



Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

Stephen & Laura Holt

Sierra Leone, West Africa

FIELD REPORT: DECEMBER 2015

Dear Praying Family and Friends,

Our sincere appology for the long delay in this new report. As explained in an update earlier this month, communications with Stephen have been very sporadic but I'm glad to finally be able to get this out to all of you; thank you for your patience. If you receive our Field Report via US Postal Service, please also subscribe for our electronic version on our web site (on the Field Report page) and you will automatically receive all updates which only go out via e-mail.

For this Field Report we'll give a brief overview of the socio-economic environment in Sierra Leone before moving on to ministry news.

EBOLA STATUS: We are so grateful to be able to report that on November 8, Sierra Leone was officially declared "clean" as regards the Ebola Virus Disease and there have been no new cases. Liberia continues to struggle with small, periodic outbreaks which are quickly confined but are concerning while Guinea has also been declared and remains clean. As for the future of this deadly virus, I'll quote one news source, "We are better prepared than we were two years ago but we're not where we should be, not even close." It's feared that "being Ebola free forever may not be a realistic goal." EVD is something that the region will just live and deal with now though prayerfully not on the massive scale seen over the past two years. Thank you for your prayers for the safety of Stephen and the church.

ECONOMIC STATUS: The containing of the virus is certainly a relief in terms of the human cost but less known is the economic impact. Again, quoting news sources, "While the primary cost of the outbreak has been in human life, the crisis has also wiped out development gains in Sierra Leone, which was devastated by 11 years of civil war ending in 2002. The World Bank estimates that Sierra Leone will lose at least \$1.4 billion in economic growth in 2015 as a result, leading to an unprecedented GDP contraction of 23.5 percent. The economic damage has been exacerbated by a sharp decline in global iron ore prices and the collapse of the mining sector amid an exodus of foreign investors." Due to this economic collapse, Sierra Leone is, according to some sources, once again ranked as the poorest country in the world, a status it had only emerged from in recent years.

POLITICAL STATUS: There continues to be quiet but simmering political tensions as President Koroma has launched a “More Time” campaign in his on going bid to keep himself in office past constitutional term limits. One Sierra Leonean news source had this to say, “In May last year, president Koroma and his political allies in the ruling APC [All People’s Congress] caused a national stir, when they instigated and touted their presidential third term agenda. But this attempt to blatantly tear up the country’s constitution as they have done in the recent past and introduce presidential continuity by stealth, was widely and roundly opposed and condemned. The debate was thought then to have died a natural death following the strong condemnation, especially by the country’s main opposition SLPP [Sierra Leone People’s Party]. More than twelve months on however, the ruling APC have resumed the third term agenda once again.” With the approval of the National Election Committee, the scheduled 2017 general election has been pushed out indefinitely with no new date announced as yet.

SOCIAL STATUS: Violent crime, armed robberies, and brutal sexual assaults remain a growing problem in Sierra Leone as well as ritualistic killings for purposes of working witchcraft. An estimated 80% unemployment rate is the result of foreign investors departing during the Ebola crisis. The decline in global iron ore and gold prices is also effecting unemployment as falling prices reduce demand for many of the region’s minerals; many mines remain shut, limiting this important revenue source for Sierra Leone’s economy which will only worsen the effects of social instability as the poor steal from the poor.

But all is not hopeless in Sierra Leone and ministry opportunities are expanding. As history bears out, crisis helps the Gospel to flourish and brings opportunities that are not seen during times of boon and stability. While we’re not seeing people turn to the Lord en masse, there is a marked increase in interest with many people asking good, sincere questions. Sierra Leone has a population that’s roughly 78% Muslim; these are the people who are asking questions. As they see their society failing they’re naturally beginning to question their religious beliefs. Our evangelism teams are well prepared to answer these questions from the Bible.

NEW EVANGELISM VENUE: In an effort to stimulate the local economy in our village, a “du-way” has been constructed at the entrance of the village. What is a “du-way” you ask. That’s the Mende word for what we would call a farmers’ market or a trade fair. Each Friday people from all around our chiefdom gather to take advantage of this expanded market opportunity. Friday being our town evangelism day sure makes it convenient for us to have all these people gather together, many of whom we would not otherwise meet. Our evangelism crew is eagerly working this great opening!

CIRCUIT MINISTRY: There have been several new opportunities to teach and preach in area churches including an invitation to preach at a small Catholic bush church. This went very well and was well attended; it was an excellent opportunity to present the Gospel. Moses and Dennis, two of our institute graduates, shared the duties of preaching at another remote church. For this service, two tribal languages, Mende and Temne, were needed so it was more effective to have these faithful brothers tag-team the preaching service. This is the fruit of many years of teaching and mentoring; it’s a joy to hear Stephen report of this advancement in the growth of our men.

Another new opportunity is teaching of Religious and Moral Education (RME) class at the recently opened junior secondary school in Baomahun. When teaching at junior and senior secondary schools we donate Bibles to each student many of whom are Muslim. Please be in prayer as the word of God is carried into homes where one or both parent is likely illiterate. Area schools continue to appeal for RME teachers and we have more requests than we can fill.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE: In October we sent out an update requesting prayer for a Muslim man named Abraham who was near the point of death and greatly suffering from a severely gangrenous leg. Stephen had steadily witnessed to Abraham over the years yet he remained lost. Upon learning of Abraham's condition, Stephen transported him to the Lion Heart hospital and began providing treatment. Our little church rallied behind this Muslim man and assisted with carrying him to our truck, accompanying him on the ride trying to keep him as comfortable as possible, and donating blood all in the hopes that his life would be spared. This level of care and compassion is very unusual in Sierra Leone and is the demonstration of fruit in the lives of our church members. The Muslim community had abandoned Abraham, leaving him to die alone in his squalid little room. Some of our men challenged the Muslim community asking why they had neglected one of their own; alms and good deeds being part of the requirements for salvation under Islamic doctrine. Their questioning went unanswered. A few church men spent time with Abraham while he was in the hospital showing compassion not only for his body but also for his soul by witnessing to him. On November 4th, following a week of antibiotic treatment and blood transfusions to strengthen him, Abraham had surgery to remove the rotting leg. Sadly, on Monday, November 9, I received a text message from Stephen, "We lost Abe yesterday." He sounded so broken saying, "I can't bear to think about him; just sick over it." We can only hope that in his last quiet days he responded to the love he was shown and the years of witnessing he received; we have no way to know. Thank you to all who prayed for Abraham.

STATE-SIDE NEWS: The fall and early winter months have been very busy with attending several mission conferences and giving ladies' talks. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to personally thank some of our supporting churches. Thank you to all who have so graciously allowed me to be with you; the friendship and fellowship are appreciated as are your continued prayer and financial support. In the coming months I have two more meetings as well as our own Bible conference which is always a highlight.

We appreciate each one of you, our co-laborers. You remain in our prayers as you faithfully serve our Lord Jesus.

Because He is Worthy

Stephen and Laura Holt

Please scroll down for photo pages

Du-way Evangelism



Left: Moses and Dennis at the du-way (farmer's market) with tracts and wordless evangelism books

Right and below
The newly constructed stalls for sellers to rent.
Notice Moses at center in red shirt.



This new market will bring us into contact with many people whom we would not otherwise meet.
Our Friday evangelism teams are ready!



*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men
(Galatians 6:10)*

Abraham in his home. With the leg wrapped to contain the infected ooze, Abraham is carried by church men (Alfred, the pastor, in black shirt) to our truck where he is shown in the last photo ready for departure to Lion Heart Hospital.



Two babies whose mothers died in childbirth and are now being cared for by family members.. We are providing formula for these and two others to help them along after their rough beginnings.



Mary, mentioned in our July Field Report, holding letters of encouragement sent to her by ladies from one of our supporting churches. Mary was quite moved by this display of kindness as Stephen read the letters to her.

Teaching & Preaching Circuit

Right and Below
Preaching to a full house at a small
Catholic church in a remote village



Right
Moses (dark shirt) and Dennis
Preaching at Gima Junction
Two languages were used here so these
institute grads worked together for this meeting



Left and Below
Using illustration of
The Good Samaritan at
Baomahun Junior Secondary School



Please note the open Bibles
These are donated to all students
in junior and senior secondary schools
where we teach

And Finally . . .



Left: The newest “Little Laura” with her father on her birthday. Her mother nearly died in childbirth due to excessive blood loss. Stephen transported the family to Lion Heart hospital and also donated a pint of blood, sparing the mother’s life. For the full story read Life of the Flesh Part III on the blog page of our web site.

Below: Mother and baby are now doing well. We help supplement Laura’s nutrition with donated infant formula.



Left: With the Sierra Leone flag at Central Baptist Church mission conference, Canton, Ohio.

Right: Flowers sent from Stephen for a ladies’ talk also at Central Baptist.

