



Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

Stephen & Laura Holt

Sierra Leone, West Africa

FIELD REPORT: JUNE 2017

Dear Praying Family and Friends

To travel from our village of Baomahun to anywhere there is only one road, the Bo/Makeni “highway”. It’s all of 37 miles from our front door to Bo but depending upon the weather and the road conditions this can take anywhere from two to four hours to cover. We won’t even talk about how long it takes if there’s an accident blocking the road. While traveling to our recent holiday in Freetown, Laura recorded these thoughts in her journal:

“I was completely astounded to hear the village children, women, and even men from one end of our road to the other, literally all the way into Bo, shouting cheerful greetings to ‘Pa Stephen’ or more commonly the sing-song ‘Brudda Stevie’! Waves. Smiles. Greetings of all sorts. Children racing along with the truck and laughing. This is a huge change and totally new to me.

“In our windshield there are chips and spider webbing, on our truck body are dents and scratches where, from the hands which now wave hello, stones were once hurled while passing through these very villages. What made the change? ‘You didn’t leave us. When everyone else left, you stayed. You care for us.’ That single heart wrenching decision has paid dividends we never could have seen. He is *their* Brudda Stevie.”

Exciting news: This report is being distributed from our own village! The mining company is moving forward, workers are returning and the new owners have graciously allowed us free use of their satellite internet. This will give our State-side manager a margin of comfort as communications won’t be quite so hit-or-miss as they’ve been for the past nine months. Thanks Stephen McGehee for tolerating your wandering charges! He’ll also be glad to know that preliminary site prep has begun for the construction of a cell tower *right in our own village*. After nearly eight years we might have cell service soon.

As promised in our April letter, this Field Report is fully dedicated to our circuit travels. By far this has been our most fully-packed dry season schedule. We’ve visited many of our old friends, have added many new churches, and we’re not completely finished as we still have several churches on line even as the rains are beginning. Michael Sillah and Moses Menjor have become my regular traveling partners which enables us to have three strong teams with experienced leaders at each church. We do have us a time roaming around and trying to stay out of trouble!

DRY SEASON RETROSPECTIVE PART 2

“STRENGTHEN THE THINGS WHICH REMAIN...” (REV. 3:2): This verse from Revelation concisely sums up the work of Gather The Fragments Bible Mission in Sierra Leone. We partner with existing churches through training and evangelism to strengthen them against the unrelenting onslaught from Islam and rabid Pentecostalism. While we prefer to not report numbers because they don’t necessarily give a true picture, we found these numbers exciting and we trust you’ll agree. When our circuit is completed we will have distributed the following: 18,900 John/Romans booklets; 11,900 New Testaments; 11,400 Essence of Christianity booklets; 1,400 Signs, Wonders, and Miracles textbooks; 1,015 Sure Foundation textbooks; 1,790 New Testament Survey textbooks; 500 Humanity of Christ textbooks; 110 One Way wordless evangelism booklets; and the last 275 of our trademark red Jesus Saves T-shirts. These materials are given directly to the churches to manage and distribute thus enabling them to continue their evangelism efforts. As of the writing of this report we’ve ministered with 25 churches and five remain which we anticipate visiting before the rains completely end our travel season. We spend an average of five days per church which includes our travel time. Often we’ll work with one church until mid-day before departing for our next engagement; we want to give each church as much time as we are able. You play an important role in this strengthening and we, along with each of the churches, say a hearty **Thank You!** for all of the materials provided through your faithful support. With the exception of a few cases of materials for local work, we’re now out of everything - a good problem - and are in the beginning stages of planning a shipment to restock our nearly empty storage room.

CIRCUIT SAMPLER: We wish there were time and space to report on each church individually as each was a blessing in its own way. Our photo pages are jam-packed and we encourage you to look at them as they'll round out what we briefly report here.

MILE 91: This is a new connection which came about quite by "accident" and underscores that there are no chance meetings. Pastor Swaray was a pleasure to work with, was well organized, and had made good arrangements ahead of time. We were met by a very eager group of twenty church members most of whom were out hitting the highways and hedges every day for the week we were there. We also conducted three nights of special meetings with Michael, Moses, and myself preaching. In a recent phone conversation, Pastor Swaray told me the church has continued with evangelism every Saturday! This is very encouraging to us as often times the evangelism stops altogether until the next time we visit. We do expect the work to slacken during the rains but since Mile 91 is directly on my route to Freetown, I'll be able to stop on occasion and continue to encourage them. We stress to all churches that it's up to them to continue in the evangelism as it's not possible for us to visit every church every year and it may be as much as two or three years before we see them again.

KENEMA: Emanuel Star Baptist Church is among our veteran partner churches and well exemplifies our vision. Since our first visits with them several years ago this congregation has been very faithful to evangelism and street work. Now they're seeing the fruit from that consistent effort with the starting of a "branch" church in a smaller village. It was a pleasure to be with this group again and also to work with the new congregation who has as their pastor a member of the original church. With this new congregation we then went further beyond Kenema to yet another village where the branch church has *already* been conducting evangelism. This group has really caught the self propagating and self supporting vision!

GBENDERU: Pastor Mohamed Dukuray and Mount Zion Baptist Church is a new contact. The village is a post civil war U.N. resettlement area about three miles out from Kenema. This brother and his family truly endure hardness as a good soldiers of Christ and they need your prayers. The few people who attend services held in the Dukuray home come sporadically from outside the settlement area. Despite being so near to Kenema, which is Sierra Leone's third largest city, Gbenderu and the surrounding area is very primitive in its tribalism, animism, and witchcraft. They regularly see ritual killings and secret society activity is very strong. In fact there had been a ritual sacrifice of a young man just a few days before we arrived. Brother Dukuray is under constant threat from "folk" Muslims, the mingling of primitive animism with Islam, as they vehemently do not want a church in the area. He's been threatened that if his children are found in or near the bush they'll be abducted, abused, and used in ritual sacrifice. These threats are taken very seriously and force the Dukuray family to purchase firewood for cooking when otherwise they would be able to freely gather it in the bush. The family has also endured unjust fines resulting from false charges and rental persecution as owners receive threats for renting to them. The spiritual oppression is dark, heavy, and palpable. But Pastor Dukuray is motivated by deep love for his Savior. As a young man this brother was trained in the Koran in Libya and Syria because his staunchly Muslim family didn't want him having any influence from Western education. Later in life he was lead to a knowledge of saving grace through the patient witness of his wife who had gotten saved before him. He's had some minimal Bible training but isn't strong in the foundational basics. It was a joy to spend time in the scriptures with this brother and also be able to leave him with books to assist him in his learning. I certainly admire Brother Dukuray's desire to see Muslims come to Christ but not at the risk of his children. I counseled him to consider moving his family to a safer area while making regular visits back into this settlement for evangelism. If a church forms from that effort then he'll have some people to work with and can reevaluate later. While we can't make immediate return visits to all of the churches, I'm planning one to Gbenderu soon just to keep Brother Dukuray encouraged and give him further training.

KONO: During our month-long survey trip in 2005, Laura and I were quite taken with Kono in the far eastern province. It's dominated by strong Muslims and is very under serviced in terms of mission work. Because of these conditions we hoped the Lord would have us base the mission station there. Things didn't turn out that way but we've never lost our heart for Kono. During our seven and one half years in country we've scheduled several times to get back to that area but for varied reasons have always had to cancel; most recently being the Ebola outbreak. Now, after more than 12 years, Gather The Fragments was once again in Kono!

Through a series of "only God" connections, I was introduced to Brother Sahr Lebbie who is the Eastern Regional Coordinator for the Baptist Conference of Sierra Leone (BCSL). Through Brother Lebbie we were put in touch with five BCSL churches and we planned three very full weeks in this region. Our largest distribution of materials was delivered to Kono and is stored in Brother Lebbie's centrally located Resource Center where it is made available to the BCSL churches. We were graciously housed by one family for the entire time using their home as a central base and traveling out to each of the five churches. Now that we have a good working relationship with Brother Lebbie I'll simply have my secretary (Moses Menjor) call him and he'll coordinate all the meetings in the Kono area greatly streamlining the work on our end. Moses, Michael and I have plans in the works to return to Kono during the rains to bring them other materials for the resource center. Concordances, dictionaries, and other much needed books and supplies will be provided for their learning and growth. Brother Lebbie is very teachable, enthusiastic, and easy to work with and we rejoice in God's timing to bring us this important contact.

BABOON SQUARE: While in Kono we had many opportunities to set up large scale illustrations for public preaching and your visit to Kono would not be complete without going to Baboon Square. But to get there we must first travel to Monkey Square.

After a full day of door-to-door work it was suggested we conclude the day with public preaching at Monkey Square. I'm game for just about anything so we were soon on our way. After a rough ride on a miserable road someone said, "Right here, this is the place." To me it looked totally dead as there was nothing was going on. We got out of the truck, assembled our supplies and started walking up a very steep bank that looked just a little dubious. But at the top I was completely surprised. Spreading out before us was a gentle slope which ran out at the bottom into a horseshoe of buildings with their verandas all facing into the center forming what the locals call "Monkey Square" and creating a great amphitheater. Groups of people were gathered and there was brisk business in selling of drinks, much of it alcoholic, food, and other sundry items. Monkey Square could be equated to a college coffee house where people gather to exchange ideas and hear some new thing. There were benches and chairs around and clusters of people just waiting for us to preach to them. After securing permission we set up our illustrations which show Jesus Christ as Advocate with the Father - Michael preaching with assistance to translate into the Kono tribal language. The preaching was well received and as always, the illustrations drew a crowd. We had a good time, many very solid conversations, and it was dark by the time we left. Back at the church house the group was really wound up and it was suggested that the following afternoon we do the same presentation at a similar site. Mission work is about adventure so I said, "Okay."

After another blistering hot day of evangelism my eager troops jumped in the truck to go to our late afternoon public preaching engagement. This crew was really getting ignited for public work and I was just as eager to fan their smoking flax so off we went eventually hitting another very miserable "road" which was more like a goat trail. Then the road forked a bit and someone announced, "This is it!" This time I was more than skeptical but, we're here now, so we'll press on. The "Y" created by the forking of the road was wooded and in there was our preaching venue. Under the trees it was starting to darken in the late afternoon but I assure you it was dark for other reasons and something

didn't seem right to me. Once again we secured permission but as we were setting up I began to hear agitated murmuring that caught my attention. In my military experience I've done many drug interdiction boardings of fishing vessels under dangerous and risky circumstances. I knew where this was heading; this was not the same kind of crowd at Monkey Square. Soon there were boisterous complaints because of the camera I was visibly sporting around my neck. We agreed that no photos would be taken, I locked the camera in the truck and the group settled down but not much. As the agitation continued to rise beyond my comfort level I quietly informed Michael that we were going to have what's called an "emergency break-away." This is a dangerous maneuver conducted out on the open ocean between two ships who are temporarily tethered together for "high lining" of supplies and fuel between them. During an emergency break away all normal exercises must be performed perfectly but at double the speed. We needed to quickly get ourselves out of this rapidly escalating situation while not arousing suspicion. Michael quietly informed each crew member to start calmly making their way to the truck while I took down the illustrations and packed up. I told them that when they hear truck engine start just get in and we're pulling out. By now we were just short of an all out brawl. Our break away went smoothly, I started the engine, the troops got in and we're set to drive out but the nose count showed one missing. Where's Hannah? Hannah is the lovely young daughter of the family who was hosting us. She's pleasant, hard working but typically very quiet. There she was in the middle of the fray, drawing fire away from the truck so we could load up, engaged in a shouting match with a bunch of drunk and stoned Rasta thugs trying to give them the Gospel. And she was holding her own just fine! What a sight. Michael quietly entered the swarm and took her by the elbow escorting her to the truck. All present and accounted for we pulled out. As we were leaving, Michael, with a wry smile and nervous laugh said, "If that other place was Monkey Square, this truly is Baboon Square!"

We later learned that "Baboon Square" is a gathering place of mostly criminals evading authorities which is why they didn't want any photos. Somehow they got the idea that we were with the government and that this was a sting operation to round them up. If our exit had been too hasty or appeared panicked they would have been confirmed in their suspicions and we would have been as serious risk of harm.

Back at the church house we were debriefing from our exciting day when in rushed the pastor. "You didn't call me; why didn't anyone call me?" In our quick exit we all forgot that the pastor was joining us on his motor bike. By the time he arrived at Baboon Square with his bright red Jesus Saves shirt, the mob was ready for blood. "They were going to kill me, you should have called!!" He was trying to appear angry but it was obvious he was terrified. Mission Motto: Adventure can be fun, it's just not always safe!

It was great to be back in Kono.

THE OUTCOME: As stated before we hesitate to give numbers especially when it comes to "decisions for Christ". Evangelism work here is slow because of all the mingled muddling of spiritual and religious ideas. Too often we see the disastrous outcome resulting from "easy believe-ism" and the common "repeat after me" kind of conversion prayer. We train pastors and churches in personal work and taking time with people. Having said that we rejoice to report that in our travels we've witnessed several very solid salvation testimonies. Along with that is a large number of very productive conversations which need followup visits. This is why we partner with established local churches as they now go back through the areas we've covered and water the seeds which have been sown.

A PERSONAL NOTE: Most of you are not aware because we just don't discuss it much but Laura has chronic health issues resulting from a birth defect at the base of her brain. Twenty years ago she had brain and spinal surgery to alleviate the symptoms of what is called Chiari Malformation. She experienced a very protracted and difficult recovery but after several years seemed to be stabilized in her improvement. In the past few years however there's been a marked decline in her condition and this last year has been particularly hard on her health. The small improvements made while in the States during the Ebola time have not sustained and she's doing quite poorly. Consequently she's returning to the States on June 6. We had hoped for a fall departure but she's so worn down that she needs to leave sooner. She'll be evaluated by a neurologist to see what is recommended at this time. She'll also see a tropical disease specialist as over the years she's had Dengue fever as well several bouts with malaria including one this January. It's possible she could have experienced cerebral malaria which causes swelling in the brain which would exacerbate her preexisting symptoms. Adding to the problem is the fact that many medications here are poor quality or even counterfeit and the good European meds we've been relying on have recently become unavailable. She'll rest in the States, get the health care she needs, and, Lord willing, return in 12-18 months. But not to worry, I'm sending her home with a pile of art projects to work on; that will be her rehabilitation therapy. As always, her housing and other expenses are covered by my military retirement; all support coming in to GTF Mission is used for the work in Sierra Leone.

STAY TUNED: We truly regret that we weren't able to report on each church visited during this circuit. As we completed this report we decided that next month we'll issue a special Photo Report packed with pictures and captions to tell more of the story in photos. It was an exhilarating evangelism season and we want to share more of it with you. We provide cameras for each team so the coverage is well rounded and plentiful; it's difficult to select which ones to use. So watch your in-box for our special report.

We remain your grateful voice to the people of Sierra Leone.

Because He is Worthy
Stephen & Laura Holt

See photo pages below

BEHIND THE SCENES



A lot has to take place to keep things running smoothly.

Our faithful dogs, Goodness and Mercy stay behind to protect Mum; no room for them anyway.

The truck has to be loaded and then unloaded.

Laundry needs to be washed, water hauled, and meals cooked.

We're well cared for as we travel.



All this extra work requires a lot of extra water. At Mile 91 there was a water crisis and due to dry wells we had to carry our water two miles. At least we have a vehicle!

Thank you to all who so cheerfully served!



We always travel with hymnals to enjoy fellowship during down time.



EQUIPPING CHURCHES AROUND THE COUNTRY



The enthusiastic team from Christ the King Baptist Church in Koeyor. Oops, she's going the wrong way on her **One Way!**



Evangelism 101 training session in Mile 91



Tracts, Bibles, Testaments and Gospel portions along with text books, the new One Way evangelism book and T-shirts are all freely given to our Partner Churches



Lunsar



Koidu



Makeni

Greetings from
Sierra Leone!



Snartown



Lebanon

Mine eye affecteth mine heart (Lam. 3:51)

On the streets or in the churches, **Illustrated Evangelism** is making a difference



Street Preaching at two sites in Kono. From guilty sinner, through crucifixion, then Jesus as Advocate for the forgiven sinner, concluding with the *Crown of Mercy* (thorns) versus the *Crown of Judgment*. The illustrations draw a crowd and hold attention.

Below: The new **One Way** book is a big hit! It helps our trained evangelists to stay focused while keeping the presentation moving.

(R) Youth workers in Kono using the **One Way** book with a group of children who enjoy the colorful pictures.



(L) At the church in Mile 91 using an illustration of "The Good Samaritan" to encourage the church to remain faithful in their evangelism efforts



Monkey Square



Above: A local church worker (L) assists Michael by translating into the Kono tribal language; a great way for new workers to learn.

(L) The view looking down on the amphitheater created by the hill and buildings at Monkey Square.

Bellow: Even as darkness was falling the crowd continued to grow and remained attentive, except the little girl in the blue chair who's fast asleep!



Michael with Pastor Dukuray's children.

Please pray for the safety of the Dukuray family as they receive threats on the lives of their children.

The Village of Gbenderu

Pastor Dukuray and Stephen spent much time together.

He was grateful for the help with text books (L) as well as time in the scriptures.

Brother Dukuray was trained in the Koran in Libya and Syria. Now he's eager to learn the Bible and serve his Savior!

