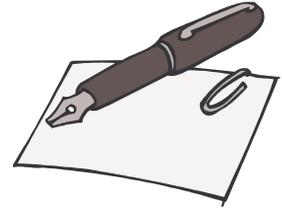




“...And He sent forth His Word, and healed them” -Psalm 107:20

Scripts from the Sacras

May 2007



You've heard the statistics – in the developing world, over half of the population are children, teens or young adults. You don't have to live here long to realize that seems pretty accurate, especially in urban areas like Monrovia. On the road in the morning, most of the pedestrians and taxi-hailers are wearing school uniforms. Later in the day, every empty lot becomes a soccer or kickball field. On holidays and weekends, the beaches are packed.



In March, we hosted Sean Marston, SIM's "Champion for Youth and Young Adult Ministries". Sean came to learn about youth issues in Africa, and to help us think about how to reach the next generation of Liberians for Jesus. Since the civil war ended, the culture gap between the young and old has widened. The floodgates opened and global culture came rushing in— music on the radio, world news on satellite TV, movies from Nigeria and India, broader access to the internet, cell phones, even the influx of UN and relief workers. Liberia's newly globalized youth feel alienated from the older generation of community and church leaders—they don't understand each other and sometimes they don't feel like they really want to.

The highlight of Sean's visit was a "Youth Forum", an open question and answer time about what youth in Liberia – really young adults, ages 16-30 – are thinking about. We invited a panel of youth leaders and ministers to young adults to spark the discussion, and the audience eagerly joined in. Sean asked questions about young adults in Liberia: what are their concerns, what do they think about God and the church? The youth said that their peers are focused on getting through school, then finding a job so they have the income to live a comfortable life and enjoy themselves. They told how a desire to succeed in school or get a job might mean giving sexual favors or payoffs. Most young people say they will think about church and "God business" when they get older and want to settle down and be serious, but for now they want to be "free". Discouraging, but I think they were telling it how it is- their openness and honesty were impressive.

Nonetheless, they indicated that underneath the material desires, young people really just want someone to care about them. Mature adults could have a profound influence if they would mentor with respect and real concern, putting aside some of the superficial aspects of youth culture, helping them work through their life challenges and not just tell them how they "should" behave. Several of the church leaders said they gained a new perspective on young people from the forum. Those who were already actively involved with youth felt affirmed and encouraged to keep building trust relationships so the door of salvation can be opened to the kids.

Because the church in Liberia has a firm foundation, some people might say it isn't necessary to have foreign missionaries here anymore – the Liberians can carry on the work without us. It's true: they can and they do. But God tells us to "spur one another on to love and good deeds"(Hebrews 10:24). We can still play a role stimulating ministry, working beside them in areas that might be out of their comfort zone. We hope Sean's visit was just the first step for us, SIM in Liberia, to encourage the development of relevant, high impact youth ministry so the next generation will know Jesus.



Youth at a recent Youth Camp

A Short Update from the Medical Front... by Dr. Rick

- We've had four visiting medical students or residents since January. I've enjoyed the teaching time; it really taps into my deepest enthusiasm—I only wish I could do more!
- Last Friday, I saw an up-country pastor, Joseph, who was in the hospital last year for over two months with heart failure. Thanks to some docs in the US sending over some sample medications, and to the grace of God, he's back on his feet, living back home in Nimba County, and doing the work he's called to do! He comes to Monrovia every 2 months or so now to get a medication refill and a check-up.
- ELWA now has about 250 HIV-positive clients on anti-retroviral medications, or ARVs (the drugs that suppress the replication of HIV), and we are hoping to "scale up" our capacity to treat a larger number of these patients. Estimates are that, right now in Liberia, less than 5% of those who need ARVs are receiving them.
- Many of the PLWAs (People Living with AIDS) have been trained as peer counselors. Ten are taking part in our home-based care program, while ten others are providing HIV/AIDS awareness in communities around Monrovia through a program sponsored by Concern, an international donor.
- I've been asked to serve on a "technical committee" that is revising Liberia's National HIV/AIDS Clinical Care Guideline. Please pray for me, that I'll represent Christ well there, and that the result will be more effective treatment and care for all of those living with HIV/AIDS in Liberia.



PLWAs and ELWA Counselors provide Home-Based Care

To all our praying friends and supporters—

We so appreciate your faithfulness to us over the years, in prayer, and with your gifts. We hope you realize how much your concern, prayers, and support mean to us—because we know that our God delights to answer the prayers of His people!

We'll continue to write by "snail mail" a few times a year, but we will be keeping you up-to-date by email on a monthly basis. If you are not receiving our email updates, please send us an email and we will get you on the list. And, if you want a more personal look at how we're doing, check out our blog at <http://iscripts.blogspot.com>.

Love, Rick & Debbie

As we begin to plan for our upcoming home assignment (tentatively January-August, 2008), we would appreciate your prayers. Many arrangements need to be made, and we are praying for coverage for Rick during his absence, both at the hospital, and at the SIM office.

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