



small-small generous church

by Gerald Thomas, former pastor of Lamberth Memorial, Roxboro, and Rick Jordan, CBFNC Church Resources Coordinator

For generations, Lamberth Memorial, Roxboro, has expressed compassion through concrete efforts. From helping to build a clinic and training center in Guatemala to Habitat homes in the United States to recovery and rebuilding efforts following storms in the Gulf and the East Coast to giving funding to help those burned-out along with those feeling down-and-out, such care is a constant rhythm of life at Lamberth Memorial.

On Sunday, November 13, 2016, Lamberth Memorial received a certificate of appreciation from fellow Christian activists in Liberia. The church gathered to remember that for two years they labored in a crowded intersection of hopeful gladness and threatening hunger. Just following the installation of Dr. Richard Wilson as the sixth president of the Liberia Baptist Theological Seminary (LBTS), the Ebola disease became widespread in Liberia. Beyond the sadness of the disease itself, Ebola created a humanitarian crisis. The disease made it dangerous to go to the common markets for food.

How did a small church in eastern North Carolina become involved with a seminary in Liberia, Africa?

Dr. Wilson notes, “The pastor, Gerald Thomas, and I have been partners in ministry since we were at Gardner-Webb College in the mid-1980s. I was teaching at GWC (1982-1988) when Gerald was a student When I became the President of the Liberia Baptist Theological Seminary in 2013, I invited Gerald to participate in the installation celebrations. As President of LBTS, I needed the support of local Baptists to help raise funds for physical improvements, student scholarships, work/study funding, and more. Gerald and I talked about it and he offered to raise the issue with Lamberth Memorial. With no resistance, we had a partner!

The Roxboro church agreed to receive funds for LBTS.

Doing so required that they send receipts to all donors and then send wire transfers to the seminary as needed.”

When Ebola broke out in July 2014, the seminary was put in peril.

Dr. Wilson continues, “I was in Liberia at the time and chose to stay until we had in place a way to care for the residents of the LBTS compound. Immediately, Lamberth Memorial joined us. Over the next 20 months, the church collected and distributed more than \$70,000 for Ebola relief. In the end, LBTS —with the church’s help— was able to provide a daily meal for Liberia Baptists living in school compounds in seven places, including locales in five Liberian counties.”

Persons in Liberia could obtain food and transport enough rice and beans for one meal per day, beginning on the LBTS campus. What was needed was a collection and distribution point in the United States for the funding.

Twenty-six churches, businesses, private organizations, and 73 individuals partnered with Lamberth Memorial. Thomas received little notes with many contributions. One woman gave her donation out of her mother’s estate funds. Some lamented not being able to do more. But in Liberia, there is a way of getting things done: small-small. Folks in Liberia received those funds and turned them into rice, beans, oil, and seasoning. All remained faithful and the rhythm of receiving and distributing continued until they finally out-gave and out-worked Ebola. Ultimately, one-meal-per-day for one hundred grew to nearly a thousand in various communities outside the seminary.

Compared to churches that are often in the news, Lamberth Memorial is “small-small,” but they are large enough and generous enough to care for brothers and sisters half a world away.