



# Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

## *Stephen & Laura Holt*

### *Sierra Leone, West Africa*

## FIELD REPORT: DECEMBER 2021

### Greetings to our Family and Friends!

*For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time . . . (James 4:14)* — Another year gone! My “little time” is truly flying by which makes me all the more eager to be back at the work in Sierra Leone. More on my return to the field in a little bit.

**HEALTH UPDATES:** As of this writing, I am seven weeks post-op from my total knee replacement. Initially, I had a slow hard start to my rehab. For the past 44 years my leg muscles have been working overtime to protect and stabilize that seriously injured joint. The doctor explained that just because the surgery was successful doesn't mean the muscles are ready to stand down in their perceived duty. At week two I was still only able to achieve a 40 degree bend (I should have been much closer to 90 degrees). Dr. Turnbull told me I had three weeks to get to a 90 degree bend or he would need to do a “manipulation” where they put you out and *force* the knee to bend, working it back and forth to loosen the joint and break up any scar tissue which may be accumulating, which, along with normal swelling, restricts the range of motion. That manipulation did not sound at all inviting. The physical therapists worked me hard for three weeks, and I worked overtime at home. At my next post op appointment, as the surgeon walked into the exam room, he was truly astounded to see me seated with my knee at a perfect 90 degree bend. He told me he was amazed at how far I had come in just three weeks. He also told me that my knee was one of the worst he had ever replaced, stating that it should have been done ten years ago! I am now right where I should be at seven weeks post-op, but still have a lot of work to do in my rehab. Praise the Lord, I have started walking without a cane, and hope to soon be on my bicycle!

Laura's health isn't such a clear-cut update. She still has a terrible time with intense cramps, muscle spasms, and chronic pain. Some of the things she's implemented are definitely helping but her improvement is harder to quantify and really remains a day-to-day prospect. Her more restrictive diet has had a very positive impact on the gastrointestinal symptoms; a great relief after years of not knowing how to handle those problems. Probably the biggest improvement comes from the hard neck brace she wears when doing certain activities which greatly strain her unstable skull, neck, and upper spine. Unfortunately, she is still struggling with getting the right balance of exercise. We are now waiting to hear from the physical therapist we spent a week with in August, as Laura needs to get her exercise program adjusted. None of these things are a “cure” for her but rather are intended to help “manage” symptoms which will never completely go away. It's a delicate balance which is easily thrown off when her management is not strictly adhered to. She also suffers from debilitating flare ups, but we are getting that balance better too, a little at a time.

**MINISTRY UPDATES:** I am genuinely pleased with how The Bible Mission Church in general, and Pastor Alfred Menjor in particular, are working to keep things going in my absence. I am in regular contact with Alfred and others in church leadership, and enjoy hearing all that is happening. We've had a few rough spots to work through but that's to be expected. The men are working well with Brother Mustard as that new relationship continues grow and settle out.

Children's church is going quite well under the capable direction of Michael Conteh. A dedicated, natural teacher, Michael is also principal of the secondary school that uses our building for classes during the week. He is very contentious and dependable, and the children respond well to his Bible teaching. Michael's wife, Sally, assists him with children's church. This is an exciting development to us as it is the first time a husband and wife have worked together in a church ministry. Please pray for this dear couple as they continue to minister to the children of The Bible Mission Church.

Under Brother Mustard's direction, GTF Bible Mission has revitalized an old outreach. One of our church members, Brother Massacoy, is a resident of a small village Ngaimbaitoya (jeng-bah-TOY-yah) where there is no church. Massacoy walks three hours one way to attend church, and, I might add, he is very faithful. Bro. Mustard, along with John to assist with language, have been holding church services there. Then Juma, a smaller village which is a 30 minute walk further into the bush, began to join them for the services when they knew that Bro. Mustard and John were going to be there. The village leadership of Ngaimbaitoya has now given a piece of property which is in between the two villages for the purpose of building a small church. The residents from both villages who are attending services have already begun making the block to erect their very first church! Bro. Mustard has now turned this work over to John who continues to provide this small group of Christians with church on Sundays, and has also begun a mid-week Bible study class. Praise the Lord for this exciting growth.

There are untold villages just in our area alone which are desirous to have Bible teaching and church, but most times there is no one in the village who can read. They need someone to come and give them the Good News and then disciple them. *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. (Matthew 9:38)*

**BUILDING PROJECT UPDATE:** We currently have two major situations impacting our building project.

First is the development of the gold mining company in our village. As the company continues to move forward toward actual mining, it affects The Bible Mission Church in two ways. First is that it brings in skilled Sierra Leonean employees, some of whom will attend church as their schedule allows. Obviously that is a plus for us. We are encouraged that thus far we haven't been impacted in church attendance, and that our people remain committed. Secondly, the company has hired, and will continue to hire, unskilled and minimally skilled laborers, as well as day laborers from among our membership. On the surface that is good, and we are thrilled for our families to have regular employment. However, as the company gets into actual mining and processing of the gold, the hours these employees will be required to put in will preclude them from any outside activities, possibly including church. The downside to this employment boom is that we are losing daytime access to the very workers we had planned on being available for manual work on the building project!

The second fly in the ointment regarding the building project is the Covid-19 pandemic. The continually changing and morphing landscape of international travel has made it difficult at best, if not nearly impossible for the planned teams from the States to come help us erect this large steel building. Travel into the country has become difficult and risky, as has the return travel to the States. There are cases of travelers from Sierra Leone being denied entrance to the States due to U. S. Immigration not accepting the paperwork and clearances from Sierra Leone. And the requirements are constantly shifting making them confusing and uncertain.

Based on these factors, Brother Mustard and I have concluded it is best to put all major projects on hold. Rather than expand outward, we can see the need to take a step back and concentrate on our Jerusalem/Judea ministries. For the next few seasons, our focus will be on teaching, training, and local/semi-local evangelism. We will reevaluate the prospect of the building project in a year or so. Even our local professional builders have no experience with this type of metal structure, let alone the unskilled church members we would be working with. Tackling a project of this nature without the assistance of the experienced teams we planned on would be a dangerous prospect.

**MY TENTATIVE RETURN PLANS:** As previously stated, I am very eager to be back in Sierra Leone. I am working on my plans for teaching our local men as well as taking training to the pastors in some outlying churches. There are two remaining hurdles I need to clear before that can happen. First is the continued rehabilitation of my knee. I need to increase my range of motion which means I need to be able to achieve a bend of 120-125 degree bend without assistance. I am currently able to attain 115 degrees with the aid of a latex band pulling on my leg, forcing the bend. I also need to greatly increase the strength in my leg as I need to be able to do much walking without the pain and swelling I currently experience.

All of this health business has revealed yet another hidden problem. It has been detected that I have a fairly large growth in my prostate and my PSA level numbers are rapidly rising. On December 1, I had a procedure to obtain 11 biopsies of the tissue in the growth and surrounding area. On December 20, Laura and I will receive the results from that procedure in a follow up with the urologist. If any treatment is needed for this, I will obviously need to stay longer than I had planned. Based on that scenario, I do not have a return plan. If there is no treatment required, I plan to return to Sierra Leone as soon as is practical in light of my knee rehab. We will be sending out an update after my appointment with the urologist to give you all a more definite plan of action. We would greatly appreciate your prayers regarding all of these pressing issues.

Praise the Lord for the Mustard family being on the ground and keeping things running well in my absence. We encourage you to subscribe to their Field Reports to get the news from their perspective. You may contact Brother Mustard via email at [mustards2africa@gmail.com](mailto:mustards2africa@gmail.com) and he will add you to their mailing list.

Thank you for your patience with us as we work out these health issues. Twelve years on the field with no medical care or physical check up has taken its toll! We appreciate each of you, your faithful prayers as well as financial support which makes possible Gather The Fragments Bible Mission. You have much fruit to your account. Be sure to continue scrolling down to see photos of the places and the faces of your fruit. Thank you for allowing us to be your voice to the people of Sierra Leone, West Africa.

Because He is Worthy

Stephen & Laura Holt

**See photo pages below**

# December 2021 Photos



Above: Michael Conte pictured at children's church with his wife, Sally, standing at far right.

Below L: Michael on town evangelism using the illustrated gospel booklet, *The Advocate*.

Below R: Brother Massacoy at church in Baomahun with his daughter, Mary.



# Meeting in Ngaimbaitoya

Bro. Mustard and John opening the Word of God to the people of Ngaimbaitoya!

