Dear Friends of Liberia,

On behalf of the Board, I send our sincere hope that each of you and your families and friends are well, and will stay so. We have a large mailing list and it is probable that some of you have been seriously affected by COVID-19, beyond the changes in plans and inconveniences that everyone is experiencing. If you wish, please let us know in a personal email if this is the case, and how we might help. Our thoughts are with you.

At a time like this, we become more aware of the preciousness of families and friends. You are part of our extended family, having had an experience in Liberia in one of many ways. We know many of you share a concern about what is happening in Liberia, since all Peace Corps Volunteers have been withdrawn. [Please follow links highlighted throughout for more info!]

A PC headquarters decision was made to evacuate all PCVs worldwide because of the projected impact of the Corona virus. You can read their announcement here. We can all remember the challenges of separating from Liberia and returning to the U.S. in the best of circumstances.

FOL has reached out to the PCVs who have returned from Liberia to see how we might help them. We offered to keep in touch or connect them to FOL members in their areas of interest or geographical areas, and to have follow-up meetings. If you would like to potentially be matched to one of the new RPCVs who reach out to us, please let Don Drach know via email (dondrach@gmail.com) and suggest how you feel you might help (job search, counseling, temporary lodging, etc.). Now is the time these RPCVs can see that PCVs from wherever, whenever, are a huge family that understands when no one else does!

The National Peace Corps Association is also developing resources to assist with adjustment and practical matters like last allowances and health insurance, as well as counseling.

Evacuated PCVS have started their own private Facebook group and have almost 9000 members (family and relevant others are generally admitted to the group - I just was). The Cincinnati RPCV group began an active spreadsheet for the evacuees to find RPCV contacts in their areas.
COVID-19 in Liberia

At this writing, 31 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed by testing in Liberia and four people have died. Ivory Coast has 216 confirmed cases, so cross-border spread is likely despite officially closed borders. Several activities are already underway by Liberians who learned the importance of prevention during the Ebola crisis.

Our Family Literacy Initiative partner, WE-CARE, quickly developed the poster shown and has sent its Home Visitors out to communities with copies to distribute, along with limited supplies for cleansing properly. We can all be proud of their leadership! We have learned of other groups that are doing community health education -- but not always modeling by use of masks, gloves, or social distancing themselves.

International organizations (UNICEF, USAID, etc.) are helping coordinate strategies with the Government of Liberia. Our Board Member, Richard Nisbett, has been called upon to assist global Methodists to get health information regarding COVID-19 to the 60+ countries they work in, as he did for countries in Africa during the Ebola crisis. If you would like a copy of the information they developed, or are working on a project related to COVID-19 yourself, please let us know.

The Liberian Musicians' Union and even President Weah quickly recorded songs for the radio to educate people about the danger and prevention of COVID-19. Despite these efforts, we are told that Liberians are quite skeptical that COVID-19 will become a major problem, and in places like West Point township (Monrovia), social distancing is impossible.

On April 8th, President Weah announced a State of Emergency would be placed on the country, starting April 10th. It is set to last three weeks, in hopes of containing the virus. The economic situation can only become more dire, and distribution of food and goods was already a problem due to gasoline shortages -- on top of serious inflation. It could portend a perfect storm, but through the decades we have repeatedly been amazed by the resilience, resourcefulness, and generosity of Liberians. Sustainable advancement, however, seems to always be getting a kick backwards for every step forward.

Our FOL Health Team in Liberia is surveying needs and discussing what is feasible with the U.S. Team, and we encourage you to share your thoughts about what FOL members can do to help ensure that Liberia is not devastated by COVID-19 as it was by Ebola via email to health@fol.org.
FOL Project Updates

HEALTH

The **most exciting news** for January 2020 was the successful implementation of the FOL Health Project that we have previewed with you in earlier reports.

More than four years in the planning, from needs assessments through curriculum development and logistics, the weeklong continuing education pilot workshop was held at the Phebe School of Nursing. Read more about this first in-service training for instructors from twenty of Liberia's Nursing and Midwifery Schools here.

FAMILY LITERACY INITIATIVE

WE-CARE Foundation, our Liberian partner organization in the Family Literacy Initiative (FLI), has temporarily closed its doors to the public, in line with government directives that also suspended Liberian schools indefinitely. WE-CARE's Home Visitor staff and coordinators working on the FLI program continue to be paid, but are not permitted to hold sessions with families. WE-CARE Home Visitors have started calling families to encourage them to keep reading and practicing, since simple cell phones are generally possessed in all households. They are also ensuring the families have valid health education about COVID-19.

The fifth year of the program was going very well with 180 participating families when it had to be suspended. The staff is focusing their efforts on COVID-19, but is eager to resume all their programs after this crisis.

Thanks to the generous contribution from Sue Dee Schlosser Shenk, PCV Group 28, and the Gerald L. Schlosser Trust, FOL's Adult Learning Program (ALP) is completely funded for its second year. The new curriculum is being written and we hope to have sessions start as soon as things are safe and the Liberian government gives permission to resume activities.
As I close, I want to say thank you again for your support. We depend on you and your contributions of time, talent, and treasure to continue ongoing successful projects and to help address emergencies in Liberia when they arise. Please think of FOL when you decide how to spend those Required Minimum Distributions, honor others with memorials, and make deductible donations (https://fol.org/donate/).

Your opinions, recommendations, referrals of contacts, and thoughts about FOL and Liberia are highly valued by your Board, so please feel encouraged to send them in. You really do matter, and together we can and will continue to make a difference. We are family.

Please stay safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

Sarah

Sarah C. Morrison, President of FOL
Email: president@fol.org

For more information about FOL, please visit our website. We welcome all donations - no amount is too small! In addition to donating toward all FOL programs, you may designate a donation as a memorial or create a reoccurring monthly or yearly donation. FOL is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. All donations are tax-deductible.