

Update about the solar panel project for Phebe Hospital, Liberia, at the Tenth Triennial Convention (2017) Minneapolis, Minnesota

By Mary Jo Mettler, Northeast Minnesota Synodical Women's Organization

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God is good.

All the time.

When I was in third grade, my teacher, Mrs. Murphy, told my mother I was the type of kid whose face she couldn't recognize because I never spoke up.

Well, Mrs. Murphy wouldn't have expected me to be standing here in front of you today. But I have successfully become a wee bit more extroverted over the years. So many extraordinary, unexpected paths have led me here. Inspired by words from Isaiah to do a new thing, reminded by words of my mother that -- please forgive me -- the road to hell is paved with good intentions -- and challenged when West Africa Lehma Gbowee, who told us get up out of the pew. I finally got up the courage to act. I traveled with Women of the ELCA to Liberia in 2012, and getting up to act was a little difficult. It took some time. Do you ever get sales calls?

Well, I like them as much as you do, yet my first action was to make a sales pitch about this crazy idea to bring solar power to a hospital in Liberia. And I had to pick up the phone and make a cold call to a stranger. I hesitated for over four months, and if it hadn't been that our SWO board meeting was taking place where this stranger worked, I don't know if I would have ever made that call. It turned out the stranger was nice, a good listener, a believer in the power of possibilities, a believer in the power of the human spirit. It was a beautiful conversation and the beginning of an exciting journey to deliver solar power to off-grid hospitals in West Africa, starting with Phebe Hospital in Liberia. God is good. All the time.

This project's been a faith walk from the very beginning. The Northeast Minnesota Women of the ELCA had to have faith in our partners, Rural Renewable Energy Alliance, usually called RREAL, as well as Global Health Ministries, and many others, and faith that we could make it happen. And it seemed like a heavy lift. We were talking hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Although our solar partner RREAL had been addressing solar power to low-income people as a means of addressing energy problem in the U.S., this would be an entirely new venture for both our organizations, and yet over the course of about four years, the crazy, bold, crazy awesome, crazy innovative Lutheran ladies of Northeast Minnesota and all of you around the country made this extraordinary project happen. We raised about \$350,000.

God is good.

So many extraordinary things happened in this project. Just when we were about to give up on fund-raising challenges, a gift of fresh perspective would come to us with new ideas. And grant dollars

started coming in. Wheat Ridge Ministries. National Geographic. The ELCA Global Missions. Accompanied by a steady stream of support from women around the country, and even a little boy at a country church in northern Minnesota who gave me a dollar.

We still didn't have all the funding in hand in November 2016 when we started shipping components. But we took a faith walk. And we knew it would come. Because God is good.

I think most of us go through doubts and struggles with our faith. There were certainly many times during this effort when I was faced with doubts. Yet almost every day there was evidence of God's hand in this work. I was amazed at how you stepped forward as groups and as individuals.

We saw as we put this together that the getting materials there was another walk of faith. The second shipping container of components was offloaded at Phebe the day before the team arrived. The tools showed up the day they arrived. The team left their tools out, thousands of dollars of tools were left in the field every day during their lunch break and afternoon sort of siesta because it was so hot, and not a single tool went missing. They said we don't even do that in Minneapolis.

They completed the installation with lots of hard manual labor. No cement trucks, no backhoes, all manual. And they do it in just three weeks.

The team arrived back in the U.S. on Easter Sunday, the day we celebrate the risen Son, and we celebrate the light of Christ. We were giving the light of life to power at Phebe. I thought the timing was perfect. God is good.

I can't possibly begin to tell you how grateful I am to have had the opportunity. This has taken me way, way out of my comfort zone. But all of you, sisters together, have given me faith and strength, and we have made this happen. We are bringing light and life to the people of Liberia. As we stand here today, we are powering Phebe Hospital with solar electricity right now.

They will save enough money this year to be able to increase the number of doctors by 50%.

That means they will be able to add seven nurses to their staff.

We still have enough money that we can bring four Phebe employees -- providing we can get

them visas -- for a two-week intensive solar and electricity intensive training that will take place in Pine River, Minnesota.

In November, we will travel again -- and yes, I am going -- for a formal ribbon cutting. If you are interested, see BJ and I in the exhibit hall.

And we are not stopping there. When the team was in Liberia, they conducted a site visit at Curran Lutheran Hospital, a hospital north of Phebe that Lutheran women have been financially helping for over 100 years. Curran Hospital is struggling to pay its bills. Some of its vendors are no longer delivering goods because they haven't been paid. Curran needs a break. Curran needs some help. We are calling this project Current for Curran. I hope we don't have to explain that the way we do it PV.

And we are off to a great start. We found out last month that we've received a grant for a donation of 889 solar electric panels, 100 KW of solar electricity modules from First Solar in support of the current project. That's about one-third of the current cost. God is good.

This past week we learned from Global Health Ministries that there's a new Lutheran center and clinic in South Sudan offering desperately needed care for refugees. And guess what? They need power.

There's more. Monday, we got a request for a system in Ethiopia. The Northeast Minnesota Women of the ELCA have a vision, a vision to deliver solar power to communities in need throughout the world, a vision to communicate a new message of hope and meaning to our younger generation, to bring energy and enthusiasm into our pews at home while offering gifts to our brothers and sisters around the globe that keep on giving while delivering a solar ministry.

I hope you will continue to support these efforts. Come, find out more. See us at servant event triad community number 2. God is good.

And so are the bold Women of the ELCA. You are changing the world, loving and helping our global neighbors, bringing the light of Christ and the light of life. God is good.

Thank you.