

## Pastor Ben's hand surgery

Dear Friends,

December is a month that universally brings up good feelings and preparations toward the celebration of Christmas for most families and homes. For Ghanaian homes, that calls for the gathering of the family from all over, to discuss family issues that have been put aside until the Christmas holidays. By family, I am not referring to just the nucleus (husband, wife and children), but to all who identify with a particular lineage who will gather to settle issues, including, marrying people in the family. Most extended family members plan to be available for such gatherings and the nucleus family will want to celebrate Christmas together. It is also a time when gifts are exchanged.

For me and my family (Julie and the children), December means a lot to us. It was 25 years ago (November 8, 1993) that I arrived in Lorain for the very first time, and stayed in Pastor Jimmy's home till April of 1994. It was the first time that I had ever spent Christmas away from my family. On December 14, 1993 - and that, incidentally is my daughter Ida's birthday - I was given a special gift: total hip replacement in my right leg, sponsored by FLC. I had been living on pain medication since my first terrible hip surgery in Ghana, in 1974. My second hip surgery, in 1993, was a major health issue that I couldn't have paid even a dollar towards from my own resources and neither could my immediate family have afforded the cost. I will forever be grateful to FLC and the many other people and organizations that made my surgery possible! It was life changing!

Since then, I have had other health issues that, by the grace of God, I have been able to afford to pay for from my own salary. My left hand has had to be worked on for nerve issues. The first surgery occurred in September of 2014. My fourth and fifth fingers of the left hand would not stretch out normally which required surgery at the elbow to correct. It was explained by the Ghanaian doctors that a nerve near the elbow, which controlled the function of the two fingers, was causing that problem. The surgeon, after the operation, explained that he had to relocate that nerve - which had swollen because of passage issues - and then the fingers were straightened out. I am able to grip things, but since that operation there has always been a feeling of numbness along the elbow reaching to those two fingers.

Then in January of 2017, my left thumb was 'clicking' so I went to the hospital and was told I had "trigger thumb". Medically this is defined as: when the tendons in your finger or thumb become inflamed, they can become stuck or locked into a bent position. When the tendons in your hands and arms become inflamed or irritated, they cannot move as readily through the thin tunnel of ligament that holds them in place. When this happens, you will notice pain, stiffness, and a snapping, popping or clicking sound.

The doctors also gave me a diagnosis of carpal tunnel syndrome. The ability to move your hand and feel sensations in your thumb and first three fingers is directly connected to the median nerve. This pathway runs from your forearm to your hand via a small tunnel in your wrist - the carpal tunnel. When this pathway is compromised, the median nerve is put under pressure resulting in tingling, weakness, and numbness in your hands, wrists and arms.

When the surgeon worked on it the first time and it seemed to be corrected, the clicking in my thumb stopped. But it reappeared in May of 2018. A steroid injection was administered in June of 2018, ostensibly to correct or improve the 'failed' first operation. Then in September of 2018 the triggering started again, this time with swelling of the thumb and even more severe pain. I could hardly use my wrist! I was unable to grip or pick up anything that required using the thumb. The same surgeon decided to work on the thumb again, on November 23, 2018. I will be going to have the stitches removed this December 6th. For now, this 'clicking' has stopped and I am praying and hoping that this time around the issue will be permanently sorted out.

My right leg/hip with the prostheses is doing well at this time. Recently, I have had pain developing in my left leg that I thought should be looked at. So, I had to go for some X-rays in the hope of a diagnosis for the pain in the left hip. I suspected that it was sciatica but to be sure I saw an orthopedic doctor on December 4th. The report from the X-rays I have severe spondylitis, which is a crack or stress fracture in one of the vertebrae, the small bones that make up the spinal column.

Thankfully, none of our children are having any health issues! Praise God! But Julie has not been very well lately. She has been diagnosed as having slipped discs in the lower back. She's having serious issues with standing for long periods and walking well. There appears to be nothing that we can do about it, so we are working on her weight, using dieting and supplements. Please pray for our health issues as you have always prayed for our mission in Akrapa!

We know that many of you also suffer with serious health issues, and our hearts and prayers go out to you. Special prayers are also needed at this time for Michele G. of Bethesda on the Bay Lutheran Church, who had a terrible accident around the Thanksgiving holiday.

May the joy of Christmas and the celebration of the birth of our Savior help us all to endure our physical pain and enjoy the time with our loved ones.

May the Lord bless and keep you safe.

Pastor Ben, Julie and family

Merry Christmas!!