# Signs for Hope

Summer 2011 Newsletter

As I sit in the comfort of my air-conditioned home to write this edition of the *Signs for Hope* newsletter, I cannot help but think about my two weeks in Liberia from which I returned earlier this month. I have said before that traveling to Liberia is incredible—incredibly difficult and challenging, but also incredibly inspiring!

(Vandora, Harrington Jududoe, Charles, Becky)

This year, my husband Charles and Vandora Henderson joined me in Liberia. This was Vandora‟s second visit to Liberia, as was mine, but Charles‟ first. Watching God‟s plans unfold for this Liberia trip some might call faith-building, to say the least, as multiple plans fell through before His plan was finally revealed. One such plan was that of Charles joining me on this trip. It really was never a question that I asked him, I just "assumed" he wanted to go to Liberia with me. We had been discussing the possible dates for this trip for many weeks, but Charles had not placed them on his calendar at work, yet. One day, about two months before our planned departure, he informed me that due to some scheduling at work—beyond his control—he would not be able to join me and Vandora on the trip. Needless to say I was more than slightly disappointed, however I simply told the Lord, "If You want to change this issue with his scheduling at work feel free to do so." I moved forward with my plans to travel to Liberia but over the Memorial Day Weekend Charles and I discussed the need for him to come to Liberia the last week of the trip—it was a two week trip—to provide some measure of safety for the two of us ladies-Vandora and myself. This plan was conducive with his work schedule. On Memorial Day Charles went to work to discuss this plan with his partner and found that the original scheduling conflict preventing Charles from traveling with us for the full two weeks had completely been resolved. Now, Charles knew it was God‟s plan—and not just mine—for him to join us in Liberia for the full two weeks. Before anything else happened I quickly secured our airline tickets for our trip.

This year‟s trip was much different from last year‟s—not to say that one was better than the other, just different. This year was much more laid back without a great amount of structure, the length was almost double, and the time spent with the Deaf children at the Deaf Mission and their director, Harrington Jududoe, was daily. This schedule gave us ample time to get to know some of the ACFI (African Christians Fellowship International) leaders much better, to evaluate needs more accurately (or at least we think so), as well as, allowing us plenty of time to discuss our experiences and observations amongst ourselves.

While we did not accomplish everything we could have while we were in Liberia, I believe we did begin to build much needed strong relationships with our ACFI Liberian brothers and sisters. This strong foundation will help to give us the ability to persevere in our efforts to wrap our arms around our Liberian family as we seek to work alongside of them to empower them to obey God‟s command to "care for the fatherless." This in turn grants us the ability to "care for the fatherless" with them.

As we met with the ACFI elders and staff before we left Liberia, Bro. Ed Kofi (the founder of African Christians Fellowship International) urged us to not become overwhelmed by the vast needs we saw while we were there. While the needs are great and could easily be overwhelming and cause one to throw up their hands in desperation, God has somehow given me the ability to see past those vast needs to the faith of my brothers and sisters. I am completely in awe of the Liberian faith in our God! Amidst some of the most difficult circumstances, without any vacation (or recess as they say) and often without any outside help, these children of God…persevere! No doubt, it is their faith coupled with God‟s intense love for me that inspires me to continue doing what little I can to aide these faithful believers in their desire to provide for the „least of the least‟.

*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*
*1 John 3:16-18*

# The Oscar & Viola Stewart School for the Deaf

## The Vocational Trade School

We were excited to actually see the construction continuing on the Vocational Trade School at the Deaf Mission while we were in Liberia. Charles stepped off the perimeter of this building and it is approximately 165‟x75‟. Seeing it in person was a bit overwhelming as I did not realize the size was so large. Last year, I had seen the original foundation that was laid for this building back in 2007, but now that the walls are coming up the full impact of its size is much greater. There is space for many classrooms for teaching various trades, as well as, a large center room that will be used for sports and group activities of various kinds. This building will provide some room to grow. The Vocational Trade School will not only be for teaching the older Deaf children, but it will also be open to older hearing children living in the community around the school. Each class will be taught both in voice and in sign. The ACFI leaders believe this will encourage the hearing students to learn sign language and allow them to begin to interact with their Deaf peers. It is believed that once this communication gap is bridged hearing Liberians will realize that the only difference between them and the Deaf is they simply cannot hear. Eventually, it is believed, this thinking will impact those in government and the Deaf will be granted full access in all aspects of Liberian life.

*Signs for Hope* has committed to raising $7,000 toward the completion of the Vocational Trade school. Thus far, donors have sent in $1,500. Additional fundraisers for this project are being planned. While we believe the building of this school is vital to the future success of the Deaf students becoming self-supporting, we have also recognized the need for building a fence around the perimeter of the Deaf Mission grounds to protect not only the property, but also the children. Theft is increasing as the community around the Deaf Mission grows, and a recent dwelling which houses members of a cult has been built less than 30 yards from the front door of the current building. Pastor Harrington Jududoe has requested those who live there to leave all of *his* children alone, and he has warned all the children to keep their distance. However, their rituals and practices can easily be seen and heard by those living at the Deaf Mission.

Boundaries or cornerstones for this property are clearly marked and estimates for fencing the perimeter are being obtained. Go to the *Signs for Hope* website to make a donation for this great cause, today! Enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that your donation is enhancing the lives of Deaf orphans to become self-supporting in a Christian environment!

*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this:*
*to look after orphans and widows in their distress*
*and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*
*James 1:27*

# Adoption Resources

Recently, the *Signs for Hope* newsletter has focused more on the Liberian portion of our ministry; especially sponsorship of Deaf orphans in great need there and the building of the trade school, but this issue will share more about the Adoption Recourses *Signs for Hope* endeavors to provide families desiring to adopt Deaf or hard of hearing(HOH). The *Signs for Hope* website has begun listing resources available to those desiring to adopt/foster children who are Deaf or HOH. Pre-adoptive training is now required for adopting and fostering any child through the U.S. Foster Care System, as well as, by the Hague Adoption Convention for inter-country adoption. The Hague Adoption Convention is an international organization working in agreement between participating countries and the families desiring to adopt their children on best adoption procedures. Even if pre-adoption training was not required by these entities, *Signs for Hope* would still be adamant about the need for all families seeking to adopt Deaf children to be as prepared as they possibly can be for raising these children who, most often, come from the "hard places."

An additional resource—promoted by *Signs for Hope*—is The Empowered to Connect Conference hosted by Show Hope, the orphan care organization founded and run by Steven Curtis Chapman and his family. This conference will be held just south of Nashville in Brentwood, TN September 23-24. ASL interpreters, through *Signs for Hope*, are set to interpret this conference for all Deaf attendees.

Dr. Karyn Purvis is the main speaker for this conference and she is co-author of a book entitled, *The Connected Child*. Karyn is the Director of the Institute of Child Development at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. From the Texas Christian University website; "During the past decade, she [Dr. Karyn Purvis] and her colleagues at the Institute have invested their efforts towards developing research-based interventions for at-risk children. Throughout her life, Karyn‟s personal and professional calling has been to create a welcoming, loving environment for children who come from "hard places". Foster and adoption issues have always been at the heart of her work, and when her own children were small, she served as foster mother to many children. She serves as expert witness in court cases of child abuse, testifies for state and national legislation, and speaks frequently to national and international groups."

Karyn‟s training and tools are not just for families who foster or adopt children, but benefits parents of biological children, educators, and counselors, as well.

Additional resources provided on the *Signs for Hope* website is a current listing of various opportunities and options available to help families fund their adoptions. This listing includes grants (some specifically for "special needs" adoptions), interest free loans, information about the Federal Tax Credit, as well as, organizations who are willing to partner with you to set up an Adoption Fund at your church. The Abba Fund is one of my favorites in this particular category. Adoption costs can seem overwhelming, but if families are willing to do some research and fill out applications for grants, and share their needs with others…fundraising can actually be exciting and a true faith builder for all involved. God has not just called families to adopt (or foster), but He has called each of us to „care for the orphan‟. Christian brothers and sisters can join together with those adopting or fostering to fulfill this desire so close to our Father‟s heart.

Finally, a regional orphan care event is being planned for the spring of 2012. Share His Hope 2012 is scheduled for April 20-21 here in Asheville. This conference will help educate individuals and churches in how they can become involved in the *pure religion* that James speaks about. Once again, Deaf speakers and attendees will be here—with ASL interpreters provided. Put this special event on your calendars now! Spring will be a beautiful time to visit Asheville—if you do not live in the area! We will need volunteers for this event, too—so let me know if you are interested in helping.

## *From my heart to yours…*

Since God turned my life upside down in March of 2008, my heart's desire to know Him more is constantly challenged by my *human* thinking and the everyday lives of those I 'do life with.' In my journey to learn more about His words, "coordinate the adoption of Deaf orphans around the world" I have been confronted, time and time again, with the suffering of massive numbers of children in third-world countries, families who have adopted children from "the hard places", friends and family struggling to preserve their earthly life as cancer rages against them, those marred by the *accidental* loss of a loved one, parents whose children no longer "love the Lord their God, with all their heart, all their soul, all their mind, and all their strength".....

Suffering, by our human perspective is most often, if not always, perceived as bad or a judgment by a vindictive God for something we did not do to adequately satisfy Him. As He unfolds a much deeper truth and one that is intertwined with His great love for us—His perspective on suffering—I am forced to replace my inaccurate human assumptions of suffering as something that is negative and insensitive to something that is not only positive, but...His best! His grace! We quote the verse, "His grace is sufficient." We *say*, "By God's grace we will do this or that." Have we flippantly misused His grace in doing so? Do we truly comprehend...His grace...even partially?

As a new believer at the age of 15, I learned the acrostic: **G** – God's **R** – Riches **A** – At **C** – Christ's **E** – Expense. While that served to remind me that God's grace was granted to His children through the suffering of His only Son, and that now I could enter Heaven because of God's grace, it never occurred to me that His grace also grants the believer a much different perspective on all of life's situations. That perspective, His, allows His child the ability to accept whatever comes his or her way—including suffering—and approach it fully knowing and trusting that our God's plan through this suffering is greater than the need for our understanding "why" this suffering.

One morning, in Liberia, as we sat on the front porch of our host's home, a Liberian woman (one of the matrons for one of the girl's dorms) came by to say good morning. We asked her how she was and enthusiastically she answered, "Oh, I am fine the Lord allowed me to get out of bed this morning. Yesterday, I could not get out of bed. But, no matter, it is all...God's grace!" I could not help but think back to what many Liberian Christians have faced through the years—this woman included; hunger, loss, physical and sexual abuse, and the list could go on. But...His Grace!

When I know there are precious vulnerable Deaf children living on the streets with no one to care for them, it is...His Grace! When my friend suffers with an adopted child, whom she has loved wholeheartedly, but that love has not been accepted and even physically rejected, it is...His Grace! When you and I suffer physical, emotional, mental, spiritual pain, it is...His grace! His Grace is Sufficient!

Please do not misunderstand me; I still struggle with this new perspective as God tries to transform my feeble thinking to a renewed level. I must confess the more He reveals Himself to me, the more I realize how very little I truly know Him.

How can we embrace—whatever happens—God's Grace? Only when we allow His Word to permeate our lives and allow His walking with us through the suffering day-by-day, will we begin to gain His perspective on suffering. One thing I know for sure, for those who are convinced of this, grasping God's perspective of suffering grants a freedom that breathes new life into situations that once seemed bleak and hopeless.

If you read this newsletter this far...bless you! I pray that as you and I continue to fall more and more in love with the God who loves us beyond anything we can ever fathom, we will surrender more and more of ourselves to His plan and His perspective to accomplish His purposes, His way, and only for His glory!

Only by His Mercy and His Grace,
*Becky*

*And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*
*II Corinthians 12:9*