

Dear friends,

November 19, 2020



We send you warm greetings on behalf of our colleagues and students in the *Christian Studies Program* at the *University of the Gambia*. For them, as for us, this has been an unforgettable year. Without a doubt, the highlight came with the February celebration of the ***first graduates in the Christian Studies Program***. And that, just before the pandemic would have cancelled any hopes of holding these ceremonies, and any hopes that we, representing Global Scholars Canada, could have travelled to join the celebrations. We had seen the program through its early stages, together with Glen Taylor, and are profoundly grateful that we could personally witness the first group of students being awarded their degrees.

For the Christian community in the Gambia there was another highlight. In September the Gambian parliament was to ratify ***major changes in the constitution that threatened religious liberty*** for Christians and other minority groups. Although a majority voted in favour (31 to 21), it was not enough to support the change. Our Gambian Christian friends heaved a big sigh of relief! And they ***thank you for praying with them*** on these challenges!



The ***third major factor, as you will guess, is the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic***. Our *Global Scholars* colleagues, Layne Turner and Manhee Yoon managed to finish the 2019-2020 academic year with a combination of teaching in person, online and by phone. Although the initial impact of the virus was mild, a dangerous peak in July led the university administration to ***cancel in-person classes for the academic year 2020-2021***. Layne, Manhee and their Gambian colleagues scrambled to prepare online courses to start by mid-September. For both faculty and students, online learning poses considerable challenges because possession of a computer cannot be

assumed, and internet connections are notoriously unreliable. But we just heard from Layne that they are coping reasonably well: ***“There were many challenges, but things are up and running.*** It has potentially saved two semesters for the university and the students.”

Given the shutdown of the country during the summer, we did not expect any new student applications, so Pastor Benjamin, our liaison with churches in recruitment, was pleasantly surprised when ***six new students applied and were admitted***. Even more, these are mature students, and we anticipate that they will do well in the program. In fact, Benjamin tells us that a few more new students are expected to enrol by February (2021).



We praise God for sending these new students! It means that the program continues with students at all four academic levels. And we in North America have the *happy task of supporting them with scholarship funding!* Indeed, providing such funds is all the more critical in the current context where the *pandemic has devastated the Gambian economy, and increased the financial burden on our students, particularly the mature students* who also bear family responsibilities. For each student tuition, books and related expenses come to about C\$1,200, in a context where the pandemic has seriously eroded the average annual income of C\$800 for many. *Can you help?* Average enrolment in the program has been ten students per year, so our goal this year too, is to fund the program for C\$40,000.

We remain convinced that this program presents a *strategic opportunity to support the growth of the Christian community in the Gambia, and West Africa*, as it desperately needs the guidance of *well-educated pastors, evangelists and educators* for the challenges of our time. From the blessings God has given us, let us share with them through both our prayers and gifts.



Once more, we *thank you for your support, your collaboration with these students* and their professors in the Christian Studies program. And may God bless our efforts toward the coming of his kingdom in West Africa.

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PS, We encourage *ongoing support*; please check the attached form, and/or the website of *Global Scholars Canada* (GSC), <http://www.globalscholarscanada.ca/give/>, where you can find the “FUND” option. Choose #3, the “Scholarship Program University of The Gambia.”

PSS, *Donors in the USA* can support the program via the *Global Scholars* website (www.global-scholars.org); or mail your donation to *Global Scholars*, P.O. Box 12147, Overland Park, KS 66282-2147 USA.