



Let's Go To Togo!

News from the Wildauer Family, serving the Lord in Togo and West Africa

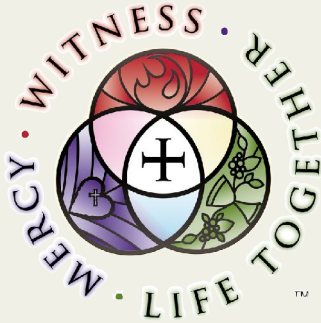
“Teach us to number our days” Psalm 90:12

Anyone can ask my mother how well I was able to stick to a calendar, schedule, program, or simple daily routine during my childhood. I was more than happy to create as I went, to find the path as I explored the options. To some extent, the ability to be flexible is required on the mission field. Who knew that it would be required of all of us during these past few months. There is a constant, though, in the midst of the great confusion of this age. Christ is the solid foundation upon which we have grounded our faith; the Word of the Lord is the beacon to our path. In His promise of salvation, we are taught to number our days. The days of this life are limited and transient, but the faithful in Christ have fixed their hearts and minds on His throne above where we will dwell for eternity. This is our hope. From God can nothing move us, for to Him we entrust our days and burdens.



I pray that you will find this newsletter to be a slight distraction to the concerns around us all, provide a bit of humor, and increase your prayers for the preaching of the Gospel worldwide. Suffice it to say, the Wildauers are on the move. I invite you to follow along on a day-by-day journey of our departure from Togo due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Many missionaries had the option to stay or go. In concert with the LCMS International Center and the pastors on the ground in Togo, we opted to return to the States. *This has also precipitated another decision which you will read about on the last page.*

There are many things in which we continue to rejoice for Togo and Francophone Africa: The Word continues to be preached; Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper continue to be administered to the faithful; and the Lord raises up men to be preachers of Christ's righteousness for the salvation of mankind. We are unified by faith in Jesus Christ as our days are ordered in His peace.



Pray For:

- † Peace in Togo and the surrounding countries as borders are still closed
- † For the inhabitants of West Africa as they face a predicted famine due to country closures and displacement due to regional terrorists
- † A strong end to the academic year once it resumes
- † The 11 students who will soon return to their home countries and begin their vicarages
- † Fellow missionaries throughout the region who have chosen to remain at their post
- † Discernment for our family's future

Give Thanks For:

- † The recent ordinations of men in the Lutheran Church of Togo
- † The recent baptisms of four children from the Dapaong community
- † The return to faith and the church of a household from the CLET neighborhood
- † Our safe arrival in the United States
- † The freedom of the Gospel as it is proclaimed in many languages

Leaving Togo for the United States

A Daily journal, COVID edition

Monday, March 23, 2020

We've just completed the necessary purchases around town for us to shelter-in-place for a few weeks. There is no one-stop shop or grocer. To find various goods, one must go to about five different localities, each one involving interaction of various sorts. Doing this also gives an opportunity to encourage the owner amidst the growing concerns.

Day minus 5

Our Area Director calls me to inform us that he and his wife have an opportunity to depart from their place in Brazzaville, Congo assisted by the U.S. Embassy. He is strongly encouraging us to consider our options whether it be to attempt a departure to the United States via commercial airlines (since those are still available in the capital city of Lomé) or to prepare to shelter-in-place for an unknown amount of months.

This is a serious discussion and decision. Does the missionary remain in place to serve the people through this trying time? Does the father considering his family outweigh the reasons to stay? Are there particular family needs affected by this decision (Yes! Our son who has battled with a recurring form of malaria)? Are there other pastors who are already in place to care for the people? What are some of the other regional situations which could play out if things don't go well? Luther's piece on whether to stay or flee from the plague was of great insight. We were chased into prayer on this matter.

Day -4

By mid-morning, Robin and I had made the decision that, for the sake of our family, it would be best if we were to return to the States. By no means was this easy. One of the encouragements from Luther to pastors is to make certain that there are pastors who will stay. Our fellow professors will remain, as well as fellow missionary Rev. Jacob Gaugert. If he is also called to depart, he will make certain that all is in place for the care of souls to continue.

This all means that all of our efforts turned from sheltering-in-place to packing the bags. This also meant announcing our departure to the children. There were some tears shed for sadness that we would be leaving, smiles of anticipation of flying in an airplane and seeing family, and a mix of emotions all around. Robin got right to it. Being as orderly as she is, most of the pertinent items were accessible and ready for packing.

Day -3

The packing continued throughout the day. Robin had designated a space in the house where she could organize each bag and distribute everything among them so as to maximize our weight allowance.



I gave a look over the vehicle to make sure that all was in order. The tank was topped off and the tires were filled to appropriate levels. I also noticed that the truck was not current on its inspection. So I ran to the inspection office with a friend and went through the process. Unfortunately, the network connection was not working and chose not to work for the rest of the day. That could be a problem on the road at one of the route stops. They gave me a phone number which the officers could call in the event that they need to verify that the car inspection has been renewed. I called this number later in the day to see if the connection was better. The number was a non-working number. Sigh.

Day -2

Departure day for Lomé. We did not take off as early as had planned due to little sleep and strategic packing. We were also waiting for the news that the vehicle inspection office had printed something for our trip which they did though not the actual sticker.

The total distance from Dapaong to Lomé is around 630km (391 miles). One cannot give an exact time of travel as one cannot gauge the traffic nor the condition of the route. This is especially true today as our Prado is loaded down with our baggage. Couple this with a recent declaration from the government that the routes are now only accessible to commercial trucks and those with a specific Laisser-Passez (this is a document issued by the government that grants access to travel in a certain region or country). We did not receive a laissez-passez issued via the U.S. Embassy since this was a new order, but traveled with the assurance that the Embassy had registered our vehicle with the National Police.



Unfortunately, the police check-points along the route were only enforcing the order concerning traveling with the specific laissez-passez. We were stopped at four newly established checkpoints located at the interior borders between the regions. They wanted to see our documents. Not having the pass which they asked for, we had to make the appropriate calls which they were unwilling to do. Some of the conversations became heated from their perspective.

I cannot imagine the pressure and the fear which they were under in fulfilling this task. One stop took around 45 minutes to get through and necessitated a call from the National Police's office in Lomé. The kids were a little restless at these stops and often wondered why we couldn't just go. They had done their task of smiling and waving through the window at the officers, even responding with the common greetings "Ça va bien," etc.

Because of a later departure and these stops, we did not make it close to Lomé by sundown. We chose to stop at a fairly new hotel in Atakpamé which is around 3 hours north of Lomé.

Day -1

Wake up at Atakpamé. Well, "wake up" is a relative term. No one really slept well. I can tell that the kids had picked up on the gravity of the situation and the anxiety of the officers the previous day. After a light, well-cooked breakfast, we were on our way.

At the first police stop of the day, an officer stopped us and immediately showed me a handwritten scrap of paper with our license plate on it. He asked if this was ours then asked me to pull forward to the office just ahead. Oh, boy. He also asked us where all our masks were, a new order given down that all voyagers wear masks. The chief officer on duty did note that they had received information regarding our vehicle and proceeded to call Lomé to verify. We believe that he had this information the previous day, but because we had not passed through, he needed to find out why. Once we were verified, he called ahead to the next stop for us and notified them of our travel. This was apparently the work of the U.S. Embassy and their liaison with the National Police. Well done, U.S. Embassy! Thus, our morning travel to Lomé was smooth and without trouble.

At the hotel of choice, we found out that there were two other missionary couples hoping to fly to the States as well. One of them already had a flight cancellation. Now it was a matter of wait-and-see on all outgoing flights which are only with Ethiopian Air. Well, that didn't last long. Within hours of arriving at the hotel, we received an email saying that our flight the next day had been cancelled and that we were now scheduled to fly on the Tuesday flight. The hotel, operated by a French family who had hoped to temporarily close down soon, more than graciously extended our stay for two more nights.

Day-0 Day -2 again

Light breakfast and a general day of rest. In fact, after our morning prayers and meditation, the majority of the day was occupied in just relaxing. No news, no updates, just a general mental break. After a refreshing lunch - the chicken nuggets here are really good! - we joined Mt. Zion Lutheran, Greenfield, WI followed by Faith Lutheran, Wylie, TX in their broadcasted services. This certainly gave us a yearning to be in face-to-face fellowship and contact as the Church gathered together, but for now, we are the Church dispersed.

Day -1 again

The kids were disappointed that they needed to wait a few more days but I cannot express the resilience that they have expressed in all of this. The hotel is small, but there was a playground, sand, ocean front views, and enough to occupy them. And let me tell you, those chicken nuggets satisfied the children well enough! (Decent chicken is tough to find in Dapaong) In the interim, Micah was able to find a better location to stow the truck in our absence. Rather than the sea salt air encrusting the car, a local Baptist bible college will maintain it.



Day 0. Retry, Tuesday, March 31, 2020

No news from the airlines and boarding passes are ready. That's good! We made plans to head to the airport by taxi 3 hours ahead of time. That's super early. Consider this: Our flight is the only one leaving Lomé today (and yesterday and tomorrow for that matter!). Upon arrival at the external entry door, my temperature was checked. Good! Then we wait in line for the check-in procedure which already had numerous people waiting. From here on out, the process was courteous and the fellow passengers were understanding of one another. Security did their job well. For the record, there are a total of five checkpoints to pass through before getting to the gate, but only two where the shoes come off. As we went from one to another, the snacks came out to satisfy the littles.

Then came the call to head to the gate. The current national regulations did not allow for anyone to enter the country via air, so there was only onboarding. This plane had arrived from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and was not anywhere near capacity. Most everyone had their own space. We departed early since all passengers were accounted for. Fish or beef? Nope, no chicken nuggets.

Arrival in Newark, New Jersey at night presented the questions of any new Stateside processes that may have been introduced while we were flying. Again, being the only international arrival within hours, there wasn't a crowd. Only one check-point asked if we had been to Europe or China. Nope! A kind customs agent noticed that we had four kids so assisted us in expediting the process. Onward to claiming bags which were all there.

Then the fun began. We had understood that due to a short overnight layover, United would check our baggage that night so that we did not need to haul them to the hotel. Yet due to the limited staff and lateness of the hour, this baggage check was in another terminal. Three carts for twelve big bags, various small bags, four tired kiddos, and good times. We made it in time to stand in a line with other fellow passengers for a two part process. To recheck bags, one must first get boarding passes. Ah, but we just found out that our flight to Chicago was cancelled! Good news is that we were rebooked for a later flight so needed those boarding passes. And right when we were almost checked in at stage one, a lady down at baggage hollered out "Closed! We're closed for the night." The lady who was helping us became our advocate and searched for help. Two other attendants eventually came to our aid,



found a large cart, and hauled all of the luggage to the back for departure the next morning. Finally, one last wait for the hotel shuttle and we can have a good, short sleep.

Day 1

We woke up in the United States of America. After a self-serve, minimal touch breakfast, it was back to the airport. Who knew our shuttle driver would be a Nigerian who was so happy to hear that we were missionaries in Togo? Not much activity at the airport also meant that arrival to the gate was quick. Seemingly easier was the flight to Chicago. Not so much easier was the gathering of the baggage. While in Newark, all bags were accounted for. In Chicago, two large bags missing. So at least we know that they are somewhere in the U.S. Took the time to register with United, gave the description, etc., and on to finding the rental vehicle. So what was it like entering the U.S.? What was the fear level? What will be open? Is it safe to eat drive through food? We didn't know, but knew that stomachs were hungry. To Taco Bell, then.

We arrived in Bremen, Indiana in the afternoon. We stopped by my brother's house followed by my cousin's, staying in the car the whole time. We are now in quarantine after all. They were happy to see us and glad that we arrived without having to quarantine in Newark. So to my grandfather's old house we went. It has been vacant since his passing in 2016. The families in town stocked the house with non-perishable food and beverage items, a few dinners, plenty of toys, a few movies, etc. Oh, and a packet of chicken nuggets in the freezer. What a pouring out of grace and blessing! What a comfortable pillow I see there!

Day 2, Thursday, April 2, 2020

The children woke up to find that the air was colder than usual. Well, anything less than 70 is considered cold when coming from Togo. This morning was around 45. Fortunately, the cousins had also donated warm pants and long sleeved clothing. We got into our routine of breakfast and morning prayers, a constant for our family during these transient days. Today began the long wait for what is next and that is truly in the Lord's hands.

An exit is always an entrance to something else

You may have just read the previous article about our return to the United States. This was much sooner than anticipated when we had taken the call to serve in 2014. During our stay in Dapaong, militant Islam has been steadily growing in the region. Over the past year, nearly 1,000,000 people have been displaced from their homes in Burkina Faso, the country to the north of us. Though the border is well guarded and the Togolese military is doing their job, our presence in Dapaong has caused great concern for the local church, especially with the idea that we were training men to be pastors. It is not time to move the seminary, but the decision has been made for the missionaries to be relocated. **Thus, with heavy hearts, we are announcing that our family will no longer be returning for permanent missionary service in Dapaong.** What does this mean? We are currently in discussion with the Office of International Mission and considering either a transfer to a different region while continuing to serve as a full-time missionary or to repatriate to the United States and seek a parish call. Please pray for us during this time.



To support our work financially, you may send a tax-deductible gift to:

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P.O. Box 66861
St. Louis, MO 63166-6861

Mission Central
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This little piggy went to marché

Technically, one cannot purchase pork in the open-air market of Dapaong due to local customs. But what does the average market look like? The market is the social center of the town. Most towns and villages in Togo have a designated space where the people come together and establish their tables, some larger than others. Trading is still a viable market tool as each person displays what one has brought. One person sells harvested grains while another presents large yams. One vendor displays flip-flops while a youth passes by with a cart of watermelons or plantains. African fabric is sold next to American t-shirts. Each market is as unique as the next, never knowing what one may find on a given day.



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