

FBC and Sierra Leone

A Brief History of Falmouth Baptists Church's Ministry in the West African Nation of Sierra Leone

The history begins with a man from a different church, a travelling musician/evangelist and an African man of God. Dave Robbins had been on a few mission trips already with musician/evangelist John Gunden while a member of Pocasset Baptist Church. They had been to Romania in the summer of 1994 and planned to return in 1995 to preach the Gospel to the people there again. With Visas in hand and non-refundable plane tickets already purchased Dave began to feel that God did not intend for him to go on this trip. It was a grueling decision but Dave remained behind even though he could not help wondering if he was letting God down. In June of 1996 a trip with John Gunden into the West African nation of The Gambia came together and Dave Robbins signed on. Sierra Leone native and evangelist Michael Turay was in The Gambia at God's leading as civil unrest was erupting in Sierra Leone. It was to be a decade of blood as the entire nation was swept up in violence. They preached the gospel in The Gambia and then made their way into Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. For 5 days they walked the streets of the city and spoke with people about Jesus Christ. They had made no domestic arrangements upon leaving the U.S. and were blessed to find Michael's mother amidst the chaos of the war torn city and acquire some meals there. A Catholic monastery provided a few nights of shelter and then they made their way back into The Gambia and then on towards home. Upon returning, Pastor Hansen of Falmouth Baptist Church asked Dave if he would come and speak about his trip to Sierra Leone and he did so.

In 1998 Dave went back again into The Gambia with John Gunden. The plan was to meet up with Michael Turay and go again into Sierra Leone but Visas were denied due to the violence of the civil war. This was a frustrating trip as the door seemed to close on everything they had hoped to accomplish. They did spend some time preaching and evangelizing on a riverside but they spent a lot of time counseling a leader in training for the Youth For Christ organization in areas of biblical leadership, financial and business practices. At the close of the trip the two veteran missionaries were very ill, i.e. vomiting and diarrhea, and it was very difficult to stay hydrated. On top of this the airline with whom they held tickets out of The Gambia had gone out of business and the agent tried to confiscate (read that steal) their passports. Finally a last minute flight in the dead of night came available and a sickened Dave roused two dazed rookies and an even sicker John for a mad scramble to the airport. They strapped in and as the plane began to take off the two sick men were suddenly well again. What I mean is that violent intestinal distress suddenly vanished. When John Gunden got home to Michigan he implemented the riverside preaching idea he had picked up in The Gambia and before long he had started the Riverside Church. Leave it to God to use an apparently botched mission trip to Sierra Leone in order to plant a church in Michigan.

Dave Robbins had been in transition from Pocasset Baptist Church to Falmouth Baptist Church. Finally he settled in and was asked to join the Missions Board. Not long after this Michael Turay came to the States and visited FBC. John Ely was the pastor at this point and the first official FBC mission trip was planned.

Falmouth Baptist's first trip into Sierra Leone took place in January 2008 and lasted 15 days including travel. The team worked in Freetown and in the vicinity of Regent Village. At this point Michael Turay had a team of folks he had been discipling and these worked closely with the FBC team members to guide, interpret and generally facilitate. In Freetown schools, colleges and local churches were visited to preach the Gospel and to encourage believers. Radio addresses were delivered by each team member on a Freetown station. In Regent valley they visited homes, marketplaces, and roadside gatherings; the basic goal being to ask each and every person if they would like to hear about God's great love for them. Day after day of sharing the Gospel and following up with Bible study and encouragement led to the first ever church service in the town of Regent. The request was very strong and almost immediate from those who believed in Jesus, "We want to have a church here!" That church continues to this day and is growing still. What came to be known as the "Ditch Ministry" has to be mentioned here. On the first day caravanning from Freetown up into Regent one vehicle, a very tired and overloaded Mercedes, fell behind. On a long upslope it finally spluttered to a stop and then began to roll backwards. It eventually came to rest off of the road right at the precipice of a ditch by a bus stop. The folks at the bus stop, some passengers waiting, a few merchants, some prostitutes, etc. seemed fairly interested in the carload of blatantly white folks dangling over the ditch and many came over to help. The car was pushed back onto the road. Even though the team members knew that they were expected in Regent they discovered that they could hardly pass up an opportunity that seemed to have been placed right in their laps so they began to share the Gospel at the bus stop. Many people believed that day and on subsequent trips into Regent they would often stop off to encourage the new brothers and sisters and to share the Good News with others. Some of the prostitutes who believed have left that lifestyle and to this day they are regularly attending the church in Regent and following Christ.

In 2009 Michael Turay visited FBC again, this time with his whole family. While with us he saw his first vacation bible school and was so enamored with it that he took the idea back home to the new church in Regent and Sierra Leone had it's first VBS.

In January of 2010 FBC headed back into Sierra Leone for another 15 day trip. This trip included 2 veterans and 4 rookies. Lodging was in an upper floor of a tenement style building in Freetown. While in the city the team again visited local schools and churches. Each team member also delivered a radio address. Several trips were made into a local marketplace (think third world Quincy Market if you can) and the Gospel was preached to anyone who was willing to hear. The team also went house to house in the maze of streets that surrounded the marketplace. Many people who had never heard of Jesus Christ gladly received Him as Lord and Savior. The team also went into Regent to encourage the church there, which was now meeting in a rented community building, and to continue to spread the Good News.

The team also went into the bush to San-San village and Matanke village to preach the Gospel. It is customary to meet with the village headman first as matter of respect before approaching the villagers. The headman in Matanke was the only Christian in an otherwise entirely Muslim village. He was old (by Sierra Leone standards) and unwell. When they explained the intention of their visit he told them that he had been praying for a long time that God would plant a church in his village. He said that God had assured him that he would not die until he saw his prayer answered. He had even set aside some village land (the headman's prerogative) for the church that God would provide. This guy halfway around the world looked right at them and told them that they were the answer to his life's prayer (It's still hard not to get chills). The next several days they came back and began to go home to home preaching the good news of Jesus Christ and inviting folks to open up their hearts to Jesus as savior. A regular bible study was started which became a church service. Talk began of an orphanage/school/church building to be constructed there on the village land set aside by the headman. The headman passed away less than a year after this visit; God had kept His promise.

In January of 2011 an FBC team went back to Sierra Leone for another 15 days. The team stayed at Michael Turays house, which had been under construction for a few years. Again they visited schools and local churches and also delivered radio addresses. They went into Regent village and the surrounding areas to continue preaching and to encourage the believers there. They also went into Godrich and preached in that region. There is now a regular bible study in the Ess-Ess camp at Godrich and many folks from there take a long walk every Sunday to attend church in Regent. Dave went into Matanke village to confirm reports that missionary Kamanda Manseray had erected a rudimentary structure on the church land set aside by the village headman. Dave found that a stick and thatched roof structure was indeed in place and that regular church services and care of orphans was underway. FBC has since funded some token fees for the land in Matanke as well as materials and local labor for construction of a permanent school/orphanage/church building there of which Kamanda is the pastor. We have also helped purchase land in Regent so that the church there will not have to rent space and will have facilities available more than one day per week.

January 2014 saw another FBC team heading back to Sierra Leone for a 10 day trip with it's largest ever team. Aside from a few visits to orphanages and hospitals most activity was concentrated in one very steep walled valley not far from Regent. In fact, the morning and evening rendezvous place offered a view (across a valley) of the community center which houses the Regent Church. The plan was to speak to every home in the valley about Jesus Christ. The terrain was rugged and the people grateful that the team had come. Most folks identified as both Muslim and Christian and so the team spent much prayer and effort in not only presenting but in clarifying the Gospel. The one Sunday in Sierra Leone saw the team split into two groups. The main group went into Regent to worship and minister at the Church there while the other group left a few days prior and heading into the bush for Matanke village. The plan was for a trip across the river in Matanke to reach a village that had never been offered the gospel and then a

dedication service for the newly finished church/school/orphanage. God had different plans. The vehicle hired to transport the team from Kamanda's home into Matanke (about 30 miles) never showed. As the team sat on the stoop a few children began to appear. Once they knew they were welcome they vanished and soon 30-40 kids were there. The team put on a completely impromptu VBS! After several hours the vehicle finally arrived and the team made it to the dedication service. After a soccer game/ministry and a small VBS there was a dedication and gospel invitation. Several villagers then walked right down the main roadway of this essentially Muslim village and were baptised in the river before God and their Muslim friends and family. The boats that were slated to carry the team across the river earlier were all submerged.

Please pray for our brothers and sisters in Sierra Leone and for the two churches and various bible studies that God has planted. Please pray for village pastors as they are disciplined in the Word of God. Please pray that the Gospel will be so clarified as to produce eternal fruit. Please pray that so long as the door is open and God is calling, FBC will respond, "Here am I, Lord. Send me!" We are humbly grateful to be a part of what God is doing in Sierra Leone.