



GTFBM

Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

Stephen & Laura Holt
Sierra Leone, West Africa

FIELD REPORT: AUGUST 2018

Dear Praying Family and Friends

Laura and I have had a blessed summer as she rests and recuperates along with time to enjoy our church, our family, and our four perfect grand children. I've had the privilege to serve with my family in public ministry and nursing homes and I treasure these times to influence our grand children, especially as we look ahead to my departure for Sierra Leone.

OFF-GRID TRAINING: Our summer started with a June trip to New Tribes Mission's training campus in Camdenton, Missouri. Here I took a week-long course titled "Off-Grid Technology" which is designed to help missionaries in remote settings to properly install and maintain a solar array, providing their own electricity where none is available. Laura made the wry quip that one cannot technically be considered "off grid" where there is no grid! Founded in 1942, New Tribes Missions has been assisting missionaries for a long time and has some excellent training available. Their focus is not to help the missionary export an American life-style to the primitive setting but rather to equip the missionary to live more efficiently thereby enabling a more effective gospel service. Recognizing that minimal electricity is vital to that effort they not only offer the off-grid training but also make available much of the equipment needed at discounted prices. They are an excellent resource and I highly recommend them to those serving in out of the way places. If you have any questions regarding this training, please call or text me at my temporary Stateside contact, 386-642-8370.

EXTENDED TRAVEL: At the time I was preparing to leave for Missouri, Laura was going through a difficult transition in her medication. I didn't like the idea of leaving her alone and thinking that some time away might help, I asked her to consider going with me. She said the only thing she would ask is that I take it at a slower pace, meaning that I would not drive the 1,200 miles straight through! With that request in mind, I arranged to visit two of our supporting churches as rest breaks for her. On our way to Missouri we stopped at Shady Grove Baptist in Bossier City, LA. We're very grateful for the hospitality extended for our two day layover. Special thanks to fellow missionary Stephen Sorrell and his wife Jill (Sri Lanka) for the time invested in fellowship as well as counseling with us. It was so good to see this family again and we truly appreciate our stop here as it helped us to sort out some critical personal issues.

On our return trip we stopped for a three day lay over with Cornerstone Baptist in Carthage, TN. Here we made some exciting connections. Laura enjoys teasing me that she slowed me down which allowed the Lord to work in ways that otherwise wouldn't have happened. And I must admit that she's right! While at Cornerstone I had some undistracted time to research metal buildings to use as our church in Sierra Leone. This will provide a much stronger and longer lasting building than if we used local building methods and materials. I was surprised to receive a quick call back from one of the companies, Titan Steel, saying they had a discounted building available which precisely fit what I had inquired about. Another church had ordered this building and then decided to go with a larger one. Needing to quickly sell the original building, the company was willing to sell it at a much lower price. The original price was \$50,000 but our price is \$29,700 which includes domestic shipping to our point of departure for Sierra Leone. It was brought to my attention that two of the men at church are in the construction trade and have considerable experience with erecting steel buildings. I was able to quickly arrange a meeting with them and one spoke directly to Titan Steel to get specific information on the building they had offered us. These brothers assured me that the building, at \$16/sq. ft, was indeed a very good deal. They then thoroughly astounded me by offering their services to come to Sierra Leone and erect the building, saying it would be their privilege. This was not spoken of or sought by me but was entirely the moving of the Lord on the hearts of these good brothers. One of them, Stephen Mustard, will be traveling to Sierra Leone in early 2019 to help me with site prep.

Our projected time frame for the erecting of the building is during the dry season of 2020 which corresponds to the winter season in the States. We have put a \$10,000 deposit on the building and Titan Steel will hold it until we're ready to ship.

ILLUSTRATED EVANGELISM: Along with the news of the church building to be erected in Sierra Leone, we also bring you news regarding Laura's Stateside studio and great advancements with Illustrated Evangelism. We thrill to watch the Lord work these things together for the GTF ministry on both sides of the puddle. As mentioned in our May Update, we have made a contact with a brother in Georgia who is helping us get Laura's large-scale works printed on durable canvas. We've received our preliminary sample and are very pleased with the quality, color, and sizing (see photo page below). These will be a tremendous asset during our dry season evangelism circuit and will be much more durable than the paper illustrations we currently use. Additionally, after much research and brainstorming, we've made some changes to Laura's studio which will enable her to work more comfortably and with less stress to her neck and back thereby easing the pressure placed on her hind brain and upper spinal cord. The major change is the "Orbital Easel" which attaches to her current drawing table via a vacuum base and pivots to any position needed. She is able to stay sitting back in her chair which keeps her back and neck well supported rather than hours of leaning over her table to work. The art department is excited about these advancements and so is the boss!

NETWORKING: While in Missouri, one of the tech teachers mentioned having recently had another student who was headed to Sierra Leone. We learned that this couple lived locally and upon contacting them they were more than willing to get together. Bill and Beth Arnold are, like us, older Christians who are setting out to serve the Lord later in life. They plan to leave for Sierra Leone in September and will be settling in the village of Makanji, a six hour ride from us. They will be serving with Global Outreach Mission as hospitality hosts and part of a team rehabilitating a hospital. Beth will also serve as educational director for the village schools. The couple who had previously been stationed in Makanji left during the Ebola Time and has not returned. We're very grateful to the Arnolds for allowing us some room in their container for our solar equipment and other items. It's a blessing to have another couple joining our ranks.

OUTREACH: I've recently heard from Sahr Lebbie, traveling evangelist and facilities manager for the Bible Conference, Sierra Leone (BCSL). I've worked with him in the past and he's a true blessing. He has told me of a great outreach opportunity that's developing and has requested urgent help with Bible literature. Through contacts with secondary school principals in the Lunsar and Mile 91 areas, Brother Sahr is arranging for GTF Bible Mission to make visits to these schools, preach the Gospel using the large scale illustrations, and distribute Bible literature. We were able to quickly arrange with Bearing Precious Seed to have 10,000 John/Romans books delivered which were included on Brother Bill Arnold's container. Additionally, we'll be sending several thousand Essence of Christianity booklets as well as tracts in the crates we're shipping.

SOME PERSONAL NOTES: I've made four trips to New England (driving) for family needs. In my first six months home, my family has experienced three deaths; my mother in early March just two weeks shy of her 98th birthday, my oldest brother three weeks later, and my sister-in-law at the beginning of July. That's a lot of grief for one family. At the end of July Laura and I drove to Rhode Island for my sister-in-law's memorial service and I'm grateful she was able to attend with me as it meant a lot to my family for her to make that effort. We then drove to Connecticut to spend some time with Laura's mom and brothers. Unfortunately we had to cut that visit short as Laura started into a "bad cycle" and I felt it best to get her home before things got much worse. That was the best call and she's now starting to stabilize again. These cycles are "normal" for her but certainly the 1,300 mile drive (one way) didn't help. It was good to see her family and we appreciate their understanding our need to leave early.

Our projected timeframe for my return to Sierra Leone is late October or early November at the latest. I do need to finalize the shipping of a couple of crates and tie up some things at our condo so all is in good order for Laura to be here alone. We're now focusing our time an attention on that target date.

IT'S REAL TO THEM: I'll leave you with this quote taken from a text message sent by Michael Sillah. It thrills my heart as it demonstrates that the walk of faith is becoming real to my students, my friends, in Sierra Leone: "We don't need to live the way we used to because the lives that is in us does not belong to us again but to Jesus." Michael is a former Muslim and one of our most faithful in evangelism. Thank you for allowing us the privilege to serve as your representatives to Sierra Leone.

Because He is Worthy
Stephen & Laura Holt

See photo pages below

Off-Grid Tech Training



Top Left: Class was well attended by people from a variety of ministries and backgrounds.

With a hands-on focus, the principles of solar electric are well learned

Left: The students and spouses were taken by boat from the New Tribes campus to a marina restaurant for sunset dinner on the beautiful Lake of the Ozarks.

Illustrated Evangelism



Left: Alfred preaching in church using paper illustrations rendered individually in pastel

Below: Our new canvas illustrations will be durable lasting for several seasons and eliminating the need for Laura to continually reproduce large-scale illustrations by hand each dry season.



Above: With its vacuum base the Orbital Easel quickly attaches to Laura's drawing table. It can then be pivoted and turned into any position enabling her to keep her back supported firmly by the chair.

Artwork will be produced at a much smaller size then reproduced on the large canvas. How nice is that!

Right: The light box is used to transfer the completed preliminary drawings onto the final paper. Note that her back is unsupported; this is what we're trying to minimize and the new easel will help!

