

2015 Ebola Ministry

“Jesus is Alive, Ebola is dead” is the confident assertion our churches in Liberia are making as they go from house to house and village to village taking food, medical supplies and disinfectant equipment which they have purchased with money that our supporters have given to help with this Ebola crisis.

The majority of churches seem to have been cowered by this crisis, hiding away in their prayer meetings for fear of catching Ebola. But our churches have been incredibly bold and active in reaching out to as many as they can throughout the course of the Ebola outbreak.

Othello is an ex-rebel fighter with a passion for Jesus. He has been a teacher in our Chocolate City school (which serves the swamp community in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia). For the last two years Othello has been travelling often to Ganglala near the Guinea border to take the Gospel to this remote area. We ministered there in February this year where we saw many remarkable healings and the small group of believers blossom into a vibrant church. That church has grown rapidly and planted more churches in neighbouring villages.

It was in this very area that Ebola crossed over into Liberia. When news of the Ebola outbreak broke I was very surprised but delighted to learn that Othello and George along with a team from our church in Chocolate City were still fearlessly travelling to Ganglata, taking food and other essential supplies to help their brothers and sisters in distress. They continue to see numerous healings in those churches and there has not been a single case of Ebola in any of the villages they are working in. The Ebola outbreak has coincided with the rainy season when there are normally outbreaks of Malaria, Typhoid, Cholera, E.coli and general dysentery. These and many other diseases have been kept at bay through faith and prayer, praise God.

Meanwhile, back in Monrovia, Jonathan and George and the other leaders have been very busy reaching out into their communities and the surrounding villages with the Gospel and in practical help. Lydia has been working with an ambulance team, collecting the sick from villages and taking them to the treatment centres. The church teams have been going out giving Ebola prevention training and bringing hope and faith in the place of the fear and despair that has gripped so many.

Again, there has not been a single case of Ebola in any of the communities we are working in and there has been no sickness amongst church members. The prayer meetings have been overflowing and full of praise and thanksgiving. Jonathan tells me that you won't hear anyone pleading with God in these meetings. They are full of joy and faith and confidence in God.

It is amazing to remember that when we first went to Liberia these churches had no significant experience of healing. After the first year when we saw about a hundred healings over 10-days they thought this was the white-man's special gift. After the second year when we saw another hundred healings they began to grow in faith. But during this year's trip they really began to believe for themselves and now they are confident in Jesus' promises and taking the offensive against Ebola.

I was asking God how they could take the offensive right into the heart of the outbreak. I could not see a way, since their communities did not have any cases, and those communities that did were quarantined by the army. A day or two later I received news that Robert, one of our most fired-up leaders had been confirmed to have Ebola and was in the main isolation camp at ELWA. After my initial shock I thanked God that He had given us entrance to the heart of the Ebola crisis. I phoned Robert, told him of my prayers and that I believed God had placed him there to bring healing. We prayed together for his healing and gave thanks to God. The following day I believe God spoke to me saying that He had heard our prayer and had given us Robert's life. Robert recovered rapidly without going through the normal pattern of sickness followed by slow recovery. He has now been confirmed free of Ebola and is able to go freely about the isolation camp praying for the sick. He has seen dozens of Ebola patients healed and is very excited about what God is doing there.

May Update

Liberia has today (9th May) been declared Ebola-free after 42 days with no new cases. This is a huge encouragement for the country which has been devastated economically by fear of the disease. More than 4,700 Ebola deaths were recorded in Liberia; more than any other affected country. Sierra Leone and Guinea are still fighting the outbreak with the number of new cases dropping each week to the low dozens. They have been hampered by not being able to track the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile, in Liberia the schools and universities have been allowed to resume, with many Ebola safety measures in place, including limiting class size to 45 (down from 60!) frequent hand-washing in bleach and daily temperature checks on every child. As a consequence many schools have increased their fees. However most people support themselves through small trading which was seriously curtailed during the Ebola crisis reducing them to severe poverty. This in turn has led to a drastic reduction in the number of children attending school.

In response we have built a second school. This one is in Fendell where we have a church plant. They have two-dozen children and 5 volunteer teachers. Our school in the swamp community has nearly a hundred students. The fees for both schools are very low, between \$10 and \$20 a semester, but even at these rates many parents simply cannot afford to pay. Church members in those communities have committed to paying the school fees for their poorer neighbours. However, the teacher's allowances cannot be met by the fees, so we are looking for sponsors for teachers. If you would like to stand with these people as they try to rebuild their lives, please join with us in making a regular gift to the Liberia Fund.

Throughout the Ebola crisis George and Othello have continued to travel regularly up to Lofa County to visit the church plants there. Growth has been very encouraging with hundreds of new believers in a growing number of villages. There is a huge need for leadership training and many people have made great sacrifices to reach out to this strongly voodoo area. We are so encouraged by all that God is doing through this bold outreach. Alongside the church they have also started a farm, growing produce to sell in the town which is about an hour's drive away.

Back in Fendell, the church plant there is growing stronger. They have started reaching into the nearby university with great effect. The students have never before been encouraged to read and discuss the scriptures together. They are coming alive with the transforming power of the gospel and are on fire with the desire to tell others. Getting the school built and the daily routine of teaching has absorbed a lot of the church's attention recently, but outreach to the surrounding villages has now resumed. The Muslim village we have befriended was enormously encouraged and helped by regular visits from the church at Fendell during the Ebola crisis. The Imam is greatly looking forward to our next visit.

Families within each of our churches are now caring for Ebola orphans. They need to find extra money for food and schooling and several families needed roomier accommodation. We have established an orphan fund to help those caring for orphans.

July Ebola Update

We thank God that Liberia is now largely free of Ebola although there have been a few sporadic outbreaks. Sadly its neighbours, Sierra Leone and Guinea, are still seeing dozens of cases a week; they have been hampered by not being able to track the spread of the virus. The economies of these countries have been severely set back by fear of the disease. This is quite an achievement for Liberia which even before the crisis was the 4th poorest country in the world (measured by the purchasing power of the average individual). More than 4,700 Ebola deaths were recorded in Liberia; more than any other affected country.

Liberia is slowly returning to normality following the Ebola crisis. However, normality for Liberia is a daily struggle with petty trading to try and earn a few dollars a day to buy food and save for rent

and school fees. Despite having now spent several months in Liberia, I still have no idea how people manage. Everyone says that God provides, and it seems He does.

Early on in the outbreak the government ordered all schools and universities to close, as well as all non-essential government departments. The strict restrictions on movement meant that few people were able to continue with their normal employment or petty trading and created severe financial difficulties. Throughout the crisis we sent money to help relieve the neediest people and also authorised our partners to use the school fees they were holding to ensure that the families of our sponsored children had what they needed.

In February, after being closed for months, the schools and universities were allowed to resume, with many Ebola safety measures in place, including limiting class size to 45 (down from 60!) frequent hand-washing in bleach and daily temperature checks on every child. As a consequence many schools increased their fees. However the economic devastation caused by the Ebola crisis has left huge numbers of children unable to pay any fees. This in turn has led to a drastic reduction in the number of children attending school.

Following gifts from a number of UK Newfrontiers churches Jonathan has been able to build a three-classroom school in Fendell where there is very little school provision. They have about 20 early years children attending and are planning to expand the school each year. The parents are delighted with the quality of education they are getting.

The school we built in Chocolate City has around 90 students many of whom are amongst the very poorest swamp dwellers.

Even though the fees are very low, around a US dollar a week, just a fraction of the normal school fee rates, many parents still find it very difficult to pay. The teachers are mostly untrained but receive help and advice from trained teachers. They each receive a monthly allowance of \$30-\$40 a month.

Church members in those communities have committed to paying the school fees for their poorer neighbours. However, the teachers' allowances and other expenses are not being met by the fees they have been able to collect. We have been sending support towards this and other costs for both schools.

Several children in our churches were orphaned through Ebola and also a road accident. They have been "adopted" by church families who, as a result, need to find extra money for food and schooling and several families needed roomier accommodation. Through a generous gift from our friend, Andy Bell's church (Open Door Church, Sunbury) we have been able to establish an orphan fund to help these families meet the extra burden on them.

Because a whole semester was missed during the Ebola crisis, the government has instructed schools to insert an extra semester during this summer to try and catch up. This was unexpected and we have had to send an extra semester's fees for all our sponsored students. However the reports of their progress have been encouraging.

We are thrilled that through our friends in the UK we are currently supporting 24 very poor children through school/university with annual fees ranging from \$50 for our own schools, \$450 for other schools and \$1700 for the university students. We are currently looking for sponsors for teachers. If you would like to stand with these people as they try to rebuild their lives, please join with us in making a regular gift to the Liberia Fund.

Although all this has of course been extremely challenging for our friends in Liberia, there has also been much encouragement. In Fendell, the church plant there is growing stronger. They have started reaching into the nearby university with great effect. The students have never before been encouraged to read and discuss the scriptures together. They are coming alive with the transforming power of the gospel and are on fire with the desire to tell others. Getting the school built and the daily routine of teaching has absorbed a lot of the church's attention recently, but outreach to the

surrounding villages has now resumed. The Muslim village we have befriended was enormously encouraged and helped by regular visits from the church at Fendell during the Ebola crisis. The Imam is always asking after us and is greatly looking forward to our next visit which will probably be in January 2016.

Throughout the Ebola crisis George and Othello continued to travel regularly up to Lofa County to visit the church plants there. Whenever I talk to George he is either in Lofa, just come back or about to return there! Growth has been very encouraging with hundreds of new believers in a growing number of villages. There is a huge need for leadership training and many people have made great sacrifices to reach out to this strongly voodoo area. We are so encouraged by all that God is doing through this bold outreach. Alongside the church they have also started a farm, growing produce to sell in the town which is about an hour's drive away.

As you can see, the work in Liberia is growing, enabled to a significant degree by the financial and practical help our friends in the UK have been able to give and the encouragement of our friendship which has helped them to face the struggles and challenges with courage and faith.

November Update

We thank God that Liberia has been free of Ebola for several months and that Sierra Leone has recently been declared Ebola free. The situation in Guinea seems now very much in control with only a very few cases still being reported. The economies of these countries have been severely set back by the disease. This is quite an achievement for Liberia which even before the crisis was the 4th poorest country in the world (measured by the purchasing power of the average individual).

Liberia is slowly returning to normality following the Ebola crisis. However, normality for Liberia is a daily struggle with petty trading to try and earn a few dollars a day to buy food and save for rent and school fees. Despite having now spent several months in Liberia, I still have no idea how people manage. Everyone says that God provides, and it seems He does.

Throughout the crisis we sent money to help relieve the neediest people and also authorised our partners to use the school fees they were holding to ensure that the families of our sponsored children had what they needed.

Following the crisis, many schools drastically increased their fees but the economic devastation has left huge numbers of children unable to pay any fees. In response Jonathan has built a three-classroom school in Fendell which we helped to fund. This has now been extended to six classes in response to local demand.

The school we built in Chocolate City has around 90 students many of whom are amongst the very poorest swamp dwellers.

The teachers are mostly untrained but receive help and advice from trained teachers. Our ongoing support has enabled these teachers to receive a monthly allowance of \$30-\$40. We are currently looking for sponsors for teachers (£320 p.a. or £260 plus gift-aid).

We are thrilled that through our friends in the UK we are currently supporting 24 very poor children through school/university with annual fees ranging from \$50 for our own schools, \$450 for other schools and \$1700 for the university students.

Throughout the Ebola crisis leaders continued to travel regularly up to Lofa County to visit the church plants there. Growth has been very encouraging with hundreds of new believers in a growing number of villages. There is a huge need for leadership training and many people have made great sacrifices to reach out to this strongly voodoo area. We have supported this ministry through help with travel costs and purchasing bibles.