

Greetings from Liberia --- January 2024

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They say a picture is worth a thousand words.

This picture shows an empty football (soccer) field next to my house in Totota, Liberia where I live and teach. On a normal afternoon and all day on weekends, this field is filled with young men and their admirers, as well as sounds of the thud of soccer balls and excited voices of the players and spectators; not so these days. The picture tells the story of an unimaginable tragedy in Totota.

On December 26 at 3:00 p.m., a gas tanker carrying 9000 gallons of gasoline overturned within the city limits of Totota. It lay on its side for 2 ½ hours while people from the town, mainly young adults and children, gathered around it. Around 5:30 p.m., the tanker exploded, injuring and killing many of those gathered; many of those were the young men who would usually be on this football field. So the football field is empty and all of Totota is grieving.

The toll from this tragedy is estimated as follows:

- On the night of December 26, 104 individuals were admitted to Phebe Hospital, a Lutheran Hospital, with three (3) of those individuals being female.
- On the afternoon of December 27, forty (40) people were buried in a mass grave near the city hall.
- Since the 26th, an additional thirty-seven (37) people who were hospitalized in hospitals across the country have died.

- It is believed over 130 people died instantly from the heat and fire of the blaze and are unable to be identified. We think the loss numbers here will become clearer as time goes on and people do not come home.
- Twenty five (25) parents from St. John's Lutheran Church had children involved in the tanker explosion.
- It would be hard to find anyone in Totota who is not affected by this tragedy. The pastors and leaders at St. John's Lutheran Church in Totota are leading efforts in ministering to victims and families. The Lutheran Church in Liberia is assisting them; as is the National Disaster Department of the Liberian Government.

When I have more information about relief efforts, I will be in touch with you. This is a long-term reality for Totota and the people who live here. I ask for your prayers for everyone who lives here.

Pictures of the incident and aftermath:



Addendum:

The students for Level 4 of the Evangelist/Deacon Training have arrived and begun classes. They come from all over Liberia and are very excited about the classes they are taking, while praying for and standing with the people here in Totota.

And in closing, as I finish this newsletter----for the first time in 3 weeks, there were football (soccer) players on the field. They did not stay long, so no pictures, but their presence is a good sign that in the midst of deep tragedy, the goodness of life can come back.

Blessings on your day, and remember Totota!

Linda Johnson Seyenkulo

