

Spring Newsletter



MARCH 2025



Reflecting Back & Looking To The Future: Our 15th Anniversary

Don Ghostlaw is the founder and president of Africa Education Partnership. His passion and vision have provided the force behind the organization.

As I reflect on how AEP began, and the many miracles that have come together for our success, the biggest blessings are the partnerships we've formed with our friends in Nigeria, and the wonderful people who have served on the AEP board of directors. The mission simply could not exist without the incredible help from all!

Over the years, two moments stand out. I first met Bishop John Danbinta, and we forged a special friendship. Bishop John came to the U.S. to obtain his Master's Degree from what was at the time Hartford Seminary. He approached one church seeking a mission partnership but was pointed to my church at the time (St. Peter's in South Windsor) since the original church was already involved in a medical mission. Bishop and I clicked right away. My office at the University of Connecticut School of Law neighbored the Hartford Seminary. I offered to assist Bishop with his master's thesis. During our discussions, his dreams for his diocese came up and he shared his vision for a private school open to students of all religions and tribes, with the intent of uniting Christians and Muslims to learn together.

I was serving on St. Peter's vestry at the time, and another lawyer on vestry urged me to explore that mission with Bishop, concerned that St. Peter's wasn't at that time involved with any in-person global mission. Plans formed around going to Nigeria in 2009, something I remain thankful for even now!

My second memory is traveling to Nigeria for the first time with Board members Bob Chagnon and Peter Dewberry. It was a true adventure, with amazing friends and far away from home. Bishop took us on a tour of the parishes he'd started in Zamfara State, including one in the village of Sangeko. The trip was challenging, but memorable. We began the 4-hour journey at 5:30am with 3 carfuls of people visiting the remote village for just a few hours. It was eye-opening; we met some of the most interesting, vibrant people I've ever encountered. It was market day, so many people were traveling the roads leading in and out of the village. I remember Bob taking the perfect picture of travel to market: a camel, a moped and a bicycle! That one trip solidified my passion for AEP, helping me clearly understand the vision that Bishop John shared with me in Hartford.

Timeline

2008

Don Ghostlaw, adjunct professor at UCONN Law School (next to the Hartford Seminary) volunteers to help Bishop Danbinta with editing his thesis. The dream of a school where Christians and Muslims are educated side-by-side is born.

2009

Exploratory trip to Gusau by Don, Peter, and Bob to further discuss building a school.

2011

Trip to Gusau by Don, Peter, Elaine, and Angela Dimezza to view the school under construction. Additional property is secured for expansion.

2007-08

Bp. John Danbinta, newly-appointed Bishop of Gusau Diocese, Zamfara State, comes to the U.S. to study for his master's degree in Christian/Muslim Relations at Hartford Seminary.

2008

Bishop graduates; Don Ghostlaw, Peter Dewberry, and Bob and Elaine Chagnon (who met Bishop John on a trip to Nigeria in 2006) were in attendance.

2009

The Africa Education Partnership is formed and initial fundraising started.



Don Ghostlaw, President

General Fund/Construction Update



The General Fund

Used for major construction and renovation projects.

To date, one complete campus has been built in Gusau. In Kafanchan, three rural schools (Kogum River, Godogodo, and Jagindi Tash) have received total renovations, complete with clean water, toilets, and security walls.

We are now undertaking our largest renovation to date: Kafanchan Junior/Senior Secondary School. This will take several years to complete, at a cost of about \$200,000.

Currently, we have secured funding to complete a total overhaul of the large L-shaped building of 17 classrooms and an office. The work is well underway and is expected to be complete by the end of March.

The next phase will be the renovation of the library/computer lab. Thanks to a generous donor, funds have been received, and that work will start by the beginning of April.

This campus has a large number of boarding students. Both boys' and girls' dormitories, including the toilets and showers, are in dire need of renovation. A new kitchen and dining hall complex will also need to be constructed.

We will renew efforts to raise the needed funds to finish the overhaul and give the school a fresh, new look.

Timeline

2014

AEP officially recognized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization; the second classroom building is constructed at Graceland; trip to see the progress

2016

Reconnaissance trip made to discuss and plan for expansion; exam hall/computer lab/library/admin building planned and ground broken.

2018

Dedication of exam hall; exploratory trip to Kafanchan with Bishop Markus Dogo, Kafanchan, Kaduna State.

2013

Graceland International School opens its doors; trip to view the school.

2015

A security wall is constructed around the Graceland site to define the property and prevent unauthorized entry (standard practice in this area of Nigeria). Annual trip to meet with partners.

2017

Exam hall construction continues; Graceland is fully accredited; authorized site for West Africa Education Council (WAEC) exams (similar to our SAT exams).

The Education Fund



Education Fund Highlights

The Education Fund exists to provide scholarships for those students who cannot afford schools fees- tuition, books, uniforms, and room and board for those students living on campus. In addition, the fund provides for routine maintenance, replacement equipment, and other associated expenses.

This is a relatively new initiative, launched and spearheaded by Trinity Church, Tariffville, CT. Begun in late fall of 2023 with planning and publicity, Scholarship Sunday was held on January 21, 2024. For \$300 per year, less than the cost of a daily cup of coffee, a child can receive an education and hope for a better future. The event was repeated this past January, and with the support of other individuals, there are currently 71 students receiving scholarships.

The names of students in need of scholarships are provided by our partners. Sponsors are found to cover the \$300 cost of each student. Some folks can provide a full scholarship. Others give what they can. We work to combine the amounts to cover a child for a year. Regardless of the amount given, each sponsor receives a card with the child's photo and some pertinent information. Three times per year, progress reports are provided. In addition, sponsors have the opportunity to write short notes to their students and receive responses.

There are more students waiting to receive financial assistance. If interested in sponsorship, you may donate online or send a check- the addresses are provided within this newsletter. Just indicate "scholarship" and your request will be processed.

Timeline

- 2019** Partnership with and commitment to Bishop Markus established; Kogum River School renovated and borehole provided for school and community.
- 2020** Pandemic hits; two school buses shipped to Kafanchan out of New York City; ground broken for dormitories at Graceland; renovation of hall at Kafanchan School completed.
- 2021** Dormitory construction continues at Graceland; wells for Godogodo and Jagindi Tasha Schools in Kafanchan dug; toilets for Kogum River in Kafanchan constructed; new construction at Jagindi Tasha School in Kafanchan
- 2022-23** Dormitories completed at Graceland; Godogodo School renovations begin and are completed with toilets; Scholarship initiative started.
- 2023** As of spring of this year, the large wing of Kafanchan School has been completed; further growth of the scholarship program and development of the skills empowerment program continue.
- 2024** Major renovation of Kafanchan School begins; AEP begins its student scholarship program and 47 students receive scholarships; development of skill acquisition centers in both Kafanchan and Gusau takes shape.

Empowerment Fund Update



Kafanchan by Fr. Shaw Mudge, Empowerment Director

Greetings from the AEP Board, and on behalf of Bishop Markus Dogo and Mrs. Dogo, the driving forces who make things happen on the ground at the empowerment/skill center.

As liaison between the Board of AEP and Bp. Markus Dogo on the matter of the skill center in Kafanchan, I am pleased to report that the skill center is off to a good start, with the completion and furnishing of the building, and more. In February the Board voted to fund the installation of two solar panel systems: One for the center itself and second for the housing wing. The project was sent out for bids from two Nigerian solar companies and a decision made as to the vendor. Installation from a reputable company will start soon.

A publicity effort has begun to attract paying church groups and other organizations to book rooms in the housing wing for events and retreats as a way of moving the center forward in terms of self-sustainability. Flyers have been printed and dispersed in the area to raise awareness. Planning is underway for a formal dedication of the empowerment/skill center, set for early March. In addition, a skills training program is also planned for March, most likely for hair barbering. In the meantime, contributions for skill kits to be used by potential students are always appreciated.

Please refer to the list for a variety of donation options. As always, the goal is to impact lives by providing a way to make their lives sustainable.



Gusau by Wendy Bellmore, AEP Board Member

There is steady progress in planning and promoting activities that empower the people and our neighbors. Items manufactured or prepared are being sold in the Skills Center Store, and participants are contributing a portion of sales of their items to support sustainment of the center and its programs. Two salespersons are paid from proceeds to manage the store.

Almost one third of the grant funding from 2024 was used to install solar power. The erratic power supply from the grid is less concerning with this investment. Participants are actively making bags of many sizes for both men and women. These are proving to be good sales items. Tailoring is also well supported, and the Center sews uniforms for the Graceland International School, one of AEP's original projects; there may be interest from other schools in the area which could provide additional revenue.

Goals for the upcoming year are to generate funds that will allow for bulk purchase of expendable supplies from manufacturers to improve sales margins, and to increase the stock of essential items.

- Sewing machine: \$175**
- Leatherworks- (grinder, leather): \$200**
- Hair Barbering (clippers, chair, brushes): \$90**
- Soap/Cosmetics: \$90**
- Catering/Baking (oven, blender, flour, oil):\$190**
- Beads/Jewelry making: \$125**
- Knitting (machine/accessories): \$275**
- Satellite installation (tracking machine): \$125**

**AFRICA EDUCATION
PARTNERSHIP 501(C)3**



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Board Reflections



Angela Dimezza

Angela Dimezza, a nurse from Ohio, has served on the board since 2011. A retired nurse, she has been instrumental in creating a connection with St. Paul's Church in Akron. Here are her reflections:

"In 2011, as part of St. Paul's Mission Committee led by Mr. Paul Frank, my friend Nan Bartlett and I were encouraged to take a trip to Nigeria. Our purpose was to understand the need for funding for schools in northern Nigeria. There, we met Bishop John Danbinta, our first partner- and so began a relationship with Nigeria. Subsequently, the relationship grew to include Bishop Markus Dogo. Funding for both bishops' schools has come from the Ohio Diocese and Mr. Paul Frank over the past 15 years. Mr. Paul Frank also served on the AEP board from 2015-2020. It has been an amazing journey- and I have been so grateful to have been included in this project. To watch AEP grow as it has, is such a privilege."



Barbara Hoff-Morris

Barbara Hoff-Morris has been with Africa Education Partnership since the very beginning, offering her skills to get the organization started. She has maintained continued service to AEP in the role of secretary.

"I have been volunteering in schools and working to raise money for schools for many years, so Bishop John's dream of building a school that girls and boys of any faith could attend spoke to me from the first time I met him. It was a struggle those first few years – getting a clear picture of the needs, working out the governance of our organization, setting up Africa Education Partnership, spreading the word, and raising the funds. There were plenty of months when it seemed like an impossible task, when it seemed like we would never have enough money for even a rudimentary building. But then another avenue would open up, an unexpected donation would arrive, and piece by piece, block by block, the first building was done, the roof installed, and the classrooms furnished. Whenever I think I don't have it in me to keep going, I remember back to the pictures of the children standing in the schoolyard the day Graceland opened. The joy and the pride are still overwhelming."



Wendy Bellmore

Wendy has only recently joined the board, having approached AEP for support in her work developing a skill center with our partner, John Danbinta, in Gusau. She was able to secure grants for the building construction and outfitting and joined forces to help support AEP's most recent skills and empowerment initiative.

"I had the opportunity travel Gusau, Nigeria, prior to the epidemic. Mrs. Helen Danbinta, wife of AEP partner Bishop John Danbinta, and the Diocese of Gusau Women's Guild and Mothers Union presented a strong vision of mission in support of a vocational center. We are all grateful for the support that has contributed to building this program for our partners in Gusau. I look forward to working with the members of AEP to further this initiative."

The AEP Board



Fr. Shaw Mudge

Fr. Shaw Mudge joined in November of 2023. Since then, he has been involved with the Empowerment/Skills Center in Kafanchan, AEP's newest initiative.

"Prayerfully considering what God would have me do through AEP, I keep going in order to be a blessing from God as a partner with our brothers and sisters in Nigeria for God's purposes."



Paul Frank, Emeritus

Paul Frank is a retired Akron businessman, who has for many years had a heart for mission. As a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Akron, Ohio, Paul was chairman of the mission committee for many years. He chose to fund and send 2 of the mission committee members to Nigeria. They met up with an already established mission team from Connecticut and so his relationship with AEP began. Paul has a passion for education and has generously funded many of the projects AEP has undertaken through requests of their partners in Nigeria. He retired from the AEP board after serving from 2014-2019. To this day, he continues to be a supporter of AEP's mission and work.



Elaine Chagnon

Elaine joined the newly formed board of AEP after her husband returned from an exploratory trip to Gusau in 2009, joining founding members Don Ghostlaw, Barbara Hoff-Morris, and Peter Dewberry. Her education background was a good fit for the mission and vision of AEP.

"It is hard to express in words the passion and emotion I feel when working on educational support programs in Nigeria with folks both here and abroad that have become my second family. It's a great feeling to look back at our humble beginnings and see how we are developing as an organization, learning to overcome obstacles to complete impactful projects, and expanding our initiatives. I feel blessed to be a part of AEP."



Bob Chagnon

Bob Chagnon currently serves as treasurer for AEP. He reflects on his service to the board of AEP:

"In 2018, I traveled to Nigeria for the fifth time, visiting all 5 of the potential project sites tied to our partner in Kafanchan. The schools were in deplorable condition, yet both teachers and students did not realize what they didn't have. That week, I made the decision to help AEP in any way that I could. I retired in September 2019 and started as treasurer for AEP in December of 2020.



Rev. Peter Dewberry, Emeritus

"My first visit to Nigeria was in 2009, the inaugural trip. I was asked by Don Ghostlaw if I would be interested in joining him and Bob Chagnon. I jumped at the chance. We were then met by Bp. John Danbinta, our first partner, who took us to Gusau, the capital of Zamfara State, and the seat of the diocese of Gusau. That was the beginning of a journey with Don, Bob, and others. It has been a pleasure to work on projects and see the organization grow and develop. I am happy to have been a part of it all.