

“KEEPING THE LIGHT SHINING IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM” (MATTHEW 5:16)

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The deadly Ebola outbreak in Liberia is unprecedented, claiming the lives of more than 2800 victims, overwhelming the fragile health system, and bringing the already war-torn nation to its knees in less than a year. Its economic and psychological effect upon the nation is as immeasurable as its grief. Liberia was ill-prepared for any epidemic of this magnitude because of our recent history of 14 years of war and destruction. So it was no surprise that we quickly became the epicenter of the deadly outbreak. Many health workers died of Ebola in Liberia while trying to save others since the outbreak began here in March 2014. It is worth noting at this point that statistics shows that there was 1 doctor to 100,000 people in Liberia prior to the outbreak, and it is now very evident that Liberia will be in a more serious condition long after Ebola is gone.

Today, six words sufficiently summarize Ebola in Liberia: panic, pain, horror, trauma, death, grief. Nearly all health centers were closed or abandoned due to lack of/inadequate medical supplies, infected facilities due to contamination caused by infection and death of health workers, terrified/traumatized health workers, or all of the above. Many places of work remain closed; workers are asked to stay at home, all schools are closed, and a curfew is in effect. With many roads still damaged and inaccessible due to the war coupled with only 1% of the country currently hooked on the national power grid and water supply, the chaos and desperation cannot be overemphasized. It is believed that the total number of Ebola deaths could be far higher than the official number as the result of the above mentioned difficulties. Simply put, many could not (and will not) make it to treatment centers.

It is also believed that more people have died of non-Ebola, curable diseases than those who died of the deadly virus. Between July and September 2014, Liberia's sick were left to fend for themselves during the chaos that ensued when the virus reached the capital city.

We are currently witnessing a slowdown in the rate of infection and the number of deaths caused by Ebola to the huge relief of people in Liberia, but health experts remain cautious and advice that all remain vigilant. The body of Christ here continues to pray for God's intervention and healing of the land. The deadly virus is still in the neighboring countries of Guinea and Sierra Leone which adds to the complexity of the situation.

The Evangelical Church of Liberia (ECOL) is absorbing its share of the effects of Ebola. Up to date we have confirmation of 22 infections, 10 deaths and 5 quarantined families as the direct result of Ebola. At the Faith United Evangelical Church in Caldwell, Montserrado, a whole family died of Ebola.



ABOVE: Pastors Moses and Momo (1ST and 2nd from left) standing beside Amelia (Ebola survivor) and her husband, Pastor Weseh.

And at the Jamaica Road Evangelical Church in Bushrod Island, Monrovia, a father (Brent) and his five children were taken into Ebola Treatment Unit last week after showing full symptoms of the virus. The wife had died of Ebola two weeks earlier. This statistics represents reports from 40% of our churches which are mainly located in and around urban communities and within phone coverage. We have no way of getting information from the majority of churches located in remote areas and outside of phone coverage.

Additionally, we have many ECOL members who have lost family members to Ebola. In one instance, Ellen Cephaus, a member of the Evangelical Christian Fellowship, lost 15 family members to the deadly virus in just three days. Also, 10 ECOL members and scores of relatives have died of non-Ebola and curable illnesses since the outbreak because of the closure of health centers when the virus outbreak intensified in Monrovia.

ECOL in the midst of desperation and suffering does not only see difficulties, but opportunities in the midst of difficulties. With trust in God we have been ministering and demonstrating the love of God in some ways despite limited resources, and we are very grateful for the strength and courage and wisdom that only must have come from Him.

ECOL EMERGENCY RESPONSE:

1. ECOL PRAYER FOR THE NATION:

We began mobilizing our churches from the onset of the outbreak (March 2014) for special prayer meetings and prayer chain on behalf of the nation for God's intervention. This prayer movement is still ongoing and individual churches have different schedules for these prayer meetings. The ECOL prayer chain for the nation is held at 12 noon each day during which every member of ECOL is to spend a few moments in prayer for the nation. We have also joined the efforts of the entire body of Christ in Liberia by honoring scheduled national fast and prayer meetings.

2. ECOL EBOLA SENSITIZATION:

ECOL in May 2014 began an Ebola awareness campaign in our churches to enable members prevent infection and encourage their communities to do the same. Health workers who are members of ECOL churches are allotted time during worship services to educate worshippers about the history, effect, modes of transmission and prevention of the deadly virus. SIM missionary doctor, John Fankaiser, also spoke at the Evangelical Christian Fellowship (ECF) during one of the "health tips" sections this year. We owe the current relatively low rate of infection and death within ECOL urban churches to the valuable information we received from these health workers and we remain very grateful.

The ECOL national leadership also conducted trainer of trainers' seminars on Ebola for 3 non-ECOL churches who have no health worker-members. The total of 32 church leaders who participated in the training are expected to help create awareness in their churches and communities about the danger and prevention of Ebola.

3. RELIEF ASSISTANCE:

The ECOL leadership continues to raise support among our churches and friends since September to provide food and other essential supplies to those of our members who are discharged from Ebola treatment units, relatives of those who died of the deadly virus as well as

those of our members who are quarantined as the result of death of family members. We cannot extend our assistance to communities due to limited resources. Our relief assistance include rice, cooking oil, bleach (recommended by experts to serve as hand sanitizers), buckets, and soap. We have so far served 4 Ebola survivors, and 8 quarantined families. We do not currently have the capacity to assist other ECOL victims or assist beneficiaries on a regular basis. We have written a project proposal named the Liberian Church Ebola Response that SIM is helping to raise funds for to enable us reach more needy people through the provisions of community awareness, relief assistance, counseling services, and reintegration program.



Bindu (Ebola survivor far right in left photo) with her relief items and pastors Joseph and Jeremiah. In left photo, children of the late Fatu (who died of Ebola) stand behind their relief items. Beside them is Pastor Jeremiah (left).

4. COUNSELING SERVICES:

ECOL currently has a counseling service for those feeling the effects of trauma and grief as the result of the outbreak. Six volunteer-pastors provide prayer and counseling (by phone) for our members who are discharged from the treatment units and others in need. We have a phone directory of relief assistance beneficiaries and also receive from our pastors contacts of other people needing counseling.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

We kindly request that you join us in prayer for the following:

- a. For God's intervention in Liberia to stop Ebola and heal the land.
- b. For more people to come to Christ during this crisis.
- c. For God's intervention to stop the deadly virus in other countries and from spreading to other nations.
- d. For wisdom and guidance as we minister in difficult circumstances.
- e. For funding for the Liberian Church Ebola Response project
- f. For protection of health workers as they serve with very high risk.
- g. For provisions of 4 Ebola orphans we feel burdened to continue to support (through provisions of food, clothing, education and medical).