

FUMCR Family

Sam and Sharon Asmah

by Julie Williams

“Hello, my friends!”

This is the warm greeting my kids receive every Sunday morning from Sam Asmah, FUMC Richardson’s Director of Building Services, as he makes his rounds preparing the church for worship. His wife, Sharon Asmah, can be seen during the week in the church kitchen, smiling as she prepares meals for the daycare program.

For the Asmahs, FUMCR is more than a workplace – it is their church home. Sam and Sharon joined the church as members in 1985. By 1988 Sam had joined the FUMCR staff, and Sharon joined the daycare staff in 1990. Since then, they have raised three children in the church – Elliot, Eben and Evaline – and celebrated many milestones, such as baptisms, confirmation and senior graduation.

The Early Years

Sam and Sharon were both born in Ghana, a country that lies along the western coast of Africa. They grew up in different parts of the country, with Sam in the coastal region to the south, and Sharon in the middle area to the north. They met when Sam traveled to Sharon’s area for work and began attending her church.

“Back home, we didn’t have anything like dating,” Sam said. Instead, young people would often meet in their community or church, and their parents would then do the groundwork of researching the prospective spouse and making formal introductions.



“It was a long process, but that was the path you had to take,” he said. “I liked Sharon, and so I had to go to my

uncle, who lived in that area, and ask him to get permission for me to see her, even though I knew her very well by then.”

Sharon and Sam were married and continued to be very involved in their church.

A Family Apart

By 1981, the Asmah family was facing difficult times, as Sam had to leave Ghana for political reasons. He settled temporarily in Hamburg, Germany, leaving behind Sharon, who was six months pregnant at the time. She gave birth to their first son, Elliot, in late 1981. Sam and Sharon were able to reunite later in Germany, but they had to leave Elliot behind in the care of family members, while they worked through all the red tape of Elliot’s exit paperwork.

The Asmahs found the language barrier difficult to overcome in Germany. “It was very, very hard to work in a country where you couldn’t communicate,” Sam said.

Both had learned English in addition to their local dialects in Ghana, so in 1984 when a friend told them of work and opportunities in America, they made another big decision to split the family yet again.

“My friend said there is work here [in the U.S.] too, and life will be better for you here,” said Sam. “I had to come here and leave my wife in Germany because of travel restrictions and the cost involved.”

Sam began working, saving money for Sharon’s travel, and visiting FUMCR by walking to the church

each Sunday, since he had no car. He said the worship service felt familiar right away. “Basically, I was a Methodist by birth. All my parents and grandparents were Methodist. The order of worship was practically the same back home.”

It took almost a year for Sam and Sharon to work and raise enough money to bring her to the U.S., a process that Sam calls “easy” in comparison to the struggle to reunite them with Elliot.

“There was so much paperwork and immigration issues,” he said. “You had to prove that you had all the right papers to stay here and work here.”

“Being here and working for the church – you are doing a service to God and mankind and at the same time you are getting paid,” said Sam. “I can’t put into words what this church means to us. I can’t imagine a better family than this, and we are very humble, thankful and grateful for what this church has done for us.”

Meanwhile, the Asmahs could not travel to Ghana to visit Elliot. Telephone calls between Ghana and the U.S. were unreliable at best, so they had to rely on letters to stay in touch with Elliot.

“We were very lucky to have anything directly from him,” Sam said. “We would tell him in our letters that we love him, that we are doing the best we can to have him join us as soon as possible, and that we would be glad to send him anything he needs to have there.”

“It was as hard on him as it was on us,” said Sam. “And this is happening all over with immigration issues today, as other families go through this process over and over again.”

Together

The Asmahs continued to work hard and press forward on Elliot’s immigration papers. In 1989, their son, Eben, was born. In 1992, the

Continued on page 7

Continued from page 2

Asmahs had cause to celebrate yet again, as their daughter, Evaline, was born. And in 1994, they received the happy news that Elliot's papers were complete.

"When they approved for him to come here, I was so glad to go there and get him," Sam said. "But then they told me at the American embassy in Ghana that I needed to have a code for his visa. They said I would need to travel back to get it or wait for it to come there. They would not let me call for the code. It could have been weeks, even months, and I needed to work."

So Sam had to return to Richardson without Elliot. He was able to send the correct code to his nephew in Ghana, who then completed the final paperwork at the embassy. At age 13, Elliot flew by himself to the U.S. to see his new home, new brother and sister and his parents at last.

Today, Elliot is married and lives with his wife in San Diego, where he serves in the U.S. Navy. Eben graduated from Naval Academy Prep. School in May and received an appointment to attend Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland.

Evaline is a leader not only in the FUMCR youth group, but also at the national level as a representative of the jurisdiction at the National Ministries for Young People. She will be a senior this fall at Naaman Forest High School.

Traditions

Sam and Sharon remain true to many of their traditions from Ghana. They speak their native language, Akan, at home with each other and their children. The only tricky part, Sam said, is that they each speak a different dialect: Sharon speaks Twi (the dialect of the Ashanti tribe where she grew up), while Sam speaks Fanti (the dialect of the Fantis in the Central region). With their different intonations and written styles, this mixing of dialects can sometime be very confusing for his children to follow, Sam said.

Other traditions:

- Eating at home – "When you cook at home, you know exactly what you are having, and that has served us very well and saved us money."
- Discipline – Sam described growing up in a community where young people would show great respect for their parents and elders, learning from their examples and advice. Sam and Sharon continue this



Sam, Elliot, Eben, Sharon, Evaline Asmah in earlier years.

today: "You set the example by doing what you want your kids to do. Above all, there is no better and good tradition than the Christian values. Faith, Hope and Love in practicality supersede all traditions," Sam concluded.

Joy

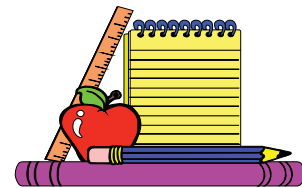
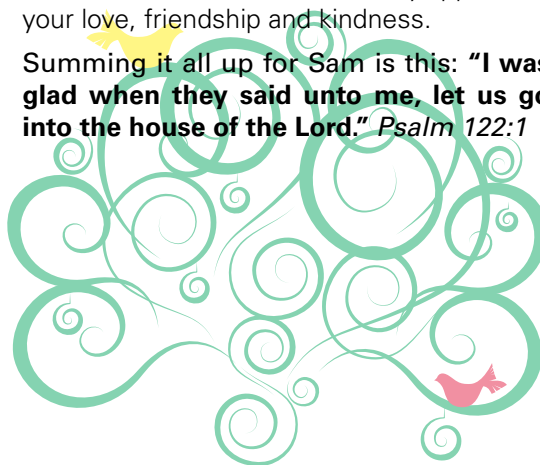
Through all of the years of hard work and waiting, the Asmahs have found the church to be what Sam calls "a double blessing." He described how, in Ghana, the younger church members would "clean up and do all the work around the church for free."

"Being here and working for the church – you are doing a service to God and mankind and at the same time you are getting paid," said Sam. "I can't put into words what this church means to us. I can't imagine a better family than this, and we are very humble, thankful and grateful for what this church has done for us."

Sharon said: "It's always joyful to see the kids from this church coming up to me to say thank you for the food I cooked for them during their daycare school days."

Sam spoke of countless church members who have been friends, advisors and mentors over the years. "We have been blessed because of their friendships and the love we have received from them." We do really appreciate your love, friendship and kindness.

Summing it all up for Sam is this: **"I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." Psalm 122:1**



School Supply Drive Underway

The annual School Supply Project sponsored by United Methodist Women is underway! Bring your donations to the church until **August 2**. Cash and school supply donations will be accepted. Donated supplies can be put in the marked boxes at the information desks in the Family Life Center, the Welcome Center, and the Education Wing at any time until August 10. Checks can be made to the church or to UMW and can be dropped off in the church office during office hours or to a UMW representative in the Welcome Center and Family Life Center on **Sundays, July 5, 12, 19 and 26**.

The most efficient way to donate is by cash or check because UMW ladies can buy in bulk and be exempt from sales tax. However, if you have young children or grandchildren, please give them the opportunity to experience shopping for other children and knowing that our church values education – and children!

All donations will be used to support students of West Dallas, East Dallas, and RISD.

Recent statistics show that 17,000 children in RISD need financial help with school supplies. Often, their teachers provide supplies for them. The teachers and students need us!

UMW School Supply Project
July 1 - August 2
See www.fumcr.com/pages/umw for information