



Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

Stephen & Laura Holt

Sierra Leone, West Africa

FIELD REPORT: JULY 2014

Dear praying family and friends

As mentioned in last month's Field Report we have had a very productive and busy 2013-14 dry season. The church in Baomahun is growing both physically and spiritually. We were blessed to begin the observance of the Lord's supper as well as having 27 of our group follow in believer's baptism. We've seen several new babies among our faithful church family and graduation of the Bible institute students was a high point for us all. The January and March 2014 reports featured many of our evangelism excursions. To conclude our dry season retrospective, this report will showcase the fruit which has come from our evangelism circuit. As always there's lots of photos – five pages of them – so please be sure to view them as they will give you a small glimpse of life here.

DRY SEASON RETROSPECTIVE: ISSUE 2

ON THE HOME FRONT: This dry season has seen several projects around the mission compound which will facilitate the smooth operation of daily life. Being gone much of the time I try to make things as easy for Laura to manage as possible. Her new super-deluxe chicken coop condo features gravity fed automatic water dispensers so she doesn't have to lug five-gallon buckets to her girls three times a day. I'm so good to her! We learned the hard way that free ranging poultry isn't advisable here due to the intensity of the rains along with the many predators including cobras. Laura's chickens are now comfortably and safely housed inside and we've experienced no losses from illness or predators. The selling of our brown eggs is so popular among local merchants that there's not an imported white egg to be found in town. A few days ago a young lady asked Laura if she could purchase some eggs. The only catch was they had to be white because they were going to be used as a sacrifice; a common practice where Islam and traditional animistic beliefs are blended. Explaining that her chickens only lay brown eggs, Laura had to turn her away. The girl said she had searched through town and there were no white eggs for her uncle to use in the sacrifice!

And to ensure that Laura has plenty of work to do I installed four 50-foot lines of drip irrigation in the garden. Our dry season brings desert-like conditions where humidity levels drop to 10-15% and temperatures can soar to 108 degrees. With the addition of heavy mulch and irrigation the garden can remain productive through most of these dry months.

In the interest of security we're in the process of purchasing approximately one acre along our south and west borders. These two boundaries remain our most vulnerable in two areas: theft and fire. Because of the dense bush it's easy for would-be thieves to venture quite close to the property and remain undetected emboldening them to enter the compound. The dogs have valiantly done their jobs driving away intruders but brushing and clearing the area will greatly increase security and the dogs will be able to better patrol that zone. Brushing will have the secondary benefit of reducing our fire risk. Every year we experience loss of personal property as well as garden and trees due to carelessness from slash-and-burn farming methods; some of the fires traveling long distances through the dry tangle of brush and standing dead wood before they reach us. We've also been targeted for arson on two occasions.

“Build it and they’ll come,” is the local philosophy for church planting and getting members. We decided to hijack that philosophy and apply it to mission workers by building guest housing. We’re now wrapping up construction of the guest bungalow mentioned in the March report; at this point only interior work remains to be completed. It’s small but comfortable and quite suitable for short-to-mid-term use. We’re now praying for the Lord to direct those who may occupy it.

THE EBOLA THREAT: Most likely many of you have heard news regarding the recent outbreak of the Ebola virus in West African countries. We have hesitated to generally request prayer for this because we weren’t directly effected by it and didn’t want to cause undue alarm. It was hoped that the virus would be quickly contained in Guinea, the country where the outbreak started. Unfortunately that is not the case and Doctors Without Borders along with the World Health Organization have now declared that the virus is “out of control” in the three effected countries: Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Fear and ignorance of the dreaded disease are fueling its spread as people seek treatment from “traditional healers” – witchdoctors who themselves then become infected and continue the spread. People are walking away from quarantine wards preferring to die in their homes. Churches are harboring patients professing to be able to heal them. Many are claiming that Ebola is a government conspiracy and even saying that it doesn’t actually exist. Others die in remote villages without going to a health post so the spread goes unreported. Extremely poor sanitation and personal hygiene also contribute to the spread.

How does Ebola effect us? By curtailing some scheduled evangelism trips. In addition to some follow up visits, Aimee and I along with two students had planned to travel Kono district in the extreme east of Sierra Leone. This was to be a reconnaissance trip to make necessary arrangements to add this heavily Muslim region to the evangelism circuit next dry season. It is also very close to the area where the Ebola virus crossed into Sierra Leone and is now an Ebola “hot spot” so we decided it would be in the best interest of everyone involved to not make this excursion. As of this writing there has been one confirmed Ebola death in Bo, evidence that the spread is continuing. We ask you to pray for God’s mercy on these countries mired in spiritual darkness.

★ **FEATURE STORY: EVANGELISM CIRCUIT REVIEW** ★

The fruit from our evangelism circuit is as varied as our partnering churches. We were blessed this season to be able to visit with each of our partnering churches at least two times with some receiving three visits. We’ll feature only three of these churches to give you a good overview of how the work is progressing.

LUNSAR: Four hours to our north-west, Ebenezer Baptist church in Lunsar has become a key in connecting us with the network of Sierra Leone Baptist Conference (SLBC) churches. In the spring of this year Lunsar hosted the annual SLBC conference which was attended by some 500 delegates from churches throughout the country. Gather The Fragments Bible Mission supplied cases of gospel tracts, New Testaments, Essence of Christianity booklets and other evangelism materials for these delegates to take back to their home turf. Many also received the iconic red “Jesus Saves Sinners” uniform T-shirts which have become synonymous with GTF evangelism. Thank you Frank and Sue – your donated T-shirts are really getting around and are now in every province of the country! Central Baptist Church in Kono is the SLBC church we had planned to visit but have postponed due to the Ebola outbreak. We’re now planning a December visit to establish this as a new partnering church.

KENEMA: Emmanuel Star Baptist Church (not an SLBC affiliate) is quickly becoming a highlight on the evangelism circuit as they are getting *really fired up* for evangelism; both personal visitation and street work. Following our second visit with them this season, I was in Kenema on other business and stopped in to talk with the assistant pastor. “The Lord has greatly blessed since you were here last,” was his enthusiastic report. He then went on to tell me that while conducting follow up visits several people had gotten saved, were baptized and are now in regular attendance at church. The church membership has responded well to the evangelism training and are implementing better methods of personal work, taking time with people rather than rushing a typical “1-2-3, repeat after me” prayer. I have confidence that these salvation testimonies are genuine. On our third visit to Kenema we introduced the crew to the excitement of street preaching. Having no previous experience with street work, they were a little timid at first (and who isn’t) but the adrenaline rush quickly kicked in and they were off and running! Our institute students are no strangers to street work and were a great encouragement to the crew from Emmanuel Star. For three days we conducted several hours of hard-core street work in down town Kenema, Sierra Leone’s third largest city. Two members of the church who attended this street effort were former Muslims. Publicly renouncing Islam about two years ago these men have been rejected by family and

friends but remain faithful in church attendance and evangelism. Socially they've lost a lot but spiritually they are gaining ground as they are not ashamed to publicly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are a true joy to work with and I'm seeing a distinct growth in their delivery of the gospel. This church is getting intense on-the-job training followed by productive critique and debriefing sessions. The response is incredible and visible. Kenema, just 4 hours to our south-east, is now being described by world media as "the nerve center [in Sierra Leone] for the fight against what is now the worst outbreak of Ebola on record." ***They urgently need your prayers.*** Emmanuel Star needs to be a source of strength in the midst of fears and panic as one of the world's most contagious and deadly viruses continues to wreak havoc.

FOYA AND BEYOND: After the fast pace of urban evangelism and street work it's refreshing to get off the beaten path, trek into the bush and slow down for some work in remote villages. The fruit here is manifest in the continued open door we so warmly receive. Most "ministries" in this country are influenced by numbers or money or both and remote rural work doesn't fit their "business plan". People in these villages are not only amazed but grateful that we take interest in their spiritual needs and will make the effort to visit with them. Abandoned by the Catholic Mission 10 years ago, Foya is a good hub to reach many smaller villages. While we certainly see residual effects of the Catholic teaching, that is fading out with the new untrained generation and being replaced by a vague adherence to Catholic customs blended with traditional animistic beliefs and a smattering of things picked up from other "Christian" influences. These people are faithful to attend church and are doing what little they know to do but they need guidance and scriptural truth. My vision for Foya and the surrounding area is to bring week-long training segments to the scattered farm men serving as pastors who are trying to feed their flocks but have no spiritual nourishment themselves. They will come to Foya where the training will be conducted. I will then leave them with some correspondence type materials so they can continue to learn together and individually between my visits. Though these pastors can read, they read poorly and their comprehension is low. Laura and I are working on revising some discipleship booklets to make them more suitable for this need. We hope to have several completed and ready for use in the coming dry season circuit. With the rains upon us I won't be able to visit them for several months so please pray that seed sown will take root and be ready to grow when I return to water it in November.

FAREWELL TO A FRIEND: Our mission intern, Aimée Tanselle, has been a true blessing as she's served in many facets of the work, most notably in children's ministry, but she's also been a valuable asset on the evangelism circuit. Additionally, she and Moses "MoJo" Menjor have become quite a team in town evangelism and visitation throughout Baomahun. She's taken to heart our two mission mottoes: "Adventure isn't always safe but it is fun," and "Whatever you do – *have fun!*" Over the course of her year here we've seen her mature and grow in confidence; she's not the same girl who arrived last September. Because this will be the last Field Report we issue before her departure in late August, we wanted to feature some of her exploits and have dedicated two photo pages to her. Additionally we've asked her to contribute to this report. We want to publicly thank her family for sharing her not only with us but with the many lives she's touched here. Thank you Aimée for your dedication and heart for the work, you will be greatly missed.

A Report from Aimee Tanselle

"Tell Aimée she needs to be prepared for kids, kids, kids!" This came in an e-mail in 2011, two years before my anticipated departure for a year of service in Sierra Leone.

How correct Bro. Stephen was, there are kids everywhere! In Baomahun, they come for Sunday school; they will gather round as you walk; as you sit on the steps of a school they will appear. You only need to get a child looking at a book or playing a game and before you have time to think you are either surrounded or you hear their shouts as they race toward you. It is nearly impossible to walk through town without being crashed into by a score of little ones who quickly take possession of each finger on your hands. And there is absolutely no chance of going into town without answering the various shouts of "Opatoo" [Krio term for "white man"] "Aimée," or going through the standard Mende greeting! Sierra Leone has some of the sweetest kids I have ever met, but they are starving; not for food, but for attention. It is a rare sight indeed to see a mother or father hugging or even talking with their children, other than to scold them. It still amazes me to find myself encircled with kids eager to hear a story, play tic-tac-toe for an hour or simply to sit with or on me!

What a privilege to have been able to teach in four Sierra Leonean schools! While each school was different, from the type of building to the size of the class, the interaction of the students and what would hold each group's attention one fact was the same for all: I was able to teach Bible stories and the Gospel to children I would never have met or been able to speak with apart from in a classroom.

It has been a joy to teach the church kids along with others who drift into Sunday school in Baomahun. There have been moments of frustration, but they are quickly forgotten when a kid says something you never expected. For example, I asked a boy named Jacob to recite Luke 19:10. In previous weeks we had also learned Jonah 2:1. Jacob knows both verses well, but in his excitement to blurt out Luke 19:10 he said, “For the Son of man is come, out of the fish’s belly.” On another occasion, I was teaching the story of the man with the palsy being lowered down through the roof to see Jesus. After telling how the men “spoiled” the roof, one boy pipes up and in all seriousness says, “God de put dem na hell fire!!” I was taken aback and asked him why God was going to send them to hell? He said because “dey spoil de roof.” In his little mind, this was a terrible crime! I will never read that story without thinking of Yusif Menjor!

Repeatedly I told myself not to have favorites, but I did not listen to me and so I have numerous “pekings” that are my favorites! There is Mustapha, a mean tic-tac-toe player and verse memorizer. Then there is Fogbowwa, the most darling little fellow who was never happier than when following the opatoo around. Steven, always ready to play ball, but quick to obey his mother’s call. Fatu, a sweet girl who calls me Aimée-Pumwee [Mende word for white man], and is a fierce thumb wrestler. Mohmee, who always knows the Bible verse and Linda who jumps in to help keep the younger kids in line. There is Tolo, a first-degree pickle who is ever eager for “stories,” and Bobo, who is just too cute for his own good! Those are the names of a few, but the list of favorites is endless. There is Lucy, Moses, Jane, Emmanuel, Daniel, Norman, Tommi, Mohamed, Hassan, Mary, Solomon, Saidu....and Yusif who somehow worked his way into the number one place in my heart.

Many people have told me that the kids are going to miss me when I leave. My hope is that though they may miss me for a time, they will not forget the Bible stories they have heard and the verses they have learned. While as for me words cannot express the ache in my heart as I prepare to say goodbye to these kids. They have forced me to be creative and spontaneous, firm yet amusing, it has been a challenge but one I have enjoyed immensely. The result of my being here working with them is that they have stolen my heart and no matter where I go or what I do in life a part of my heart will remain in Sierra Leone.

What a pleasure it has been to serve the Lord in Sierra Leone with the Holts; I will ever be grateful for the time I have been able to spend here – time and so many faces I will not soon forget.



We’re grateful that in Christ our goodbyes are temporary. Thank you for your continued prayers and support.

Because He is Worthy

Stephen and Laura Holt

EVANGELISM: URBAN LUNSAR & KENEMA



Evangelism training session in Lunsar



With higher literacy rates, urban work provides many opportunities to open a Bible.



The Kenema team ready to hit the streets and . . .

(Below) the streets getting ready to hit the team!

We had several very rowdy encounters with people clamoring for tracts and booklets before they even knew what they were.



Alfred using an illustrated evangelism book



Aimee was an encouragement and good example to the young people in Lunsar and Kenema



Thankfully the materials got read and we didn't find them scattered on the ground.



Preaching to a packed crowd. The illustrated books are very effective and really hold the attention of those listening



Enjoying a little down time



EVANGELISM: RURAL FOYA AND BEYOND



The church in Foya. Pastor Andrew receiving his "uniform" shirt. We want to help these dear people truly know the God whom they faithfully but ignorantly worship.



The slower pace of rural evangelism affords ample time for productive group discussion sessions.



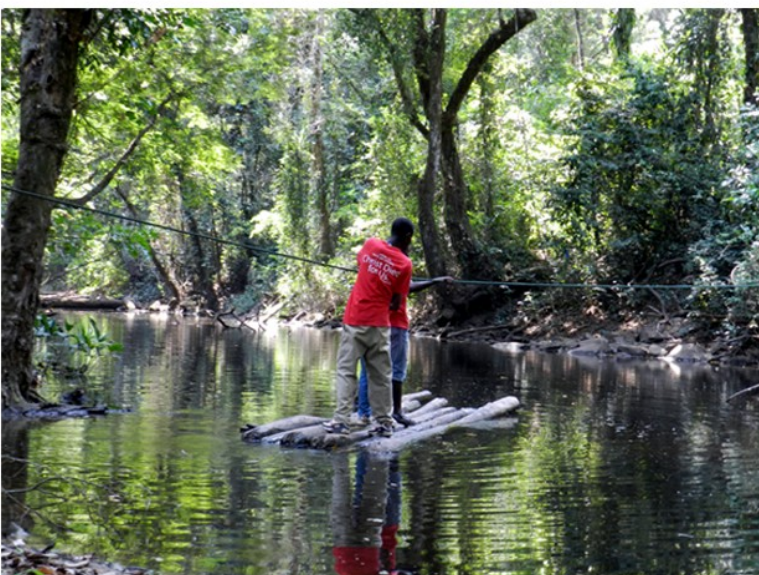
Using a mango branch, Michael demonstrates how Adam was cut off from his source of life and was truly dead though he looked alive. Rural farming people quickly grasp this simple illustration.



One of the "hundredfold" promised in Mark 10:29-30



This woman was more than happy to demonstrate her craft. Taking an interest in the lives of rural people helps them feel appreciated and cared for which opens the way for the Gospel.



The rope ferry Aimee used to cross this stream as she trekked from one village to another. Though not wide, the stream was quite deep and will swell significantly in the rains.

Aimee and her Kids



Bobo in Tendabu



Fierce Tic-Tac-Toe in Tendabu using a small dry erase board



Baomahun Sunday School



Gumahun Sunday Afternoon



Cruising the market in Boamahun



Teaching in Foya - she's in there somewhere!

Reading Bible story picture books in Baomahun



Teaching in Mongeri

Aimee and her shadow
Yusif Menjor



When she's not with her kids you might find Aimee. . .



Preparing for classes



Above: Planting beans in dry season
with newly installed drip
irrigation



Center: Weed-whacking the jungle



Left: Endless garden weeding
in the rainy season

Below: Duplicating tapes



In Bo for the day enjoying some Lebanese cheese
bread or refreshing coconut water



Learning to drive a stick-shift and
navigating our dirt roads



Relaxing on the veranda at
the end of the day



Or on her way to round up more
li'l rascals!

ON THE HOMEFRONT



Drip irrigation and mulch are helping our garden to stay productive during the desert-like conditions of our harsh dry season. Bush green beans and Florida broad-leafed mustard growing together.



Wetting down our fire break on the west boundary. This is a portion of the property we're purchasing. Boards in the foreground were spread to dry in the sun for use in building the guest house.



With only interior work remaining, our new visitors' housing is almost ready for occupancy.



For safety and security our dogs are a valuable asset. Mercy alerted us to this midnight visitor, a 5 foot spitting cobra, and then assisted in the kill.



Mercy's brother, Goodness, fell victim to a spitting cobra one night during another battle. The spray of venom went on his head and into both eyes. With quick and careful treatment he has healed fairly well. That cobra was also killed with Mercy's skilled assistance.



Move-in day for the chickens. The coop has two bays making it easy to rotate stock. Grain is stored in the aisle. Laura's favorite feature is the gravity-fed water dispensers. We currently have about 80 hens - Hyline Browns for any chicken people who care to know.

