

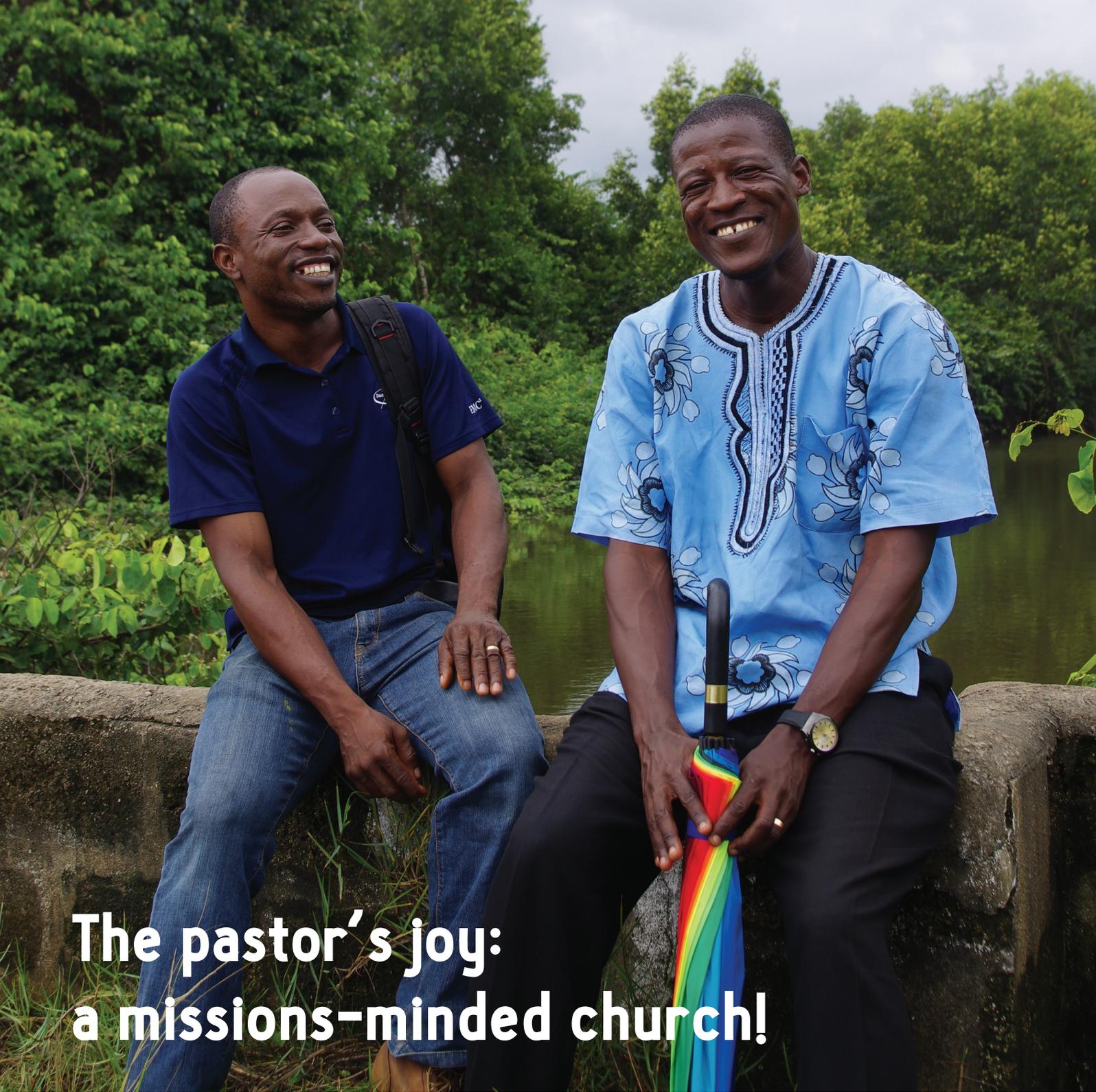
"Our small church  
grew a big heart  
for mission."

# AFRIGO

Encouraging the Church in world mission

Reaching out  
to Ebola  
survivors

Volume 1, Issue 3



**The pastor's joy:  
a missions-minded church!**

# HOW OUR SMALL CHURCH GREW A BIG HEART FOR MISSION

## MOSES PAYE

As pastors we can, to a large extent, help to shape the direction of our churches. It is a major part of our responsibility to exert godly influence on the life and direction of the people under our care. That's why we are called leaders.

Our church, the Evangelical Christian Fellowship (ECF), outside Monrovia, Liberia, had a sending off ceremony on 26 June 2016 for a missionary family who will be serving in rural Liberia. We are sending Dexter Brown to the southeastern region, where he will be engaged in evangelism and church planting. Based in the village of Saryah in River Cess, Dexter plans to extend his outreach to villages in Sinoe County and other remote places in the area. His wife, Cecelia, and their five children will join him some time next year.

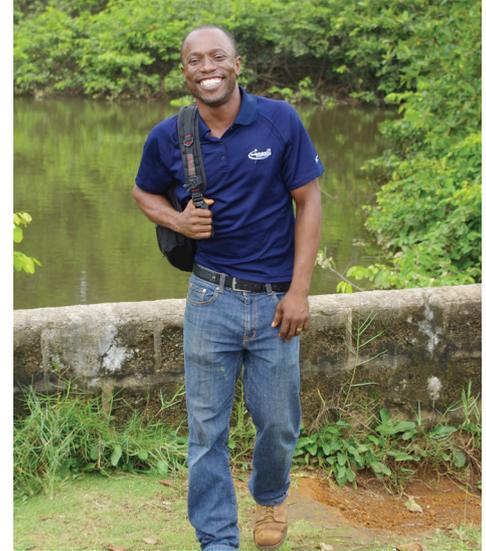
This is an exciting time for our church family, and we praise the Lord for the privilege and the leading of his Spirit to step out beyond the boundaries of our immediate church environment to share the gospel.

ECF has been assisting the Browns in raising financial support. But motivating our members to appreciate and fully participate in mission has meant taking some intentional and concrete steps.

### Putting the spotlight on mission

It has been my prayer since the church was established that mission would be central to the motives and ministry of ECF. In our prayer meetings we have often asked the Lord to help us to be missions-minded. We see what is unfolding at the church as God's answer.

Every year we devote the month of May to mission: it's the focus of our preaching, teaching, worship songs and prayers. We highlight the mandate, priority, beauty and reward of mission, so that our members will be encouraged to get involved. We raise a special offering each week of the month, which



Dexter is stepping out to share the gospel.

is usually sent to the mission board of the Evangelical Church of Liberia (ECOL) to support its ministry activities.

In 2009 I started a one-year Bible training programme to equip leaders and potential leaders for effective service in discipleship and mission. Nearly all of those trained are now faithfully serving in the church. After Dexter Brown successfully completed the 2010-2011 programme, he served as a deacon and an adult Sunday school teacher.

For several years before this my wife and I led weekend rural outreach trips. We usually encouraged church members to accompany us, so it was a vision trip for them. Some joined us in sharing Christ with the villagers. When they returned home, they told other church members about the excitement of the work, as well as the needs. This ministry resulted in the establishment of three churches in three villages.

Dexter often accompanied us on these trips, and I watched him grow in his passion for souls as he shared his faith in Christ. His decision to go to the mission field was no accident; the Lord had been preparing him.

### Reason to celebrate!

Located just outside the capital city of Monrovia, ECF was established in

2001, when war was waging in Liberia. Today our membership is 165, and we have four Ebola survivors, including two orphans. Many church families, including the Browns, were placed under quarantine during the Ebola outbreak.

We are part of the ECOL, an association of more than 100 churches. In early 2015, when ECOL sounded the call to the churches to send a missionary to the southeastern region, we regularly asked God to touch someone. Three months later Dexter told me, "Pastor, I am of the conviction that the Lord wants me to go."

Dexter had felt called to mission since 2012, when he completed his Bible training, but he wasn't sure when or how to go. He and his family had been praying for God's direction, so the call from ECOL was both a confirmation and an answer.

As pastor of ECF, I praise God as He continues to transform our church into a body of "goers" and "supporters"! It brings all of us tremendous joy to see our members step forward for missionary service.

It's something every church should celebrate.

*Photos by Warwick Walker*

# WHY WE GO



## People Groups: Ebola survivors

### Ask God To

- Restore physical and emotional health to survivors of Ebola;
- Remove the stigma of Ebola and inspire his people to reach out to Ebola survivors in their communities;
- Comfort those who continue to grieve the loss of family members to the disease;
- Bless and equip pastors who are leading their churches to love and embrace Ebola survivors.

In March 2014 the news of an outbreak of Ebola virus in northern Guinea surprised the world, because Ebola had never been identified in the region before. The number of people who contracted the disease quickly mounted, as it spread into neighbouring Liberia and Sierra Leone.

As the epidemic has drawn to a close in 2016, the WHO reports that 28,616 West Africans were infected with Ebola virus and more than 11,000 died. However, it is believed that the official statistics underestimate the number of people who fell victim to the disease.

The survivors' ordeal did not end when they left the treatment centre. Today many people experience ongoing health problems: deafness, partial blindness, swollen joints, and post-traumatic stress and depression. Some lost their entire family, and have a sense of guilt about their survival, in addition to their grief. Many have not been able to resume their former activities or jobs for physical and emotional reasons. Children have been left without parents.

Although they no longer carry the Ebola virus, survivors have been stigmatised and rejected. When they returned to their homes, still weak from their lengthy sickness, they often found themselves locked out and their

belongings burned. Some have been sent away by their own spouses, out of fear that the virus is still hiding in their bodies. Others have been accused of killing their families or neighbours with witchcraft. When a flare-up occurs with no apparent source, fear of survivors is reignited. As a result, many have had to move into new communities, where they can hide their status as Ebola survivors.

Worst of all, Ebola survivors are not always welcome when they seek medical treatment. But ELWA Hospital in Monrovia, Liberia, is one facility that provides free health care for survivors, assuring them that they will not be turned away.

Recently a nurse told the story of a pregnant Ebola survivor who came to ELWA Hospital with malaria. She had begun intravenous treatment at another facility, but left when she had a bad reaction. Because of her survivor status, she had been forced to lie on the ground, and was neglected when she had the reaction. Since then she had not felt her baby move.

When the ELWA doctor heard of this woman's concern about her unborn baby, he brought the portable ultrasound machine to her bedside. He showed her on the screen that her baby was moving, and pointed out the beating heart. Still, she was

anxious because she could not feel any movement herself. So a nurse connected her to a foetal heart monitor and explained what signs of health could be seen on the printout. The woman smiled for the first time since she arrived, relieved and at peace.

Serving Ebola survivors is an opportunity for the Church to be like Jesus, to touch the untouchable and accept those who have been rejected. The Evangelical Church of Liberia has provided food and assistance to survivors' families. Through a ministry of Trauma Healing Workshops launched by SIM and implemented through Liberian churches, many survivors have found healing for their grief by the Holy Spirit, hope in the love of their Heavenly Father, and acceptance in the body of Christ.

*Top photo by Bethany Fankhauser*

