



GTFBM

Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

Stephen & Laura Holt
Sierra Leone, West Africa

FIELD REPORT: DECEMBER 2019

Greetings to our Family and Friends!

New Year Greetings to each of you from GTF Bible Mission! It's amazing that we're at the end of another year already. For the last six months our road has been impassable due to heavy rains (see our August Field Report). Finally, at the end of November, the rains stopped, the mud pits dried out, and we're able to safely venture forth into Bo and beyond. The months of isolation were really starting to wear on everyone. Due to the present condition of the roads on the two routes to our village, we may need to delay the shipment of our 40-foot container which will result in a postponement of the erecting of our new church building. It would not be a happy thing to get our container stuck on the road as happened to another truck. This tractor trailer truck was transporting heavy equipment for a mining company. Unfortunately their trailer remained mud-bound for four months! Though the mud is dried out now the road is in such bad condition that it would not be wise to attempt bringing in a container unless some improvements are made first. Rumors abound as to when repairs will be forthcoming.

EVANGELISM CIRCUIT: With the road opening up, Moses and I have begun making a very full schedule for the 2020 Dry Season Circuit, our busiest time of year. We have our main areas of Bo, Kenema, and Lunsar covered fairly well already. I'd like to take care of our established churches early in the season and then concentrate on new contacts.

We have exciting plans in the works to break new ground in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Although we have previously visited the Eastern Province, this year we plan to expand our area of ministry in this region, going beyond Kono, penetrating further east into Kailahun. Our first foray will be a test run to get a feel for the reception of the Gospel to see if the timing is right for "Aggressive Evangelism" campaigns, as Jonathan Goforth, early 20th century missionary, to China termed his circuit work. Not meaning that their presentation was aggressive, but, rather, that their pace certainly was! A worthy role model indeed. There is currently an influx of population to this area as people leave the gold mining areas to hastily relocate in the currently more lucrative diamond mining fields of the east. We're hopeful for a good window of opportunity for the Gospel before mining competition becomes too fierce and people lose interest in spiritual matters, putting all of their time into mining, literally 24/7. We have solid connections in this region from previous incursions and will maximize these established friendships in order to build new ones thereby adding to our circuit of Partner Churches. While in the region we'll also visit our established church contacts.

The Northern Province will be entirely new territory and needs much prayer. We currently have no established connections. Moses and I plan to make some reconnaissance runs into the area to see if there are any churches willing to collaborate with GTF Bible Mission. The north is a Muslim stronghold with the more aggressive, though not radical, Islam of the Fula and Fulani tribes, which we are not accustomed to dealing with in the Southern Province. There are two major areas of population we will initially target, Kamakwie and Kabala, both well positioned close to the border with Guinea. We hope to begin making inroads for the Gospel by setting up our evangelism banners for open air preaching. The major advantage is that this is mainly an agricultural region which will give us much better access to people especially on Fridays, the Muslim holy day when people typically refrain from working.

LOCAL EVANGELISM: With the roads to the outside world being impassable for so long, GTF carried out many more locally based evangelism operations than usual in recent months. One highlight from these efforts is an open air

meeting held in Pelewahun — a Mende name meaning, *the village of the far (or main) road*. We had previously conducted a church meeting with our partner church in this small village about 10 miles downline from us. The congregation at this tiny church got so fired up that they wanted us to return for a village-wide presentation using the Gospel banners in their *barrie* (an open sided pavilion for public meetings). Following the preaching, we opened up the floor for questions. I was so pleased with the answers given by this host church; they had really learned the material and it was far more beneficial for the predominantly Muslim audience to hear the answers from their fellow residents. Now they know they can go to these church members for some basic spiritual answers. This is exactly the desired outcome of our training forays with Partner Churches.

NEW NAMES: The effectiveness of Illustrated Evangelism cannot be over-stated. In recent months we've had two new names written down in Glory, the direct result of the artwork which Laura continues to create for our evangelism.

First is Alpha Conteh. One day recently, as I was walking home from town, someone started calling my name so I turned and there was a young man waving his hand and running toward me from one of the houses near the market. He had been present when Moses and I were doing public evangelism here in town. Alpha was drinking palm wine in a “ghetto” (similar to a bar) where Moses preached using one of the wordless books which are just right for smaller venues. Well, the Lord just would not leave Alpha alone, so after wrestling with God for two weeks, in the quiet of his own room, he “decided for Jesus,” as he put it. He has left Islam and come out for Christ! He even informed me that he stopped drinking — Praise the Lord, no one but the Holy Spirit had to tell him.

Next is Michael Conteh — no relation, just a very common name. Michael was Seventh Day Adventist when he first heard (and saw) the Gospel. Moses and I had been invited to preach, using the large banners, at Michael's SDA church in village near Yele. We get invited to all kinds of places, Catholic, Wesleyan, Methodist, even Pentecostal! I'll preach any place I'm invited because you just don't know how the Lord will use it. Michael's work has now brought him to our village of Baomahun, so we continued to follow up with this young man. After several months, his understanding finally all came together, and, while sitting on our veranda, he called on the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive his sin! Between his open confession of salvation and the smile on his face, we can have confidence that he certainly is born again. Michael is now in church and is even attending Bible Institute!

And we have two more new names! Erastus and Benjamin — our newest little members at The Bible Mission Church. We've featured pictures of these baby naming and dedication ceremonies on our photo pages. It's such a joy to see our families growing in the Lord as they desire to dedicate their children to Him and raise them in church. Pretty soon we'll have a small army of children with Bible names — *GLORY!* A note for prayer: Benjamin's mother, Maria, is married to a Muslim man. Please lift him in prayer as the church men make visits to him to talk about his soul's great need. Benjamin is albino, and will face the potential of skin cancer and blindness from the intensity of the sun.

BAPTISMS: I recently had business in Bo which necessitated that I stay over on a Saturday night so I decided to just drop in for church at Grace Baptist, our main Partner Church in Bo. They happened to have a baptism scheduled for that day and gave me the privilege of baptizing the candidates. This was truly a blessing as each gave a very clear testimony of salvation, and made it plain that they understood the purpose of the baptism. Each had been through a baptism class, and were well prepared to answer my questions. We sang some hymns at the site and then jumped into the water, hoping there were no crocodiles basking in the warm afternoon sun! It was a very special time for me as I witnessed the spiritual growth of this church. Unfortunately the institute classes for the Bo churches had to be postponed due to the road. I'm hopeful to be able to make this up early in the next rainy season before we get too awash again.

We are now wrapping up our course work at GTF Bible Institute. This semester's class was How to Read and Study the Bible and I can see the men are really benefitting as they learn how to use a concordance, a dictionary, and prepare a systematic method for study, and message preparation. This is our first class since my return from the States a year ago. It's been good to have the men back in the classroom.

In January, Stephen and Rebekah Mustard will be making a trip to Sierra Leone. This will be especially beneficial for Rebekah as she hasn't been here before. This will mainly be a time of area familiarization. They're also going to make

some purchases to begin setting up the house for their family. When Laura and I built this house, we knew one day we would be turning it over to another family. We are both very happy to be able to assist the Mustards in any way possible as they settle in to the routine of life with young children in a third-world setting. Since my needs are fewer now, I'll be moving into the smaller guest house down the hill from the main mission house.

While Stephen and Rebekah were at a mission conference at Spring City Baptist Church in Cleveland, Virginia, they were part of a group who met at "The Publishing Room," a ministry of the church, to assemble the John and Romans booklets we will be using for our evangelism efforts. This booklet uses the cover Laura designed, and which matches our Essence of Christianity booklets produced earlier this year by Colonial Press, a ministry of Colonial Baptist Church in Keswick, VA. What an exciting opportunity for these scripture portions to be assembled by a group of missionaries who will soon be scattered to all points around the globe. This truly underscores the universal message of Jesus Christ! Please keep The Mustard family in your prayers as they continue their deputation travels and during their transition to Sierra Leone.

LAURA'S HEALTH: Over the last few months, Laura's health has experienced an unfortunate set-back. As reported in our July Field Notes update, Laura has been diagnosed with a connective tissue disorder called Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS). In September Laura dislocated her kneecap while turning over in bed. It's actually fairly common for people with EDS to be injured in bed. With sleep, muscles are relaxed, and the overly loose joints slip out of their proper places. She's had full and partial dislocations in the past but we didn't know what caused them. Five weeks after her initial injury, she experienced a second dislocation of the same kneecap. Now, 14 weeks on and she's still having some pain, is using a cane when out, and is using athletic tape to keep the kneecap in place while the ligaments continue to heal. She remains in physical therapy as well. Because of these complications, her doctor at Mayo Clinic has referred her for genetic testing to determine if she may possibly have a more serious form of EDS (all of which are genetic) or perhaps a different connective tissue disorder. Without exacting genetic tests, the doctor is relying solely on a more general clinical diagnosis. Laura is very blessed to be seeing a geneticist who specializes in connective tissue disorders, and has even discovered the genetic sequencing of a new sub-type of EDS. She will be seeing one of the best in the field! It's also not uncommon for people with this disorder to start "falling apart" later in life. The muscles get tired, the pain increases, exercise decreases, joints wear out prematurely. It does seem like a lot of this is all of the sudden, but it's been building for many years. However, without a diagnosis we had no way of knowing what was happening. We're very grateful for the incredibly skilled team who are helping us to understand all of these problems, and how to manage them. While Laura is certainly very tired, she's also continuing to work on art projects, and has the artwork for our newest set of banners well underway. She's in good spirit, enjoying church when she's able, and the wonderful tonic of time with our four perfect grand children. While we would both like for her to be here, we also know that she needs the medical services afforded her in the States. We are dedicated to our commitment for the sake of the Gospel, and our Worthy Savior.

In our August Field Report, we asked you to pray for the Lord of the Harvest to touch another family with His call to service in Sierra Leone. Please continue in this prayer as this would be a great benefit for the ministry in general, but more particularly for Mustard family. For any who are not already subscribed to Laura's blog, [Fragments of Gold](#), [this link](#) has her recent post, which is along this theme. I encourage you to read it.

Thank you for another year of support, of both finance and prayer, for Gather The Fragments Bible Mission. We are most grateful for each of you, and your care for us and the people of Sierra Leone.

Because He is Worthy
Stephen & Laura Holt

Evangelism

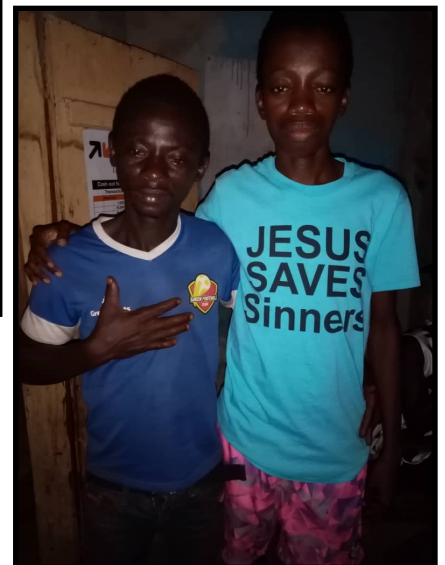
Preaching in Pelewahun.

This is the same banner presentation that Michael Conteh (below) heard earlier in the summer at his SDA church.

The reception here was very good and we expect to be back.



Michael Conteh



Alpha Conteh with Moses

Center - preaching in the "ghetto" with the wordless book

GTF Bible Institute

Bible institute students include a few members from the Pentecostal church in our village — Pray they will desire to follow the truth found in the Bible!



Bo Baptisms



Altogether there were eight baptized, each giving a very clear salvation testimony. GLORY!

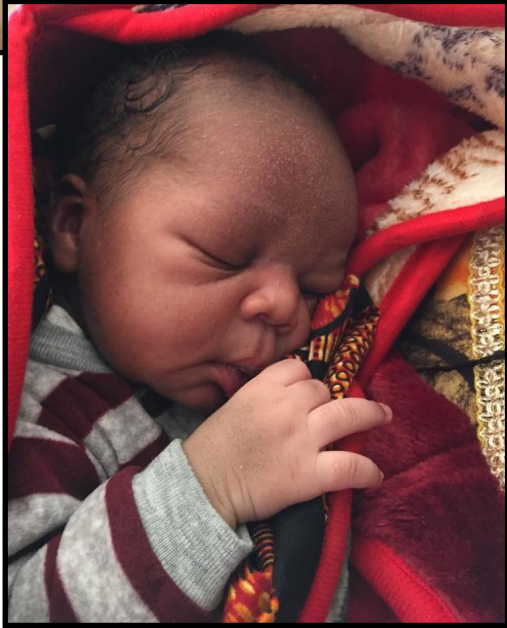
Container Preparations Continue



What a thrill to have our John and Romans booklets assembled by a team of missionaries at a missions conference!

A global effort for the evangelism work in Sierra Leone — Praise the LORD!

Baby Dedications



L — Erastus

R — Benjamin

As an albino, Benjamin will face health problems including skin cancer, and the risk of becoming blind as he ages in the strong equatorial sun.



Illustrated Evangelism
hard at work in the
DeLand studio!