"Coordinating the Adoption of Deaf Orphans in the World"

SIGNS FOR HOPE

Prayer Letter

March 2014

Signs for Hope February/March 2014 Liberia Mission Trip is History!

The Oscar & Viola Stewart School for the Deaf

"Thank You!" really is not adequate for how you have impacted the SFH team while we were in Liberia. But, thank you for every prayer. Thank you for your gifts to help the team pay for their travel expenses. Thank you for your donations of supplies and sponsorship packets for the Deaf students at the Oscar & Viola Stewart School for the Deaf. Thank you for sharing the love of Christ with those who crave it more than you and I will ever comprehend.

The plans to visit as many Deaf schools in the greater Monrovia, Liberia area to gather much needed information about their current education situation was more productive and more informative than we could have imagined. The God-connections He made, even in addition to the Deaf school related ones, are some that will certainly be ongoing and will be a blessing for years to come.

NOW MAY THE GOD OF PEACE HIMSELF SANCTIFY YOU COMPLETELY, AND MAY YOUR WHOLE SPIRIT AND SOUL AND BODY BE KEPT BLAMELESS AT THE COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. HE WHO CALLS YOU IS FAITHFUL; HE WILL SURELY DO IT.
1 THESSALONIANS 5:23-24

Please pray for the continued follow-up still needed for this trip and pray nothing and no one falls through the cracks. Also, pray for God to continue to lead us in knowing how best to walk with our Deaf brothers and sisters to improve the education (academic, vocational, and spiritual) of all Liberian Deaf children as we continue to seek His plan, His way, and in His timing!

LIBERIA, WEST AFRICA THROUGH THE EYES OF DR. STEVE FARMER, CHAIRMAN OF OUR SIGNS FOR HOPE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

On February 28, 2014, Heather and I were joined by Blaire Murray and Sonya Swink on our mission/research trip to Liberia led by Signs for Hope. Upon our arrival in Liberia (after an all night and all day flight), we were greeted by Becky Lloyd who had already been in the country for over a week.

Although "all we had planned" to (1) spread the love of Christ to Deaf people and (2) research 4 schools for the deaf, little did we realize that we were in for an "adventure" that week! ☺

It all started the very next day (Sunday) when we traveled to visit a deaf group at Bethlehem Church in Johnsonville. After an "interesting" ride on unpaved, dusty, and BUMPY/ROCKY roads, we were greeted warmly by 17 deaf individuals. During the brief meeting there, they informed us of the dire need for better education, teacher training, and vocational training for deaf children and adults. Never in a million years did I expect the response we received when we informed them that we were there to research schools and seek ways to help them. They cheered wildly and thanked us profusely for our willingness to help. That experience stuck with me for the rest of the week… and yes to this day.

On Monday, we got up and left early to go to Virginia School for the Deaf (aka Liberia School for the Deaf). Once we got on the road, we quickly got a glimpse of travel in Liberia. Even if any destination is supposed to be "only 45 minutes away", we learned that an *adventure*, always, awaits! We got into a traffic jam that included complete stops, moving at perhaps 2 MPH, then our Liberian driver getting "checked" by police for license, registration, and insurance. The registration, according to police, had expired. After some "talking" between the police and driver, we were eventually let go. It didn't take too long before we got "checked" by another policeman. Luckily, he said everything "looked good". Before we realized it, we got into a minor accident with a motorcycle—the ensuing "meeting" between the driver, police, the motorcyclist, and several other unhappy Liberians lasted a good 30 minutes while our team stayed inside the vehicle. Needless to say, we were hot and sweaty! Once we left, we groaned (or maybe we laughed?) when we got "checked" once again! The police officers weren't too happy with the driver's license (note, the police said the registration was fine, but not the license). After haggling for a while, we were let go.

After 3+ hours on the road, we FINALLY got to our destination! There, we met the rest of our research team, Sarah Houge (a Deaf researcher from MN) and Edward Cheah (a Deaf Liberian who currently lives in Washington, DC). The rest of the day went without an incident and a lot of fun was had by all! YES, all this happened in ONE morning, our first morning! (Note: Each time we were on the road, there were numerous "close calls", wide eyes, gasps, white knuckles, closed eyes, face covered with a book, looking down, and so forth). Imagine going upward on an one-lane bridge after being ordered to do so by a policeman and being greeted by 40+ motorcyclists heading right at you and passing by you on both sides—and our driver speeding up as we went up the bridge or passing four or five cars in "no pass zones" and watching cars heading right at you—and getting back in our lane just in time…

The rest of the week, like any trip, had its low points and highlights. Among the highlights were being able to complete our research which included observing classrooms, interviewing teachers and administrators, and interacting with students and adults, meeting with the Deputy Minister of Special Education to discuss the state of Deaf Education in Liberia, being interviewed on a national Liberian TV show and radio, inspecting and being impressed with the agricultural program at ACFI School for the Deaf, meeting with a person from the American Embassy who knows the Deaf Community well, and updating information on the children at ACFI, distributing clothes, school supplies, packets from sponsors, and giving out love! Sickness and allergies had hit several of the team members on different levels, but all recovered and none of this hindered any of our work!

The morning of the last day in Liberia, we were able to minister to students and adults at the ACFI School for the Deaf during their church service through songs, stories, testimonies, and preaching. For most of us, it was heart-wrenching to leave the children as we left there for our trip home.

To sum it all up, through all the things we experienced and all the people we met, we realized that God had a part in each and every detail of our trip. We were (and still are) in awe of His power, love, and mercy.

There is much work left to do in Liberia. Teachers at the schools for the deaf are in desperate need of training. Their schools are in desperate need of textbooks and other school supplies. Quality education and empowerment among the deaf is not an option – it is a must!

Please join us in prayer for the Deaf people of Liberia and for members of future teams going back to help train teachers. This will likely be a long-term project. Teachers and trainers (current, retired, and/or Teacher Preparation students, educational interpreters, etc.) are needed. If God is leading/moving you to help in this area, please do not hesitate to contact Signs for Hope!

~ Steve Farmer

SIGNS FOR HOPE'S 2013 FINANCIAL UPDATE

I believe Philippians 4:19 is applicable to the entire ministry of Signs for Hope and all those we minister to, just as it is applicable to our own personal lives. If you want to know more about how Charles and I approach the monetary giving aspect of Signs for Hope, and personally, check out the June 2013 PrayerLetter for more specifics.

2013 was a year of many firsts at Signs for Hope. We held two giveaways during the year, one at Valentine's ($500 Bed and Breakfast Stay) and the other at Christmas ($5,000 cash prize). Interestingly enough, the amount raised between the two was less than $100 total. Fascinating, isn't it? Basically, they became our PR (public relations) for the year—paying for themselves—raising awareness related to the ministry of SFH. God chose to bless SFH financially in much more personal ways. We held no other "fundraisers" in 2013. That was not our plan, but we allow God to lead us in the fundraising arena, as in every other way, and trust Him to provide when, where, and how He desires. Thankfully, God touched the hearts of a relatively small number of you and you gave approximately $55,000 to Signs for Hope in 2013. That was up from approximately $33,000 in total donations in 2012 or approximately a 67% increase in giving. ONLY GOD!

Lifeline Children's Services paid for half of my expenses ($2,212.10) to travel with the Willard's to China as their ASL interpreter, to bring their Deaf daughter home in May. This gift was such a blessing!

This increase in monetary gifts from you reduced the amount that Charles and I had to supplement the ministry in 2013. Personally, in 2012, we donated more than $15,000 to SFH, but in 2013 that amount was cut in half. As Charles' income continues to decline, year by year, this obviously helped us, personally, in 2013, to responsibly pay our own personal obligations and to continue with the commitments to support others in their ministries as God has lead us to do through the years.

In case you are wondering, all my time is still voluntary for the work and ministry of Signs for Hope. The Lord does provide the needed interpreting assignments to keep my interpreting license current. I do believe one day God will provide for us financially, some how, through Signs for Hope, but that has never been my goal. In fact, if SFH never paid me one dime for what I do it would be fine with me. I do, however, have a vision for being compensated by a totally separate entity, some day. I know other non-profit charities that never pay out salaries to those who manage them, but instead have a private organization or foundation, which pays their salaries. This is something I do ask the Lord to provide, IF He desires for me to be monetarily compensated for what He has called me to do some day.

"AND MY GOD WILL SUPPLY EVERY NEED OF YOURS ACCORDING TO HIS RICHES IN GLORY IN CHRIST JESUS.

PHILIPPIANS 4:19

It is impossible for me to adequately thank you for your generosity, but I believe the Lord alone is the One responsible for your generosity. He, alone, will be the One to reward you for your obedience when He touches your heart to do anything and everything for the sake of deaf orphans and children around the world.

If you would like a more detailed financial report for 2013, please email Charles.

> *"THEREFORE, IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, THE NEW CREATION HAS COME: THE OLD HAS GONE, THE NEW IS HERE! ALL THIS IS FROM GOD, WHO RECONCILED US TO HIMSELF THROUGH CHRIST AND GAVE US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION: THAT GOD WAS RECONCILING THE WORLD TO HIMSELF IN CHRIST, NOT COUNTING PEOPLE'S SINS AGAINST THEM. AND HE HAS COMMITTED TO US THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-19*

FROM MY HEART TO YOURS…

While in Liberia and since, the Lord has been teaching me much from John's account of the feeding of the 5,000. It's not so much the miracle of 5 small barley loaves and 2 fish feeding 5,000+ until they were full (with leftovers), yes that is impressive, but more impacting for me is the fact that Jesus Himself was the One to distribute to each of those there, first the bread and then the fish.

As I have contemplated the fact that Jesus personally walked among all those that were seated, in that grassy area, He looked them each in the eye (twice) and handed each, the bread and the fish, I have been so moved by His desire to connect with and build relationship with each of them. I cannot begin to imagine how long it took Jesus to personally serve this crowd of probably well over 10,000, but He did it.

God created me to be a strategist/planner. That being said, for the past 4 years, it's been somewhat challenging and downright frustrating at times to not be able to strategize or plan how best to help empower the deaf children in Liberia, until this trip. There was, and still is, too much need for my mind to comprehend or to know HOW best to help without hurting more. We have not known HOW to move forward, but God in His perfect timing has now revealed HOW to move forward from here and has orchestrated some vital connections, we believe, for this to begin to take place. Will this be easy to do? Will it be a quick fix? A thousand times, NO! But, EASY and QUICK is not always the best plan for God to do the miraculous so that He receives the greatest glory and others are drawn to Him.

I have truly wondered, many times, what have I accomplished over the past 4 years in Liberia? What, if anything, has improved for the deaf children God led me to in the beginning? The only thing I can say, with any assurance, is God has forged and developed some strong relationships…with hearing Liberians and with Deaf Liberians over this time period. The love that welled up in my heart overtook me more than once when I saw many of them, face-to-face again. This caught me off guard. And what is even more mind-boggling, I do believe the feeling is often mutual.

There is something life-changing about looking deeply into the eyes of our brothers and sisters!

I know God alone is cause for this to happen. Building relationships requires time. Building relationships often gets messy. Building relationships often brings with it pain. But building relationships is...our GOD! That is the whole of the reason He sent His only Son to this earth to endure all He had to endure, just so God could look each of us in the eyes with a face full of love. Jesus knew this well, as He served each of those individually on that day many, many years ago. Had it been me responsible for feeding those 5,000+ I would have somehow devised a plan that would be the timeliest in nature, not the one that would necessarily foster the building of deeper relationships. You know, the one that says, "Let's get these people fed quickly so that we can get to the most important task of sharing the gospel with them so they can get saved." Or, "The quicker we get this done, the quicker we can move on to do the next thing." Obviously, at least for this particular time, Jesus thought it best to take His time to personally "touch" the lives of each of them. Jesus, Himself, is the gospel, anyway!

As we approach the time of year when we celebrate the miraculous resurrection of our Lord, I pray each of us will take the time to look our Savior in the eyes, deeply. And I pray we will once again be overwhelmed and undone by His life-consuming desire to show us our Father's love, at all cost. The question remains...will you and I take the necessary time to look our brothers and sisters in the eyes as we not only become Jesus' hands and feet to them...but we also become His eyes full of love, as well?

I do love each of you, but He loves you so much more!

Becky

New blogpost: What Do You Have?

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Check our some recent SFH blog posts!

In You, the fatherless find compassion. - Hosea 14:3