building in Abesewa with a floor,” Arant said. The center is needed to enable youth to finish their schooling. In Ghana, when students complete middle school, they must take a computer exam in order to proceed to higher education. However, in Abesewa, there are no computers, and the nearest town with computers is four hours away, which means their schooling effectively stops after middle school.

“They're done—the lost generation,” Arant said. “They're just hanging around, the teenage pregnancy rates skyrocketing. There's just no hope. But we're hoping to give them hope and a future. That's why we're doing this.”

The Orangeburg District team, led by Arant, is raising \$80,000 to build the Abesewa Information Technology Center using local materials and labor, then equip the center with about 40 computers and Internet access, plus staff to run the center and assist with the computers. Part of the building will also be a library, and the whole building will be open to children and adults in Abesewa.



The Mission Society

So far they have raised about \$22,000, which is almost enough to complete the building. The foundation has been laid and walls are now up. They need \$5,000 more to complete the building, then \$55,000 for furnishings, including computer stations and books.

‘Good progress’

Mary Kay Jackson, a missionary who also works with the Methodist Development and Relief Fund, has been the district’s local contact, and Arant and others plan to visit Abesewa Dec. 4 to assess final needs, including whether it would be better to buy furnishings there or ship them from the United States.

“They are making good progress,” Jackson said about construction. “The walls are up almost to lintel level now.... More heartening to me was seeing that a few of the schoolchildren were working on the project, helping to carry dirt to fill in the floors. I also received photos of the community workday, when the floors were originally filled. The entire community was apparently out working on the project.”

Indeed, Orangeburg District Superintendent the Rev. Frederick Yebuah told the Advocate, the project “will mobilize the whole community.” Yebuah is from Ghana originally and introduced the project to his district as a way to help his native country.

Alexander Nyarko Acheampong, building committee member onsite in Abesewa, said this is the first project of its kind in that area.

“Schools throughout the district will benefit, and Abesewa will take the lead.”

Students, teachers proud and excited

Abesewa youth said they are looking forward to seeing the technology center become reality.

“This center will help us learn ICT (information and computer technologies) and get jobs in computers,” said Abesewa resident Nimatu, who is in Form 3, similar to ninth grade.

“We will be able to communicate with people outside Ghana, and can share information with them,” said Mohammed Rezak, also in Form 3.

“I am proud to be helping,” said their classmate, Agnes. “It will help us learn to type and write letters (email). We can get letters from family that travels (lives outside Ghana).” Teachers are especially enthusiastic.

Teacher Isaac Opoku said the center will help them a great deal.

“We the teachers need to do research to prepare for our classes,” Opoku said. “Students can do assignments and practice their ICT skills... We prefer to teach using PowerPoint, so it will be better for the students to learn.”



Head teacher Kwaku Adu said the center will enable their school to be a resource center, and they will be able to train information and computer technologies teachers so all schools will improve, not just those in Abesewa.

And because of the library, Adu said, “Now we are pushing our children into reading. They are asked to read for one hour every morning (in school). The library will be a place they can go to read and get books. This will help our students in taking their exams.”

How to help

The Orangeburg District is rolling out a major fundraising effort in January with five dinners across the district: Jan. 22-24 at St. John’s UMC, Aiken; Feb. 27 at Canaan UMC, Cope; March 19 at St. Paul UMC, St. Matthews; in April at Edisto Fork UMC, Orangeburg (date to be determined); and May 14 at Beulah UMC, Sandy Run. Cost will be \$10/person plus any additional donation toward the project.

Donations are tax-deductible.

To help: Donate to the [Ghana Chapel and School Construction Project](#).

Mary Kay Jackson assisted with the article.

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