



February 1, 2021

Dear Ministry Partner,

Amazing news from Africa!

I have just returned from Sierra Leone in West Africa. Your giving has led to a mighty harvest field there—wonderful fruit! I have seen it firsthand!

It didn't start well, however. . . .

I had heard people say "T.I.A."— *This is Africa* —and I learned the meaning of the acronym. I've been to Africa a number of times, but this was very different.

Our first night was spent in what seemed to be an abandoned plantation-style hotel. It was opened exclusively for us. The sheets and pillowcases had clearly hosted many travelers—and had not been washed in years. **The evening meal was delivered in a sack.** We could either cut open a green banana, or peel and eat a cucumber.

I dressed the pillow in one of my clean shirts and went to bed. I don't know if there were bed bugs, but I can tell you there was a lot of itching and scratching!

The next day I was to preach at a church in a town called Waterloo. My three traveling companions and I had coffee, a protein bar and a piece of fruit and headed for church.

I knew I had to preach with parables and illustrations, not with abstract concepts. After my first message, the pastor who hosted us for the week encouraged me: "Please use that exact message everywhere." I normally don't repeat a sermon, but I accommodated his request.

After church, we continued to a place called Bo Town. The trip took the better part of Sunday afternoon. Arriving in Bo Town, we checked out two hotels before settling on the "best" one. **So who needs hot water or a light in the bathroom?** At least the sheets were clean, and towels were fresh every day. That was nice!

But the accommodations were nothing like the people. *The people were WONDERFUL!*

The remaining schedule called for visiting an average of four villages per day, with hours of travel on roads through the bush to reach each of them. At the first village, the trip turned festive—and it was even more so the rest of the week. We were received with music—praise songs and drums—animated dancing and colorful costumes.

We began each visit by paying our respects to chiefs and community leaders. Then, in my message, I offered three simple illustrations to communicate the loss and death that sin brings to our lives, even when our sin seems innocent or insignificant. (For example: An ordinary little tick can penetrate the skin and even lay eggs. The locals knew only too well the kind of bug I was talking about. Talking about ticks made an instant connection; it struck them as funny every time!)

After the illustrations, I moved on to develop the biblical ideas of sin and death. The solution—God’s protocol—was a breakthrough concept in every gathering. Then I extended an invitation with a serious call for people to turn to God for salvation.

To explain the concept of being “born again,” I asked what I thought was a simple question: *When was your birthday?* I was surprised, however, to find that many people in this culture don’t know when they were born. This only made my next statement all the more important: “You have to make sure you know that you have been born again!” (John 3).

When they prayed to receive the Lord, I emphasized that they were now born again. Then I called out: “*Happy birthday!*” They broke out into cheers, applause, great and genuine joy, thrilled by the good news that they were now “born again”! It was a party in every village!

God knows the real number, but our team estimated some 700 people made serious decisions for the Lord in this one short week! Everywhere we went, everyone wanted to receive salvation in the name of Jesus. *Every hand would go up.* The host pastor said, in amazement:

“These are Muslims raising their hands!”

In virtually every location, a pastor or church planter spoke of how recently the Christians’ lives had been threatened because of their evangelism work. They pointed to specific chiefs who are Muslims, or to imams, who had been viciously antagonistic to Christianity as recently as a few months before.

Yet God is at work. **Where Christians have established schools or helped to dig wells—meeting the most pressing needs of the people—hearts have softened.** Schools are so desperately needed, Muslim leaders welcome even Christian schools. (These are not big, fancy facilities. Think of our one-room schoolhouses of long ago, and you’re getting closer to their reality.)

In one of the villages, the people were lamenting the fact that the teacher had left—one-room schoolhouse, only one teacher—because they couldn’t afford to pay him the requisite salary: *\$75 a month*. The one-room school building was abandoned. “Building” may be too fancy a term. This was a rectangular mud hut with a thatched roof. The entire school budget in these villages is often little more than \$150 a month!

At the end of our service, the local Muslim chief thanked us for coming to his village. He spoke of how sad the villagers were that their school had been closed. I told him that we are trusting in the Lord that their school will soon be restored to them. His response was simple and deeply moving: *My heart has been made very happy.*

I believe we're seeing the tide turning in Africa. In a green field in front of the abandoned schoolhouse was a makeshift thatched-roof “facility” used by the congregation made up of people from three villages—some 250 people, many very new to Christianity. The church meeting here is only one month old. **The spiritual hunger of Africa's people is growing.**

We saw more evidence of the tide turning even in areas of persistent anti-Christian hostility—in the form of police escorts. Let me explain! . . .

Our team of four didn't travel alone. A large group led by the host pastor went with us to every site: a total of three vehicles—two cars with up to five people each and a pickup truck with seven or more passengers, some perched precariously on the edge of the cargo hold!

But this wasn't all. With a village on our schedule where fierce threats had been made, the host pastor felt strongly that we should have a police escort. The authorities assigned two officers to go with us. I've seen celebrity preachers go around with security escorts, but never anyone followed by men in camouflage and red berets armed with semi-automatic weapons!

The local church planters were deeply gratified to see this big entourage. It sent a message to them: *You are not alone. You are part of a global family of believers.* And the addition of the police guards gave them the assurance that they had the approval and support of the authorities—an astonishing turn of events!

But the greatest challenges in this region are not political. They are spiritual. In various churches, I saw Catholic tapestries—such as a picture of the Virgin Mary wearing a crown as the “Queen of Heaven,” with the Baby Jesus, also crowned, in her arms. These images communicate the doctrine of Mary as “co-redemptress” with Jesus—utterly false teaching.

In another place, as we recorded interviews with church planters, one of them was wearing a crucifix necklace. I asked him where he got it. He replied very innocently that it was a gift from his friend, a Mormon missionary. When I explained the basic teachings of the Latter-Days Saints, or Mormons—revealing that they're a cult—he seemed to accept the warning.

Again and again across the area, we saw twin phenomena: on one hand, great hunger and thirst for Christianity; on the other hand, great confusion, great misunderstanding, great lack of knowledge . . . *great risk*.

- **There is an urgent need for the teaching of sound Bible doctrine—not only to congregations, but to pastors and church planters!**

I asked the church planter with the Mormon crucifix how he discipled those who receive the Lord. He answered that he has ten lessons' worth of material for teaching new believers—but he has created another six (so far) on his own—“from my own head!” he announced proudly. He was a walking example of Ezekiel 13:2,3, which warns about getting messages from “our own inspiration” and not by the Word of the Lord.

He's not alone. All over the region, I saw it repeatedly: What little is known about the Word and theology is being bolstered by mere opinion and “personal theories.”

Yes, this church planter was receptive to correction, as were others. But we must intensify our focus on West Africa—because there are many misunderstandings about Christian doctrine and a great deal of ignorance and superstition. What a person doesn't know, he fills in with personal opinion. (And not just in Africa. It happens in our own culture as well!)

Wherever people are spiritually hungry, cults and promoters of false doctrines seek to take advantage. Left unchallenged, they will spoil the harvest.

How can we secure the exploding harvest in Muslim regions of Sierra Leone and beyond?

To open doors, and keep them open, we need to dig wells, staff schools, build hospitals. Any practical gesture of love is met with joy and gratitude—and inspires Muslims to seek the One who sent us!

But when they seek . . . what then? **We must be ready to respond. We must train and send church planters and pastors to establish solid, Bible-teaching churches.**

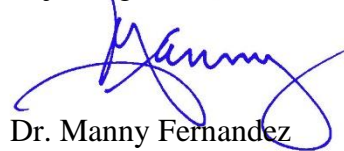
This cannot wait. Every day we delay, the enemy is encroaching, advancing, invading. Not just in Africa, but around the world.

God has positioned us to proclaim the truth worldwide. He has enabled us to “plant the flag” on every continent. He has given us a proven powerful strategy of multiplication as we raise up church planters whose churches will produce still other churches!

So I humbly ask—and boldly ask—for your strong financial support today. Our teams are at work. They are giving their all. But they need our help. Please be as generous as possible. Give as God has blessed you. And of course, you know, I will keep you posted on how God is turning your sacrifice of love into a fantastic Soul-Harvest, for His glory!

I hope to hear from you very soon. Thank you in advance. God bless you!

Rejoicing in the harvest,



Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. We have seen how God uses your gifts. It's amazing. It's beautiful. But we must not rest, not while the enemy creeps into the harvest field to poison the hearts and minds of the unsuspecting. I am grateful that you understand the stakes here, and that you are willing to step up and be part of God's army, counterattacking on the front lines! Thank you again!