

October 22, 2009

Greetings from Kabala Christian School:

Pink-uniformed energy bursts into the classrooms every morning, as the new school day begins. Classes open the day with singing and devotions. The grade six class fills one of the newly built rooms, a classroom larger than the others, that can also be used for parent and church meetings held after school hours. Clean, well-designed (pit) latrines are in use. They include hand-washing facilities. This might seem like a small thing, but other area schools provide only an area enclosed by a woven mat to protect squatting children. The kitchen is finished and facilitates the cooking of daily hot lunches for the students.



Dr. Jo Kuyvenhoven, currently a professor at Calvin College, makes regular trips to Sierra Leone. She, with Dennis De Groot and Fraser Valley Christian High School, have been instrumental in launching this school. The information in this report is largely from her. It is her desire that this school can be a place where other teachers can come and learn; where teaching materials can be designed and distributed, where professional development can be offered to *other area* teachers.

At the end of this school year the grade six students will be our first primary school graduates! They will take the national standardized exit exam, the NPSE. That will surely reveal how well we are doing—to the nation as well as to us. The testing we've already done suggests that they will do very well. For the second year in a row, all the classes passed tests with average scores above 70%. Most students scored about 85%. This compares with scores from other schools in the Koinadugu district that rarely average above 30%. In some ways, this is not surprising. The teachers participate in continuing education, and have developed abilities to use more effective methods. They aim for Christ-like teaching and learning relationships. There is enough paper for all the children to write daily and there are books to read... several times the number of books & texts available in nearby schools. The classrooms are not crowded, with the result that the teachers

can give each child time and care—and what child anywhere doesn't thrive under these conditions?

Absenteeism is rare. The children have distinguished the school as a place where learning happens. Neighbors and others can hardly believe that children in grades 1 and 2 are reading words! Children in grades 3 through 5 are able to write letters for their parents! J. T. Koroma, the school principal, is much pressured by parents who want their children in the school, three times as many children applied for the grade one class this year than could be accommodated.



We have been able to hire two new teachers. They are both very recent graduates from Makeni Teacher Training College. They are both Christians, and of the local Kuranko tribe. When young Mr. Sulieman was told he would be receiving a contract to teach, he had tears of excitement. He is an eager learner and promises to bring keen energy to the staff. Mr. Jalloh, while a recent graduate, brings experience of teaching and program design to his new position. He worked for Christian Extension Services for nearly a decade before going to school for a teaching certificate. He is a mature Christian with strong leadership abilities. The staff of the Kabala school is much strengthened and diversified with these additions.

Yes, we are looking to the future! Some of the walls need a new coat of whitewash; cement needs to be laid on the veranda. A guest house will facilitate the Western guests and teachers who come. It might also produce extra income for the school, when the rooms are available. By September 2011, we hope to open the first junior secondary school classroom to accommodate our sixth grade graduates!

This school must not become a place of privilege, an island of educational wellness. We are a people called to be salt and light. As we look toward the future, and plan for growth, we need to show that a Christian school is never about exclusive access; it is dedicated to sharing, to loving neighbors, to being an agent of healing.

Thank you for your participation in bringing this vision to reality.

John, Mary & Emily Loeks and Aaron Kortenhoven