

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings as we begin the last quarter of the year. We continue to thank God as He protects and guides us through many challenges, and pray He sees us safely to a new years beginning. Hope you all are well, and we would love to hear from any of you reading this note.

I mentioned last letter of the many health challenges faced by many. Those continue as we are at the tail end of the rainy season. Thanks again for helping to make medicine and health care available to those who could otherwise not afford it. The biggest case was with our dear brother, and my last remaining redneck friend here, Ini Mkpong. The Mkpong family have been at the forefront of Christian education and have a large legacy and impact on the church here. For some time now, especially after the death of their father and patriarch of the family, Ini has had a stressful task of helping run the school their father started. This and other factors eventually led to his kidney failure. He was able to get a donor and have a successful surgery here at one of the leading hospitals in Port Harcourt. He and his wife have been in isolation and were able to spend some needed recovery time in our home. All looks well so far and we thank God for many answered prayers. Please continue to join us in prayer as we ask God to give Ini more years to continue to be with his family and to serve in the critical area of shaping young lives.

We had one health crisis that did not resolve as we would have liked and that was the case of Gloria Okon, more commonly known as Mama Paul. Parents are often called after the name of a child or grandchild, so she gained the nickname “Mama Paul” after her first grandson. She and her husband were baptized here several years ago and have been faithful members ever since. She has been a faithful worker in our household, caring for the children. This is not a distant person, but someone close in our heart.

Recently Nkiru noticed she was not feeling well, and advised her to take time off or even change jobs to take something less stressful. She always replied that she is the only breadwinner in her family, excluding the two oldest who live far away, and her salary was the only hope for them. Her common answer was she did not know how her family would survive without her.

Unfortunately, we are all having to answer that question as she suddenly slumped in front of the children and died soon after arriving at the hospital. She had just had a conversation with my wife in the kitchen, were she encouraged my wife, who also suffers from high blood pressure, to slow down. My wife Nkiru replied that we are to live each day as if it were our last, so she would want to be busy to the last moment. And indeed Mama Paul did just that. She walked back down the stairs and soon slumped at the front door. Nkiru held her and tried to

calm her down, as Gloria talked of her enemies stopping her heart. So much fear and superstition lives in the hearts of many here. Her heart did give out shortly after arrival, leaving everyone stunned. A vibrant, busy woman one minute and a corpse a few moments later.

Her husband Rufus, who has himself battled blood pressure and diabetes and is not longer able to work, plus Nkiru and I and a couple of our older boys, carried the corpse wrapped in a new bolt of cloth to the military hospital and mortuary. I was surprised that on arrival, he could not know her age or date of birth. He said her parents never told him her age, and he never asked. I asked if he knew his own age, which he did not. We payed extra for her to be kept in a refrigerated vault, which had strange consequences later.

Her oldest son left Kebbi, in the far north were the family lived for many years, to come and help with the many details of the burial. It was a rough 3 day and night journey. The oldest daughter came from Lagos and then they began to struggle to find a place to bury the body. The only private cemetery around, where we buried our friend Brooks last year, had more than doubled the price of a plot to almost 3,000\$. Rufus and his oldest son and daughter went to their village of origin to try to secure a burial plot, since they no longer have any land there. There were so many demands made, with culture and protocols to be observed. The village was angry that since having moved away so many years ago, they had not participated in any village events, and so they tried to extract so many dues and fines. We eventually helped them buy a quarter acre plot for \$1000, buy a goat and yams, etc and eventually won permission to bury their loved one.

The church stepped forward and our bus was full for the almost five hour trip to the burial site. The brothers and sisters sang for almost the entire 15 hour journey, arriving back uncomfortably late. The bus blew a tire, which delayed the return, but we thank God that they were able to successfully bury Sister Gloria. The community and the family felt the warmth of our fellowship and support. One more strange event was the corpse, which had been refrigerated, began to sweat in the African heat, an unsettling sight for those who peered through the glass plate on top of the coffin.

Another trip to a burial to support another brother also took place since last i wrote. Br Christian had to bury his father, who was a chief and had so many attendant protocols to observe. We were grateful that everything went well, no flat tires this time, and that once again the congregation had an opportunity to show love. Unfortunately two weeks later Christian's younger brother died of malaria and typhoid. Because of his age and single status, a quick burial was able to take place right away, bypassing expensive protocols.

Two poisonings of brothers of two of our members, one leading to death and the other to a long hospital stay, another emergency hospitalization of a sister due to malaria, the normal rounds of malaria both in our immediate family and friends around us, plus the usual daily liturgy of requests for help have made this an unusually busy and expensive period. Thank God for His continued strengthening and for your support which makes us able to be here as a help to others.

The building project continues to rise, through rain and shine. I really commend the men who have physically labored to make it up to the third floor. We just have the bare frames and concrete slab floors but we thank God for the progress so far. As in all other aspects of our life, we depend on God's enablement to finish what has been started.

Another start was made, and that was with our children's education. After struggling so many years with various schools, I asked the family to consider home schooling. We are using a combination of online classes and two teachers. So far so good. Hopefully we can keep it up. If you have any suggested sites or programs please let us know as we want this to work. Eventually we want to expand it to offer free school to the many kids whose parents cannot afford school.

We did have an overnight visit from Don Thompson from Nashville. At 81 he still self funds trips to help at Nigerian Christian Hospital, where we first came to serve 32 years ago. This makes his 21st time to come to Nigeria. It was an encouraging visit for me, and an inspiration for me to keep on in spite of my age and condition. May the Lord continue to bless him and others who still come to serve. Remember, we have plenty of room for any who wants to come to visit. We'll treat you so many ways you will have to like some of them.

Remember we love you. We never forget it. Each plate of food we eat, each shared meal we serve is all because of your love. May God continue to richly bless you.

Blessings,  
Cliff, Nkiru and family