



# Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

## *Stephen & Laura Holt*

### *Sierra Leone, West Africa*

## **FIELD REPORT: DECEMBER 2014**

*Dear Praying Family and Friends*

It's been a very busy four months since my return to the States. After successfully completing my 21 day monitoring period in accordance with CDC guidelines, I was able to spend some time in New England with family. A lot of my time was spent in helping my Mom prepare for hip replacement surgery which she'll have on January 12. I'll be returning to Connecticut in January for 10 days to assist her with recovery. I'm grateful to be able to lend a hand to Mom at a time when she and my brothers can use some extra help. I also visited with Stephen's mother who at 94 wore me out running laps around the mall for exercise! Despite some physical set backs she's as spunky as ever and we thoroughly enjoyed our time together. While in New England I also visited one of our supporting churches; it was such a joy to be with Bible Way Baptist Church in Auburn, Massachusetts and see old friends as well as meet new members.

**STAYING BUSY:** Upon my return to Florida I set about the task of settling in for a longer stay than originally anticipated. I've purchased a vehicle and just last week have moved into a beautiful rental home. The size of the house is such as to afford me a wonderful space to set up my temporary art studio where I will continue to produce evangelism materials which will be sent to Stephen. When I left Sierra Leone in late August, I brought with me several projects already in the development stage; these will be my first projects and, just to ensure I have enough to do, Stephen already has plans for additional materials he would like illustrated. I'm also looking forward to planting some flowers and vegetables as gardening is my favorite mental therapy.

One project which I'm particularly excited about is the complete overhaul of our web site. Working with Brother Cody Stinson from Spring City Baptist Church in Lebanon, Virginia has been a pleasure and our web site is now "Powered by BRN Web Tools" whom I would highly recommend for their professionalism and great tech support. This overhaul has been long over due and accomplishing such a task was only possible from this side of the Atlantic. While a few minor tweaks and typos remain to be resolved, I invite you to check out the site at [gatherthefragments.com](http://gatherthefragments.com). Also, new to the site is my blog "Grains of Gold" which can also be accessed through [grainsofgold.org](http://grainsofgold.org). This is now the repository for my journal entries which used to be featured in our Field Reports.

**OTHER VENTURES AND PROJECTS:** It's hard for us to believe that November 3 marked our 5-year anniversary of service in Sierra Leone and I'll soon be developing a DVD which will highlight the work of Gather The Fragments Bible Mission at this milestone.

Following the holidays I'll begin assisting our home church with Child Evangelism Fellowship's Good News Clubs which are held in several area public schools. The club I will be assisting regularly has 100 students in attendance! We're thankful for the opportunity to minister to these kids, many of whom have no church background and this may be their only chance to hear the Good News.

On December 19, I was privileged to speak to the 5th grade class at Stetson Baptist Christian Academy in DeLand. The lively class of 14 students and their dedicated teacher, Miss Price, were attentive and had great questions. I was excited to learn that they've been studying the continent of Africa since the beginning of the year so they were familiar with African history and had heard of Sierra Leone as part of their current events. I've been invited to have a second session with this class as they move into their study of modern Africa next term.

**A PERSONAL NOTE:** Stephen and I are very fortunate to have the benefit of his retirement pension from his 20 years of active-duty service in the United States Coast Guard. When we were first saved in 1989, Stephen, in his zeal to serve the Lord, considered leaving the Coast Guard to attend full-time Bible school. With 14 years already behind him, we decided that it would be prudent to stay in the service so he would have the pension and medical benefits that his invested 20 years would afford him. The day we came to that decision we dedicated the use of the pension to the Lord. Now, on the mission field, we so clearly see the wisdom in that choice. We regularly use that personal money as our "Project Fund" enabling us to make advancements in the work without needing to ask for additional funds. We also use the pension for emergencies such as our current situation. All of my expenses while State-side are covered by this pension; 100% of support money designated to Gather The Fragments Bible Mission continues to be sent to Stephen in Sierra Leone for the work of the ministry you have entrusted to us.

**THE NEWS FROM SIERRA LEONE:** Despite the lack of front page attention, Ebola is far from over and Sierra Leone has now surpassed Liberia in its rate of infection and deaths caused by the virus. Sadly, our beautiful Sierra Leone now has the distinction of being the Ebola Capital of the World with new surges erupting regularly throughout the country. Schools remain closed and people are becoming frustrated, discouraged, and restless as they see a hopeless future. Unemployment is at about 85% and the economy is failing. People are becoming hungry as food prices soar. Aid money and food are not being used as designated. At this point, Stephen's biggest concern is the high potential for social and political unrest as people hold to the belief that Ebola is a government conspiracy to diminish populations who support the opposition party. The president has hinted at suspending the constitution to allow him to stay in power past his term limits citing the "state of emergency" which he declared in August due to the Ebola crisis. We ask you to make this a matter of prayer and for Stephen to have wisdom should a departure become necessary. **However, I must also clearly state that currently he feels no threat and sees no immediate reason to leave.**

With the imposition of severe travel restrictions the scheduled dry season circuit of training and evangelism with our network of Partnering Churches will be suspended this year. While that is certainly a disappointment, Stephen is staying very busy with evangelism, home visits, and training at the institute in Baomahun. He regularly takes one or two students and/or graduates and makes the rounds in town with many productive discussions. "Ebola might take me next," is commonly heard from people he talks to. The crisis is opening the doors for the Gospel and people are seriously examining themselves and their standing with Christ; many of these discussions are with Muslims. He is also seeing personal growth in church members particularly in the area of family relationships and husbands are becoming more considerate of their hard working wives as they submit to biblical teaching delivered in regular church services. As restrictions on group gatherings become more stringent, we ask you to pray that church services will not be effected.

GTF Bible Institute is about to wrap up it's rainy-season term with the conclusion of teaching through the book of John. This is the second time Stephen has taught this book as he's now begun a new cycle of classes following our first graduation in June. He's happy to report that he has some new students who are eager to learn. One in particular always sits directly in front of Stephen just eating up the teaching. He said it's exciting to see the lights come on as understanding breaks forth.

Earlier this month I sent an update which reported that Stephen has been issued an official Ebola Response Pass for the vehicle. At the end of this year all such passes expire and he has asked specific prayer that he be issued a new pass for 2015. This pass not only helps with personal travel but is essential for him to be able to travel into quarantined areas particularly Tonkolini District where the best hospital is located. Without that pass he wouldn't be able to get medical care for himself or others. He regularly uses our vehicle for "ambulance" services particularly in the assistance of church members. In mid-November he transported a friend and his wife who was experiencing severe childbirth complications. Sadly, Cumba died in childbirth at Bo Government Hospital; the baby also died. Our little church family held its first funeral service for mother and baby. Stephen also transported a little girl, Mattah, and her family which was the subject of another update this month. This time he refused to go to the Government hospital preferring the Dutch-run facility in Tonkolini District. This district is closed to traffic and one must have the Ebola Response Pass to get into that hospital.

People continue to express their gratitude for Stephen's choice to stay. Stephen and I continue to be amazed, thrilled, and humbled that the Lord allows us to represent Him and you as your voice to the people of Sierra Leone.

I will leave you with this quote from an email sent to Stephen. This is Brother James Togba, a long-time friend who is a national pastor in Monrovia, Liberia. Stephen recently contacted him to find out how he and the church family are holding up through the Ebola crisis. I'll leave his diction as he wrote it.

"Greetings Brother Steve ... You one of the real God called missionary that I have ever seen. Even in the mist of the Deadly Ebola virus , you are still making disciples for the Kingdom of our Master, The Lord Jesus Christ. All of the ABWE [*Association of Baptists for World Evangelism*] and other missionaries around here left , except two Jamaican ladies who felt the Lord wanted them to remain engaged in ministry in spite of the virus. Indeed the Ebola virus can not and will not STOP the spread of the GOSPEL. God blessed you brother, Please let it be known to you that our prayer is with you . By the grace of God my family is doing just fine. Please let us keep praying for one another."

*Because He is Worthy*

*Stephen and Laura Holt*

*Please be sure to scroll down and view our photo pages.*



## December Activities

Above: My rental home in DeLeon Springs just outside of DeLand.

Right: 5th grade class at Stetson Baptist Christian Academy

Below: John and Moses teaching Junior Church



Below: David Johnny and his wife, Nyanda with their new son, Stephen!

Below Left: Beatrice and Little Laura both in good health.







Left: Town visitation

Below: Gathering of church members for the funeral of Cumba and her infant; both died in childbirth



Below Left: Mattah in a coma and near death from dehydration and severe anemia.

Below Right: Mattah fully recovered and receiving a doll from Stephen.

