

**T**wo years ago, we planted a seed. We introduced Connected Communities as a new additional sponsorship model. This program allows a church in the U.S. to come alongside a particular school, hostel, child development center or other ministry of the Free Methodist Church somewhere in the world. Locally, this relational model creates the synergy of shared vision and mutual love for a particular people and place. Deeper relationships are developed in a shared missional focus. Globally, it makes a space for true relationships to form and flourish across cultures and international borders. If a church is currently supporting a missionary or country project, this model allows for a stronger partnership. Connected Communities grow in all shapes and sizes, from smaller churches to entire conferences.



And these Connected Communities are truly growing! We've watched as these seeds were rooted in relationships and are yielding abundant fruit. Connected Communities are cultivating global families through prayer, sponsorship, photos, videos, and personal visits.

Just take a look! From the Keystone Conference to Costa Rica, and from Brooke Hills (WV) to Grand Bassa County (Liberia), the seeds of Connected Communities are sprouting.

We have communities in Ethiopia, Togo, Nicaragua, Paraguay and several other countries where opportunities await. Where would your church like to grow a Connected Community?

## Building Relationships

2019 Costa Rica

By Pastor Charles Riel, Centerville & Pleasantville (PA) FMCs



At our 2017 Keystone Annual Conference, our new conference mission's coordinator and spokesperson for our new Connected Community with the Uno+ School in Costa Rica recruited people for missions' teams.

As I began to inquire about a trip, the two churches in which I serve expressed interest immediately.

I had six determined to go. Then another five from Sugar Grove FMC (PA) joined.

Our purpose was to build relationships with the Uno+ School our conference is sponsoring as a Connected Community. This ministry began with missionaries Dennis and Kyle Leon of Pura Vida Church, Costa Rica. It is the desire of Uno+ to create better people for the world, a holistic process that can happen in many ways. There are 3 or 4 more schools forming in other nearby communities. Our Uno+ School operates three days a week (Tues., Thurs., Sat.) for two hours in the afternoons.

On our first day we distributed a backpack and school supplies to each child. Uno+ schools are not to replace the public education system. Their mission is to instill values in the children who are hanging out on the streets while their parents are at work or involved in other things.

The teaching is focused around five important pillars that will teach and equip the children with life skills.

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They include: Biblical values, the value of education, art, creation care and good nutrition.

While we did work on a shade shelter, two raised gardens and other projects, it was the

relationships, with the children, with the Leons, with our host, driver and team, we formed that made the trip awesome. When God prompts, go, be blessed!

## Transforming Lives

### 2019 Liberia

By Pastor Steven Hlatky, Brooke Hills FMC (WV)

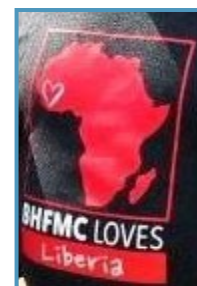
Brooke Hills Free Methodist Church (BHFMC) first made its connection with the Free Methodist Church (FMC) in Liberia, Africa, in 2012. Working closely with Africa Area Director Mike Reynen, ICCM Regional Coordinator Vickie Reynen and Liberian National Mission Director Leader Rev. Rufus Kahn, BHFMC was able to extend outside of normal church operations and work alongside the local church in Grand Bassa County to see the dream of a school come to fruition. This work, which led to the construction and implementation of the Zuezohn School, provided the opportunity for local children to receive a thorough, Christian based, education.

In February 2019, a BHFMC team of five travelled to Liberia to participate in the sixth Annual Free Methodist Church Conference. This trip was a little different from previous trips. Because of leadership transition at BHFMC, the new pastors, Steven Hlatky and Linda Corle, went to meet with Rev. Kahn and the churches, and to

interact with the Zuezohn School, teachers, students, and families. BHFMC wanted to reassure all of them of its continued support, prayers and connection.

Zuezohn School has grown immensely since its opening in 2016. There are currently 120 students attending. Thirty-three of those students are sponsored by BHFMC families.

John H. Westerhoff, III, in his book *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, reminds the church of its duty: "Christ calls His church to be a community of change, to act with God in transforming the world into the community of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As a Christian faith community, we engage in personal, interpersonal, and social actions."



BHFMC's partnership with the FMC of Liberia and ICCM is an example of the church providing the gospel message of Christ and being a community of change. The church is engaging in social action and presenting the love of God through food, connection, and education, in hopes of transforming the lives of children and families.