



Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

Stephen & Laura Holt

Sierra Leone, West Africa

FIELD REPORT: OCTOBER 2017

Dear Praying Family and Friends

Greetings from Sierra Leone and State-side. With this report we will be expanding upon several points mentioned in our August electronic update. We strongly encourage you all to subscribe for our electronic distribution list as after the new year we'll be phasing out our hard copy Field Reports. The benefits to the electronic letters are that photos are included plus our updates only go out in electronic format. Please visit gatherthefragments.com/field-reports where, on the right-hand side, you'll find our simple subscription form.

As mentioned in the August update, I am now free from any lingering tropical illness and MRI imaging has shown no trace of tumor or stroke; I was also informed that my 20 year old surgical site in the area of my brainstem looks very good. I'm also glad to report that my blood pressure has stabilized to where my general care physician has allowed me to go off that medication. Unfortunately my local neurologist has said that mine is a complex case and she, personally, is at the end of what she can do for me. Through phone calls and emails, I've learned of a doctor who trained with a well respected neurology school in Cincinnati, Ohio which has a specialty clinic for my specific condition, Chiari Malformation Type II. This doctor is now the chair of the school of neurology at the University of South Florida in Tampa. I've spoken directly to them and now have an appointment for January 9. Stephen and I were quite impressed with their team approach which will ensure that doctors from different areas of specialty within neurology will review my case. We truly need some answers for my continued lack of improvement and I need to get some life back in me!

Due to my insufficient improvement as well as the need to see a specialist, Stephen and I have concluded that it will be best for him to return to the States at this time. Stephen asked me to include a note stating that this isn't going to be a typical furlough as such. The focus of his time here will be dedicated to determining the outlook for the future of my health concerns and we'll be pouring our efforts into doing what's necessary to get some solid medical answers for my poor response to rest and medication. Stephen's been in Sierra Leone for nine years without rest or reprieve so I'm also hopeful that he'll take the time for his own neglected health issues.

We have purchased tickets for December 28 and he'll arrive at Daytona airport late in the evening of December 29. I'm in a stable enough holding pattern right now to be able to wait, and I have so many wonderful friends along with family helping with the day-to-day aspects of life, for whom we both are most grateful. Stephen has a lot to accomplish in a short amount of time in preparing the security of our home and property for his extended absence.

Due to this unexpected change in plans, Stephen has decided it best to hold off commencing the church building project which was announced in the August update. The church men will be kept busy during his leave as they continue hauling sand from the river and making cement blocks. Additionally they'll be harvesting granite rock from a nearby village, bringing it to our work site and, by hand, smashing big rocks into small stones to use as gravel in the building process. We could easily pay for all of this work to be done more quickly but feel strongly that the church membership needs to do as much of the work as they're qualified and able to do.

EVANGELISM CIRCUIT: Updates continue to come in from pastors around the country who are remaining faithful in the evangelism, personal work, and public ministry; we'll highlight three for this report.

Pastor Swaray of Mile 91 recently conducted a baptism of 22 new members who were all saved and joined to the church *directly through their evangelism efforts!* Four of the baptismal candidates were orphaned children who are now part of the church family. This church runs an orphanage and we believe these children are in residence there so they will be in regular attendance at church where we pray they'll grow in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

You may recall the story from our June 2017 Field Report regarding our visit to the village of Gbenderu with Pastor Mohamed Dukuray a former Muslim trained in Syria and Libya. The village is a post civil war U.N. resettlement area about three miles out from Kenema and is 99% Muslim. Brother Dukuray and his family have suffered much trying to establish a church here. Praise to the Lord for the recent news from this brother. There are now 17 people in steady church attendance. Additionally, he's had the joy of baptizing one and also has another in a New Believers discipleship class who will also be baptized soon.

An excellent report from Pastor Alucious of Emanuel Star Baptist in Kenema gives us the good news of a new church started from their regular evangelism work. When we first began visits in Kenema five years ago we only had Emmanuel Star on our circuit. This past dry season we added training and evangelism with a new branch church started by Emmanuel Star in an outlying village. In a recent phone call to Stephen it was reported that this branch church has now started a second branch reaching even further out from Kenema! This is exactly our vision for these circuit churches — that they be self supporting, self governing, and self propagating. We do not give financial assistance to any pastors and we do not build any churches. The only support we give is in the area of materials, training, and copious enthusiastic encouragement.

AN ISOLATED CASE: While we are indeed helping to build The Bible Mission Church in our own village of Baomahun, we do not financially support Pastor Alfred Menjor; that is the duty of the church membership. Our financial assistance with the building is because it will always be associated with the GTF Mission and we want it to be a good testimony. It will not be a garishly overbuilt Western-style building as many mission organizations erect, but rather a simple, local style utilizing higher quality materials than the church could afford on its own so it will remain in good condition for many years. We see it as an investment in our community. We are also employing local workers in an effort to help the local economy. We've worked very diligently to have a good reputation in Baomahun and with area leaders and this effort will greatly bolster our relations.

POLITICAL NEWS: Sierra Leone is scheduled to hold its presidential election on March 7, 2018. There is already tension brewing as well as a low level of fear. Due to social uncertainties and voiced fears of their constituents, parliament recently voted to close all schools for the entire third trimester of this academic year so students will not have to travel during the potentially dangerous time leading up to the election. Many students must travel far from their homes and reside in populous urban areas where schools are available; parents are justifiably concerned about having their children away from home during campaign and election time. Some rallies have already turned mildly violent but were brought quickly under control. President Koroma recently announced his hand picked candidate to represent his ruling All People's Congress political party rather than following protocol of having delegates vote in the candidate to run for office. This is furthering the uneasy climate of fear among the rank-and-file. Please pray for peaceful transition of power as President Koroma is at the end of his term limits and there's apprehension regarding his willingness to peacefully leave office.

SPECIAL PRAYER REQUEST: Moses Menjor (Pastor Alfred's older brother) is Stephen's right-hand man and is indispensable to the work especially in the areas of evangelism, public ministry, and coordinating the dry season circuit.

Moses has sickle-cell anemia which can cause severe joint pain and deterioration. When just seven years old, Moses suffered a protracted cycle of the anemia with excruciating pain in his left hip. The local "traditional healer", better known as a witch doctor, used the folk method of treatment by attempting to pull the pain out of his leg, a "treatment" method still used to this day. In the process of tugging on the leg, Moses' hip was dislocated and never properly reset.

Moses is now 35 and after all of these years of walking, he has completely destroyed the joint; his X-rays are unbelievable.

We have been working for two years to find a place we can take him to have a replacement as this surgery isn't available anywhere in Sierra Leone. Calls, emails, inquiries to other missionaries, and many dead ends, have finally led us to an orthopedic hospital in Ghana. We're happy to report that after all that work, Moses and Stephen fly to Ghana on October 23rd, have the initial evaluation on the 24th, then surgery will be scheduled for the following week. The benefit of staying within the region of West Africa is that the travel is greatly simplified in terms of visa and passport requirements. Stephen will only stay a couple of days but we've just learned of a Sierra Leonean friend known to both us and Moses who now lives in Ghana very close to the hospital who will be able to look in on Moses as well as transport him back to the airport when he's ready to leave. We want Moses to remain in Ghana a full month to take best advantage of proper physical therapy. He'll have to learn to walk all over again!

It doesn't seem possible that something so common in the States could be so difficult; we surely are blessed here. Because we've been working so long on this project, Stephen and I both felt strongly that we needed to see it through before his return to the States and this played a large part in our decision for the timing of his departure. We're so thankful that it finally all pulled together. Please pray for them as they travel and especially for Moses as he learns to use his new hip — something that no one in our village, or for that matter, even most of the country, has ever seen! Baomahun is Moses' birth village and everyone there has only known him as crippled.

Very special thanks to the loving and generous benefactors who, upon learning of Moses' story, have made this travel and surgery possible and have faithfully prayed during these two years. Baomahun is 75-80% Muslim and a comment we hear somewhat regularly is that our church, The Bible Mission Church, is caring toward its membership as well as the village population in general. Stephen has the reputation for being non-partial when it comes to his generous and liberal use of his time and effort to use our vehicle as an ambulance free of charge. The news of some families on the other side of the world caring so deeply for someone they've never met will be an incredible testimony to the love of Christ. It may even be the catalyst to someone being born into the family of God. Thank you for giving to the Lord.

We'll be sending out an electronic update regarding Moses' surgery so please be sure to subscribe if you're not already on our distribution list. Thank you to all of you for your faithful prayers and support which allow us to be your voice in Sierra Leone. We are privileged to serve in this capacity and all Glory to God!

Because He is Worthy

Stephen & Laura Holt

See photo pages below

Baptism in Mile 91



Baptism Candidates

Thanks goes to Pastor Swaray (below praying before baptism) who sent these photos via email.

Watch out for crocks and other surprises!!



Our Faithful Moses



Bringing up the rear. Despite his crutch and bad hip, Moses is faithful to evangelism service walking long jungle trails, crossing slippery log bridges, and even wading through small rivers if necessary to preach the Gospel of Christ to the lost.

Public ministry in Kono. Moses, a regular member of the circuit crew, is a bold and fiery preacher who isn't afraid of his countrymen.



At far left, Moses and the crew are ready to head out on evangelism in Baomahun.

Also pictured are (L-R)
Alfred Jusu and Michael Sillah