

“Veronica-bucket” the easiest way for many - Impressions from Ghana

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Rev. Gregson Erasmus: What is the situation at present in Ghana with regards to COVID-19? How does the Medical Services cope with the situation?

Wegurih Corona virus (COVID-19) has become a world issue and Ghana has not been spared. The COVID-19 has left many Ghanaians in a state of shock and fear both in the cities and small villages. The epicentres in Ghana had being Accra, Kumasi, and the Eastern Region. There are currently 10 regions in Ghana that recorded COVID-19 cases. Today, 22.04.2020, Ghana has recorded 1154 cases out of 68,591 tests conducted so far. So far nine people died from the COVID-19 and 120 people have recovered (www.ghanahealthservice.org).

The Government, Ministry of Health and the Ghana Health Service are doing very well as far as the COVID-19 is concerned. They are excellent in the areas of educating the people, routine surveillance, enhance contact tracing, mandatory quarantine, laboratory testing for the virus and distribution of limited quantities of Personal Protective Equipment's.

Treatment centres have been setup at the national and regional levels. Our national borders are closed in addition to the ban on public gatherings since the 15th of March 2020 up to date. Since then schools both public and private, mosques and churches are completely closed.

However, there are some challenges in the country. There are still some people who believed that the virus is not real and it's not a 'black' African's disease, despite of the vigorous education. Our porous health systems has remained challenged as some of the health facilities are facing the challenge of inadequate

staff. In addition, some health facilities' inability to buy the necessary Personal Protective Equipment for the staff because of the National Health Insurance Schemes' failure to pay claims submitted since last year.

Erasmus: Have COVID-19 influence food security and the economy in Ghana?

Wegurih: Yes, food prices has been increased due to the partial lockdown in some selected cities like Accra, Kumasi and their surrounding areas. Another factor that caused the price hikes, is because people are doing panic buying anticipating that there may be a total national lockdown. The prices of certain medical consumables like facemasks, hand sanitizers and Veronica buckets were also influenced because of the high demand.

A Veronica Bucket is a sanitation set-up originating in Ghana. It compromises of a bucket with a tap fixed at the bottom and a bowl at the bottom to collect waste water. This serves as a simple way to encourage proper handwashing using flowing water. In the picture below Veronica Bekoe, the founder of this simple sanitation set-up.



The ban of public gatherings has affected private schools and churches, with regards to employees. Most people who were employed in private schools and churches have either lost their jobs or have a reduced pay because the income of these institutions depend solely on their internal generated funds (IGF) to operate. These employees have been contributing hugely to the economy of the nation through income tax payments. The churches in Ghana do not receive any financial support from the government unlike other developed countries. Churches operate mainly on Sunday offerings and individual payment of tithes.

Erasmus: What are the spiritual messages of the church during this time and how do you convey these messages to congregations?

Wegurih: Following the ban on public gatherings, the pastors have initiated new innovative ways of reaching out to members of the church. The use of technology has become the sole way of reaching people with the Word of God. Therefor pastors have been using Facebook, Zoom, Television, WhatsApp, Skype, Conference Calls and Radio to disseminate the Word of God. Some also do house to house visitation to pray and encourage members especially in the smaller communities.

Before Easter, all messages were meant to encourage people to trust in Jesus Christ, especially in the midst of the pandemic and to also observe the precautionary measures outlined by the Ministry of Health. The biblical text during that period was Psalm 23:4 which state that "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23).

During the Easter, the messages were based mainly on the Gospel story of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. This story was retold and applied in the context of real-life situations which include COVID-19 pandemic. It will interest you to know that on the Good Friday, most Churches organised virtual communion services to aid members to participate in the Lord's Supper.

Erasmus: What biblical text have accompanied you in these last weeks?

Wegurih: Personally, the lesson that I have learning is that God is doing a new thing in the world to draw the entire world's attention to Himself. It's clear from this pandemic that all human beings are equal no matter your location in the world. It also clear that humans' dependence on science, social advancement, economic powers, levels of literacy and environmental cleanliness based on human efforts have completely failed. Therefore, it is a wake-up call on all to put our trust in the Lord first, then in any other human intelligence.

We are praying daily for all of humankind around the globe especially for our ecumenical brothers and sisters in the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and its allied organizations worldwide.

Wishing you all God's continuous protection and guidance as we fight this COVID-19 pandemic together.

Shalom!

This interview was done by Rev Gregson Erasmus, Ecumenical Co-Worker in the Service for Mission, Ecumenical Relations and Development (DiMOE), Stuttgart