

TRYING SMALL

Brian Palmer – ELCA Pastor/Missionary serving in Totota, Liberia



On Course

The above photo shows the Lutheran University of Liberia College of Theology's graduating class of 2028. They will be the first graduating class from the LUL's College of Theology. They are from, left to right they are, Prince, Joe Y, Boetay, George and Jerry. George only came this gone September but was able to transfer 36 credits and join the sophomores. They are an outstanding bunch. The things you can see in the picture are:

- They are all older/2nd career folks
- They are all men

The things you can't see include:

- They are all Lutheran
- They all have been serving the church for many years
- Three of them are from very remote areas in Liberia – the kinds of places that are

difficult to travel to, especially during the rainy season.

- They all have families. For a multitude of poverty related reasons many people in Liberia take in children that are not directly related. One of these guys and his wife provide a home for 9 children.
- They have a passion for the LORD and for the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is hard to find in the USA.

The class of 2029 is also on the campus. Someday I'll share their picture. It's a bigger group (8) and includes one and a half Pentecostals. (I dare you to ask me what half a Pentecostal is!) They are quite a bit younger than the class of 2028 but they are still all men. As Liberians would say, small-small.

I'm still serving as dean for the College of Theology, and I feel like we're making progress. The theme of my efforts is something I call, "honest education." I

keep telling the students and instructors that instead of pretending to teach and pretending to learn we should be striving for instructors actually teaching and students actually learning. This may sound trivial but in the Liberian setting honest education is *the* thing that would set the LUL apart from all the others.

No female presence in the College of Theology remains a problem. The Lutheran Church in Liberia does have one women attending seminary up in Gbarnga and two women in Monrovia. We have one in the pipeline to begin in September 2027 but that's a ways off. When I raise the issue with current students they get defensive, "What can we do?" My response is always something along the lines of, "Encourage, empower, plant seeds etc." I tell them the same thing a fella by the name of Pastor Luther Mauney of the Virginia Synod used to say to candidates for pastoral ministry, "The Church's call *is* God's call."



Sometimes You Just Need a Reason

A few days ago, I killed a cobra in my kitchen. It wasn't huge—maybe three feet long with a body about as thick as my thumb. I caught sight of the last few inches of its tail slipping into a hole at the base of the propane tank that sits next to my stove.

I've killed plenty of presumably venomous snakes over the years and even have a system involving rubber rain boots and a machete. This was only the second snake I've ever found inside the house, which doesn't really bother me all that much. What

truly freaked me out about this particular cobra happened about ten minutes before I spotted its tail disappearing under the propane tank.

It was early morning. I'd just gotten out of bed, shuffled to the bathroom, and—for less than a second—saw a shadow vanish beneath the water in the toilet bowl.

"What the heck was that?!" was my immediate thought.

My next one: "Must be my imagination..."

I went about my morning routine—hanging the mosquito net over the bed, putting water on for coffee, trying to convince myself to do some calisthenics—and that's when I saw the cobra's tail and in that moment the shadow in the toilet made sense.

Yikes.

I'm not sure if the idea of snakes emerging from the toilet has been giving me bad dreams, but it was definitely what convinced me to repair the manhole cover on my septic tank.