

Some Great Contributions of the Episcopal Church of Liberia (1836-2012)

By Rabbi Prince Joseph Tomoonh-Garlodeyh Gbaba, Sr., Ed. D.



Worshippers at the Trinity Cathedral of the Episcopal Church of Liberia located on Broad Street in Monrovia, Liberia

Introduction

Members of the international community, alumni of various institutions from Liberia, distinguished ladies and gentlemen:

My family, friends, fans, and well wishers and I would like to congratulate the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut Chapter of the B.W. Harris Alumni Association for selecting me as the 2012 recipient of the prestigious George D. Browne Achievement Award in Education. Indeed, we anticipate an exciting Saturday evening of pronounced scholarship and cordial fun fare on April 28th, 2012 from 8:30 p.m. to 2 a.m. at the Family Life Center, 59 Wright Street, Staten Island, New York.

During this time, we expect many distinguished and well educated Liberians and foreign nationals from all spheres of the globe to assemble in the true Spartan spirit and celebrate the legacy of Archbishop George D. Browne. Also, there will be plenty of delicious Liberian delicacies served during the dinner amidst great pomp and pageantry the B.W. Harris style! Hence, I am blessed to be this year's nominee of this prestigious scholarly award and do invite you to come and share with the Spartan family their great successes and contributions over the years.

Brief History of the Episcopal Church of Liberia



Bishop Browne celebrating mass at the Trinity Cathedral in Monrovia

The Episcopal Church of Liberia began sending missionaries to Liberia in 1836 and it was first established among the Grebo people of Liberia in Gbehleh-dru (now known as Cape Palmas or Harper City, Maryland County). Later, the Episcopal Church expanded its branches to Sinoe, Grand Bassa, Montserrado, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa, and then eventually Suacoco, Bong County, Liberia. Also, the Episcopal Church founded reputable schools in these localities to educate the children of settlers and natives about God, industry and agriculture. Accordingly, some of the church's schools include but are not limited to: Cuttington University, Bishop Ferguson High School, B.W. Harris Episcopal High School, St. John's High School, House of Bethany, Bromley Mission School for girls, J. D. Baker, as well as the schools and the monastery built among the Gbandi people by the Holy Cross Missionaries of Bolahun and Kolahun in Lofa County. In addition, some of these schools were named in honor of outstanding church leaders. Below are two shining examples of how the Episcopal Church of Liberia memorialized its heroes.

Bishop Ferguson High School, Gbeleh-dru, Maryland County



Bishop Samuel David Ferguson, first Black Bishop in the United States and founder of Cuttington University and Bromley

Bishop Ferguson High School in Gbeleh-dru was named for Bishop Samuel David Ferguson who was a pioneering bishop in the Episcopal Church of the United States of America and Liberia, respectively. He was the first Black person to be elected Bishop of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America. Bishop Ferguson was ordained a deacon on December 28, 1865 and a priest on March 15, 1868. He was consecrated bishop on June 24, 1885 and he thereafter founded Cuttington and Bromley Mission School, correspondingly (Murphy, L.G., 2003).

B.W. Harris Episcopal High School, Broad Street, Monrovia, Liberia



Bishop Bravid Washington Harris

B. W. Harris Episcopal High School was named in honor of Bishop Bravid Washington Harris. It is a consolidation of Trinity Parish Day Elementary School and St. Thomas Parish Secondary school to better prepare Liberian students for higher and professional vocation at the university level. The school officially opened June 29, 1960 under the leadership of Reverend Dr. Emmanuel W. Johnson as its first principal. Father Johnson later became President of Cuttington College from 1973-1980. Other principals of B.W. Harris included E.G. W. King, J. Wah-Doe Bedell, Zoe Traub, Father J. Jelico Bright, Reverend Robertha Phillips, Daisy Ricks, and Tony Deline, among others.

B.W. Harris is one of Liberia's prestigious secondary institutions. Over the years B.W. Harris Spartans were noted for great sportsmanship, particularly their basketball and kickball teams and it was a center of great social and cultural life. B.W. Harris' students used to bluff in their blue and white uniform when they walked on Broad Street after school. They were noted for their beautiful bright-skinned young ladies and for making the "Eyes Right" during Flag Day in Monrovia! Above all, B.W. Harris' guys were disciplined; some were good basket players and others were "fly"! That is why we call them the "SPARTANS"!

St. John's Episcopal School and House of Bethany in Robertsport, Grand Cape Mount County, Liberia



The St. John's Episcopal Mission Uphill Robertsport, Grand Cape Mount County, Liberia

St. John's Episcopal High School and House of Bethany are two of the church's most exceptional secondary institutions located in Grand Cape Mount County, Western Liberia. Cape Mount is the home of the Vais, Mendes, and Golas. St. John's campus hosted the boys and House of Bethany was where all the fine, fine young Liberian girls resided! St. John's High School was so great that many parents from African countries like Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ghana, Nigeria, and some from the western world sent their children to drink of the fountain of knowledge at that great Liberian institution.



Above is a photo of one of the buildings on the House of Bethany campus that was destroyed during the Liberian Civil War.



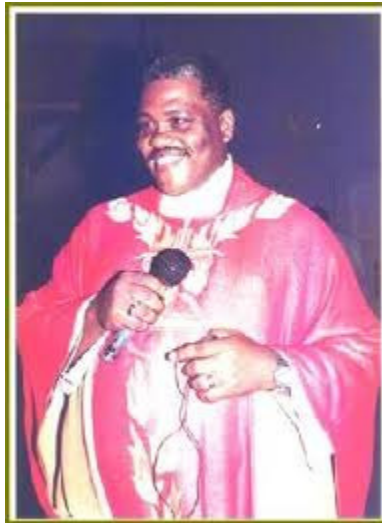
Father E. Bolling Robertson
Principal of St. John's Episcopal High School (1945-1971)

One of the legendary Episcopalian priests who led St. John's to academic excellence was the late American missionary Father E. Bolling Robertson. He died recently and was buried on Cape Mount Mountain. During the Liberian civil war many buildings on St. John's and at House of Bethany campuses were destroyed and are now in need of renovation or reconstruction. Therefore, I am appealing to graduates of Episcopal and non-Episcopal schools who one way or the other benefitted from the contributions of the Episcopal Church of Liberia to give back to their Alma Maters and support education in post-war Liberia. Our children need the discipline and wisdom we gained from great scholars the likes of great Liberian scholars, so that our children may pass the light on to future generations.

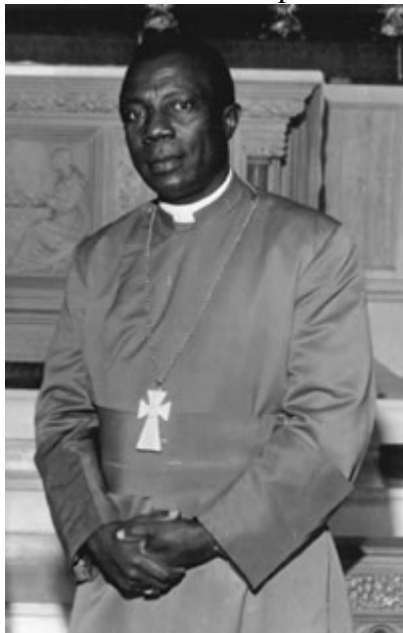


St. John's Irving Memorial Church where Fr. Robertson served as rector.

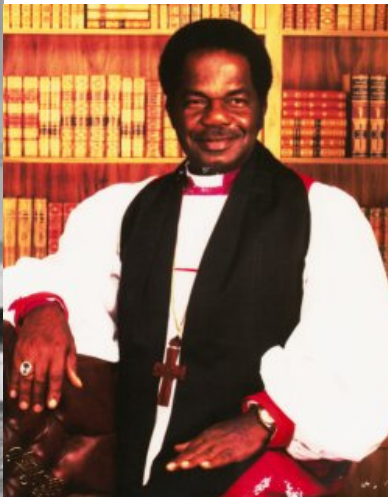
Native Leadership of the Episcopal Church of Liberia



Bishop Jonathan Hart (current)



Right Reverend George D. Browne
First Liberian born bishop (1970-1993)



Bishop Edward Neufville
(1996-2007)

Apart from being an eloquent statesman and church leader, Bishop George Daniel Browne was a pacesetter. He was the first Liberian born Episcopal Bishop. During his reign as bishop of the Episcopal Church of Liberia (1970-1993) he undertook many worthwhile projects to uplift Cuttington academically from a college to a university-college. The Rural Development Institute (RDI) was also annexed to Cuttington to train young Liberians about agriculture and industry.

In addition, Bishop Browne did much to broker peace during the heat of the Liberian civil crisis. Very wise and farsighted, he hit the nail on the head in most of his

fiery sermons that made him controversial and fearless in speaking the truth among the elites of the Liberian society. Above all, he was very well respected among the clergy of Liberia and abroad. Bishop Browne was an avid supporter of education and a strong advocate of Liberianizing of the Episcopal Church.

Bishop Edward Neufville (1996-2007) graduated from the Divinity School at Cuttington College (now Cuttington University). He served as priest in Yekepa, Nimba County at the St. Martin on the Mount Episcopal Church. Bishop Neufville was elected Suffragan Bishop in 1980. Later, he succeeded Archbishop Browne as Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Liberia from 1996 until his retirement in 2007 when he turned seventy, the mandatory retirement age in the Episcopal Diocese of Liberia.

Conclusion

Today, the Episcopal Church of Liberia is headed by a young and energetic clergyman named Jonathan Hart. He was consecrated in 2007 and he now carries the responsibility of continuing the herculean tasks begun by his predecessors. Bishop Hart is a very friendly and outgoing clergyman and he has the well-being of his people at heart. Indeed Liberia stands to benefit from his wisdom and splendid Christian leadership in years to come. I pray that he receives the support and love he needs to carry out Christ's mission in Liberia.

In view of the numerous contributions the Episcopal Church has made, it is safe to say that providing financial, material, and moral supports to members of the alumni association of Episcopal Church schools will go a long way in alleviating the postwar economic burdens the church now experiences. Hence, my family, friends, fans, and I would like to appeal to the general public to attend en masse and support the fund raising efforts of the B.W. Harris Alumni Chapter of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut on Saturday, April 28th, 2012 at the Family Life Center, 59 Wright Street, Staten Island, New York, from 8:30 p.m. to 2 a.m. The admission is \$35 and this includes a sumptuous dinner of the finest Liberian dishes and delicacies, as well as an evening filled with pomp and pageantry and beautiful women.

Rabbi Prince Joseph Tomoonh-Garlodeyh Gbaba, Sr., Ed. D.
April 10, 2012