



Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

Stephen & Laura Holt

Sierra Leone, West Africa

FIELD REPORT: JUNE 2014

Dear praying family and friends

The rains have begun, bringing cooler weather as well as a natural shift in our projects and schedules. As the rains increase with intensity we hunker down and use this season in preparation for the following dry season. Lesson plans, new artwork, extra study time and circuit training plans become our focus. The rains also afford the slower pace which is conducive to careful evaluation of the work from the previous dry season and how to make future improvements. This past dry season has been our busiest and most fruitful. There's just too much to adequately cover in one Field Report so our retrospective will come in two special issues. Along with the written reports will be loads of pictures. We're grateful for this electronic age which allows us to so conveniently and cost effectively keep you informed through photographs. This issue has five photo pages; please be sure to enjoy each one and see what the Lord is doing through your faithfulness.

DRY SEASON RETROSPECTIVE: ISSUE 1

CHURCH GROWTH – SPIRITUAL: Though not yet ordained, Alfred is capably filling the role of pastor for our small but growing church. He regularly visits families and has a natural sensitivity to their spiritual needs. Finding that many were asking about the observance of the Lord's Supper he came to me for assistance. I held several private training sessions with him so he could effectively bring the teaching to his flock. It's so much more effective coming from one of their own so I strongly encouraged him to do this instruction. Following three weeks of teaching, we held our first communion service in January of this year. Alfred carefully and soberly reiterated in Krio, "Dis na fambul chop. Una noto na fambul, una noto fo partake." You must be part of the Family was plainly stressed. There were three adults who chose to abstain that first day because they didn't have sufficient understanding. We now conduct the memorial service on the first Sunday of each month during Sunday school. It has become a very special time for our faithful church family and is generally well attended.

Alfred's teaching on the Lord's Supper sparked a tidal wave of questions regarding baptism. If, according to the Bible, the Lord's Supper isn't a necessary sacrament for salvation, what about baptism? More private teaching along with more encouragement for Alfred to instruct his people. Three weeks of teaching followed and there were several desiring to follow in believer's baptism. Alfred conducted private interviews with each candidate and a date was set for our first baptisms. On March 2nd following our third observance of the Lord's Supper, we headed to the small village of Simbek, three miles off from Baomahun, where there's a secluded stream-fed pool down a really rough goat trail "road". Alfred had neglected to get a final number of candidates so I wasn't sure what to expect. It seemed like they just kept coming! Solid sincere testimonies were heard by each. The overwhelming majority of candidates had been raised in religions which taught that baptism was a work for salvation. "I just didn't know the truth." "I had never learned any Bible before." "I didn't understand what baptism was even for," are comments representative of many testimonies. Several were converted Muslims who publicly renounced Islam. Only one was newly saved; Alfred's wife Dusu. The rest had been saved and were now growing. In all 10 men and 5 women were baptized. Those who had come with us in the truck then piled back in and we headed for home singing hymns all the way – *quite loudly!* People walking on the road stopped and watched as our joyful load bounced along, many waving and smiling as we passed. We were a rowdy crew for sure.

Several who had desired baptism were out of town for various reasons. Upon their return to town a second round of baptisms was scheduled. By that time others had interviewed with Alfred making a total of 12 candidates. On April 6, again following the Lord's Supper, we packed as many as possible into the truck, the remainder coming by motorbikes. Once more we set out for Simbek after morning church and once more there were testimonies of appreciation for sound Bible teaching which has brought light and understanding.

CHURCH GROWTH – PHYSICAL: We enjoy steady attendance of our regular people along with a fair number of visitors. But our largest area of church growth is in new babies! We are blessed to have families who come as families and rejoice when they want to publicly dedicate their new little ones. We've lost track of the count – suffice to say we're growing the church from the inside out. The children's church is also growing as Aimee faithfully serves with us. Many of the children are "strays" who wander in and we do our best to accommodate them. Occasionally some of the older ones come for the purpose of causing trouble and are asked to leave but overall the children are attentive and able to answer review questions following the lesson. We're grateful for Aimee's patient dedication to this difficult ministry.

★ **FEATURE STORY: GRADUATION!** ★

Three and one half years of training and teaching, encouraging and prodding all culminated on Sunday May 25th with the first graduating class from GTFBM Bible Institute. I must confess that there were times when I seriously doubted that we'd ever see that day. We started in September of 2010 and quickly hit a high of 27 students. Some soon learned the reality of Ecclesiastes 12:12 "much study is a weariness of the flesh" and fell away. Some didn't want to leave the doctrinal errors of the Pentecostal cult and stormed away. However, the vast majority quit when they realized that I really meant it when I said I wasn't going to pay them to be students or that their completion would not automatically give them a "position" with the ministry. Of that initial 27 students only two graduated. Two others also crossed the finish line who started one semester later.

I had envisioned an nice quiet, semi-private ceremony following a normal Sunday morning church service but was over ruled by my mutinous students. Little did I realize what a big deal this was not only to them but to the town. Word was spreading that there was to be a college graduation – a first in Valunia Chiefdom. We were putting Baomahun on the map for something other than gold mining and we had to make this an occasion worthy of that honor. Dignitaries were invited; far flung family members were invited; the town was buzzing with excitement and the church rose to the occasion to help prepare. Much of that is shown in living color on our photo pages. Somehow everything pulled together even though we were still working up to the thirty-minute count-down mark. I grabbed a shower, donned my formal clothes, and made it to the pulpit by the 10 o'clock start time! Due to the expected size of the crowd we constructed a cane-and-palm shelter in front of the classroom/church building and prayed for no rain. We weren't disappointed as the day dawned sunny despite heavy rain during the night. Approximately 130 adults were in attendance along with countless children and a couple of dogs.

We sang some hymns and then following cultural protocol town dignitaries were introduced – in proper order. I was glad we had someone present who knew what to do because I'm sure I would have messed it up. I was then introduced as GTF Mission Director. Wanting to keep my part minimal and highlight our graduates I gave a brief history of the ministry and introduced Laura and Aimee as co-workers. The floor then went to our four graduates. I called each one in turn, presented his hard-earned diploma and then stepped aside allowing each to take as much time as he wanted for a personal testimony. The testimonies were as varied as the men with each glorifying God, thanking family, honoring their wives and rejoicing at such an accomplishment in their lives. It was a very moving and sober atmosphere.

To be balanced in our reporting I want to be careful to say that we weren't without problems. There were misunderstandings and hurt feelings. There were assumptions and unmet expectations. The women didn't always work harmoniously and we had to settle some arguments among them. Guests grumbled when they didn't think they were getting their fair share. As the serving of food to the guests was concluding we were literally stormed by children who just drifted over from every quarter of town all pushing, scrambling and fighting to get some of the leftovers. Laura had to break up a fist fight between two boys who both wanted the same plastic spoon. Some of the women who worked went home angry because they felt that they hadn't gotten what they deserved from the leftovers. Fortunately the problems centered entirely around the food aspect of the program so the graduation ceremony itself remained untarnished. From start to finish the food and the preparation thereof was a source of grief.

But on the plus side is the growth and insight which has been gained from this first experience. Alfred, Laura and I have had some good debrief sessions regarding the problems and our frustrated “We’ll *NEVER* do this again!” has cooled to “Next time we’ll do it this way.” Our little church is experiencing growing pains as people learn to esteem the other better than himself. A tough lesson in any culture.

A personal highlight for me was when the town dignitaries spoke at the end of the ceremony. They were gracious and thank us for the work. Most notable was Chief Karim Lahai who is our sponsor into the town. He publicly apologized for the treatment we received in our early years here. Speaking for the entire leadership he stated that they had listened to men whom they now regarded as “little children”. He said that by patiently standing our ground and moving forward with the work despite the harsh treatment they could see that I was a “true man” (meaning honest) and not the bad person I had been portrayed to be. He stated that if we had run from town they would have assumed we had come for deceitful purposes and we would have been viewed as dishonest – a reputation which would have followed us. Thankfully we now enjoy a good reputation with the leadership and townspeople as do our students.

Part of the course work required for graduation is the Evangelism Practical where students assist with evangelism in two areas. First is unassigned ongoing town evangelism as schedules and weather allow. In addition students are required to accompany me on the evangelism circuit. It’s not hard to find willing participants as the students eagerly join Aimee and me traveling to areas both urban and rural. They’re putting sneakers on their classroom studies, hitting the streets and jungle trails and making it *REAL*. They capably handle questions from all religious sides giving answers from scripture. It’s been a joy to watch them grow in confidence as they learn to earnestly contend for the faith without being contentious. Two men in leadership at Emmanuel Star Baptist Church in Kenema, one of our partnering churches, made the four hour ride to join us on graduation day. They’ve seen our students in action and wanted to come celebrate their accomplishment with them. More on this church will be covered next month in Issue Two of our Dry Season Retrospective.

A lot is happening as the work moves forward. As always, we remain grateful for your prayer and financial support. Thank you for being co-laborers together with us in West Africa. You have much fruit to your account!

Because He is Worthy

Stephen and Laura Holt

CHURCH GROWTH

LORD's Supper and Baptisms



Above: Following 3 weeks of teaching, attendance for our first observance of the Lord's supper was good. Some chose to abstain because they did not yet have sufficient understanding.



Giving thanks for the bread and the cup.



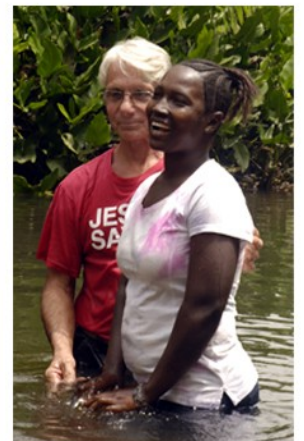
A former Muslim, Mohamed Sillah publicly changed his name to Michael stating that Mohamed is buried in Christ!



Michael's lovely wife, Beatrice. Two married couples were baptized together that day!



Long-time friend Moses Gbla is representative of many who were raised in religion but had no understanding of the purpose of baptism.



Newly saved, Alfred's wife Dusu joyfully submitted to baptism. The couple is now united in Christ!



A portion of the first baptism group receiving their baptism certificates.

CHURCH GROWTH

Physical & Spiritual



Top and bottom: Two of the many baby dedications among our faithful and growing church family.



Above: Following each birth we donate a bag of rice to help strengthen the health of the mother.



Under Aimee Tanselle's capable direction, the children's church is learning and growing. Coloring day is always fun!



Zainab and her new baby, Miriama. Very tiny and sickly at birth, Miriama died at two months.



Traditional English hymns set to traditional African rhythms played on locally made instruments makes for a lively song service.

Left: L-R the solo drum, the keylay, the bass drum. Above, Zainab plays the shebora, a beaded gourd.

GRADUATION!

Building a West African cane and palm “baffa” which we prayed would be needed for sun protection not rain.

Curious children from the school next door were quite fascinated by the power auger used to dig holes for the cane sticks.



The finished baffa kept our guests shaded and comfortable - no rain came that day! Special thanks to our grand children for their fervent prayers.



As the program wore on, a tired Julius needed some lap time with “Pa”.



Each graduate honored his wife for her role in his success. Michael and a very pregnant Beatrice are shown here.



Our sons, Timothy and John serving as ushers. Timothy also translated for Stephen.



Chief Karim Lahai

The four graduates, the relieved teacher and two visiting pastors from Kenema who know and serve with our students on the evangelism circuit.



GRADUATION!

Cultural differences aside, where there's fellowship - *there's food!*
Our ladies did an outstanding job cooking for the crowd of guests that attended the graduation.
All food prep was done at Alfred and Dusu's house just across from us.



Aimee helped prepare "doughnuts" which were included with other small items in favor bags.



Two of the four large pots which simmered for two days in various stages of preparation.



Preparing the tomato based "Jolloff" sauce. The rice is then cooked directly in the sauce making the festive Jolloff Rice which is similar to a pilaf - and very fiery with pepper!



The final cooking began before dawn on Sunday morning.

The finished rice and other accompaniments being carried down the hill to the church building where guests were beginning to assemble. The women had just enough time for a quick bath and change of clothes.



Man with a mission: now Julius is satisfied!



THIS DIPLOMA OF GRADUATION IS AWARDED BY
GATHER THE FRAGMENTS BIBLE
MISSION

To



Dennis Bambang



Michael M. Sillah



Moses Menjor



Alfred Menjor

*In recognition of having completed course requirements for the
Associate of Bible Studies Programme*

GTFBM Bible Institute Baomahun, Valunia Chiefdom, Bo District

Awarded this 25th day of May, 2014