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A First Hand Look

On January 16, 2011, a team of four people from Indianapolis, Indiana arrived in Ganta Liberia for a short-term mission trip to the Liberia International Christian College (LICC). The team consisted of:

- Dave Rodriquez, Senior Pastor at Grace Community Church in Noblesville, Indiana
- Keith Carlson, Pastor of Outreach and Leadership Development at Grace Community Church
- Ruth Schwartz, ULICAF Treasurer and LICC Financial Advisor
- Russ Schwartz, Strategic Planner and Instructional Design Consultant for LICC.

Dave and Keith had come to investigate the feasibility of ULICAF/LICC entering into a strategic partnership with Grace. Ruth came to provide financial consulting and Russ came to provide computer consulting. All four planned to teach short courses while on campus.

While the team knew that Nimba County community, business, and ministry leaders attended the school, they had no idea of the impact that the school was having after only two years of operation. During their stay, the team heard the testimonies and visited the workplaces or ministries of five LICC students. The team saw, first-hand, how LICC students, through leadership roles in their

professions and their ministries, are actively bringing hope and reconciliation to the Liberian people by sharing God's love as told through the Gospels, and by sacrificially serving the needs of the Liberian people. Their LICC education has equipped them with management and technical skills needed to do their jobs and minister to people more effectively. This has positively impacted hundreds, if not thousands.

On their second day, the team travelled about a mile to the St. John River, which marks the border with Guinea. As the team walked to the bridge, LICC student Esther Gbor told how the 75,000 population of Ganta had to flee while it was attacked simultaneously by an army of rebels and an army of mercenaries that were each fighting for control of Nimba County. Her husband was in school out of the country, and she had to flee with six children, two of her own and four nieces and nephews. She turned and waved her arm across the rolling hills stretching from the North, to the East, and

the South. She said those hills were covered with a mass of humanity waiting to flee into Guinea when the border had closed that morning. Late that afternoon, Guinea opened the crossing, and everyone fled. She said that the discarded baggage was chest-deep across the valley. People tried to swim across the river, and many drowned. Her 17-year-old nephew carried her 4-year-old daughter on his back as he and three of the children swam across the river. They were rescued by Guineas who threw ropes to them and pulled them across. Esther, who could not swim, had to cross by bridge with her baby on her back. She zig-zagged across the bridge with her head down and partially covered because rebels walked among the crowd. If they suspected she was sympathetic to the government, they would shoot her on the spot. On the other side, she eventually found her children, and then she lived in a refugee camp for 6 months. Eventually, Esther's husband finished school and rejoined her. When she finally returned home, Esther's house had been looted, the kitchen had been



Ruth Schwartz and Esther Gbor

eager for redemption & renewal

A First Hand Look (cont.)

destroyed, and part of the roof had been stripped away. She was luckier than many, whose houses had been burnt to the ground.

What was the impact of this trip? Ruth Schwartz returned to Indianapolis eager to lead future short-term mission trips to Liberia. She observed that, despite its destroyed infrastructure, Liberia can be a comfortable place to live and serve when one knows what to expect. She and Russ took notes on the flight back to develop a LICC Visitor's Guide that covers everything from what to pack, to personal hygiene, to Liberian customs.

On returning, Russ Schwartz remarked, "In America, we think we know about relationships. In Liberia, everything is about relationships. I have never felt more known, more connected, more loved, more belonging than I did in Liberia." For future travelers, he advised, "When visiting Liberia, you have to forget everything you know about life in America and suspend your judgment. If you don't, you will fail to see the beauty of the Liberian people or to understand who they are.



Keith Carlson, Sei Buor, Russ Schwartz, Mr. Dor Cooper, Mayor of Ganta, Liberia, Pastor Dave Rodriguez

The secret is to be flexible, to pray to God with a "palms up" (open-hearted) attitude, to keep your eyes and ears open, and to ask questions. Ignore the environment. Get to know who people are, to hear the longings of their hearts."

From The Desk of Keith Carlson, *Outreach Pastor of Grace Community Church*

We had to see Liberia in person to get the full impact. No amount of news coverage or conversations with folks that have been there can really prepare you for the reality of Liberia, nor as a result the full potential of LICC. From the moment we stepped off the plane we began to see the full devastation from the civil war: bullet holes, burned out buildings, ruined infrastructure, potholes, dirt roads, no electricity, hardly any cars. The closer we came to Ganta, the worse the road became, until we didn't know how our little 4 door sedan could possibly pass over the rutted road.

But the next morning we were greeted with a completely different, and abnormal response. We could not have received a more gracious welcome from LICC. Every student, faculty, and administrator that we met was full of hope for the future. The school was beautiful, solid, full of life. Something unique was going on in the middle of Ganta. We then visited ten different ministries, schools, orphanages, and businesses throughout Ganta that were being led by these remarkable students of LICC. Each was significant. Each student was proud of their place. Each was leading Ganta and Liberia back from the brink of oblivion and hopelessness. We could not have had a more inspiring day, capped off by a spirited game of soccer by the students.

The next day continued with a special convocation of the school and leaders

from throughout the whole city of Ganta. 300 people gathered at LICC to see this new resource for the whole community, and to praise God for his faithfulness. What a beautiful picture of God's kingdom. Thank you for the incredible work of ULICAF and Dr. Buor, truly a labor of love for a country so dear to your hearts.

Prayer & Praise

As you've read this newsletter we're sure you've been touched and blessed by what God is doing in Liberia. Praise God for His blessings to ULICAF and that we've been able to finish the 2nd floor of the LICC classroom building and furnishings are being delivered during the month of February and March. Praise God for an anonymous donor that has allowed us to finish construction on the Faculty Guesthouse. Praise God for the successful short-term trip from Grace Community Church in January! Please pray that God would stir donors hearts as we prepare to launch fund-raising for the next project "Step Into Our Story" to provide funding to build the LICC library/administration building. The needs are great in Liberia – for building – for scholarships – for on-going operating funds but we know that our God is able! Please use the enclosed donor return slip if you wish to make a donation to ULICAF. We greatly appreciate any and all contributions.

ULICAF 2010 Conference

Please mark your calendars for the weekend of July 14-July 17, 2011 for the annual ULICAF Conference. This year the conference will be hosted in Indianapolis, Indiana. Additional information will be forthcoming and we look forward to your participation in this year's conference.