

## Mission to Liberia

*By Lloyd and Nancy Greenhaw*

It had been just one year since we were here in Liberia and as we landed we could see and sense a slight change in the physical, spiritual, emotional atmosphere for the better.

We were met at the airport by Monsignor Karnley, who has been the acting bishop for the last 4 ½ years. He is filling in for Bishop Francis Michael who lost his health trying to protect the Catholics and the physical buildings of the Church during the war. The bishop stood against the roving bands of government assassins, rebels, teens and young men drunk with alcohol, drugs and blood. They had been given permission by their commanders to raid the countryside, kill, maim, rape and destroy. This bishop held the line against the senseless violence and he is greatly admired by all the priests. After the war he experienced a stroke and there was no bishop to take his place, so Msgr. Karnley was appointed to be his spokesman. As a young priest, Msgr. Karnley has done a fabulous job with this young church. More than fighting one another, the warring factors mainly inflicted brutality on the innocent men, women and children of Liberia. Subsequently thousands, including older priests, never came back.



Our team for this mission included Brent Heiser, who lives in North Carolina and is the county coordinator of Ghana for Renewal Ministries, and his two close associates from Ghana. Emmanuel Tamakloe is the National Worship Leader of Ghana, in charge of formation at the National Charismatic Renewal Center. Jerry John Kponyo is the National Youth Coordinator for the Charismatic Renewal in Ghana. We went from the airport to meet the newly appointed Archbishop of Monrovia, Coadjutor Archbishop Lewis Zeigler and some of the other priests that came for the Priests' Retreat. The Ghanaians shared with the new bishop about the great things God is doing in the Charismatic Renewal and the youth in Ghana. They provide formation and training in leadership and evangelization for about 1000 persons yearly, including prayer group and ministry leaders, tertiary students, seminarians, clergy, etc. God is increasing the number and strength of the prayer groups in Ghana. They present Evangelization schools for formation with programs like Course Paul, Alpha and Parish Missions. They also provide training in teaching, healing, intercession, worship music, marriage and family life, hospitality and media.



They are making a huge impact in the Catholic Church in Ghana. Jerry spoke of all of the teens and young people who have had the direction of their lives changed forever, away from sin and towards holiness. Now these kids can see Ghanaian role models like Jerry, who have made the choice to live chastely and are now happily married. Jerry was influenced at one of Renewal Ministries' Evangelization schools we facilitated in the early 2000s. He also went through a program that encourages chastity and now he is the National Coordinator for Youth Inter-Tertiary Institutions National

Coordinating Team (ITINCT). The Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Ghana is targeting the Tertiary Schools and influencing the leaders of tomorrow. These two leaders stressed obedience and adherence to Catholic values. The bishop was as impressed as the rest of us were. We immediately wanted to bring them back to the United States with us!

On Sunday we drove 1½ hours to St. Christopher's, a small parish church in Kakata. The people were beautiful. Lloyd gave an excellent talk after the Gospel and did a healing service at the end of Mass. He stressed forgiveness and the people really seemed to respond. After lunch with the parish priest we traveled back to the Pastoral Center where we were staying and would be teaching for the remainder of the week.

On the first day of the seminar for the priests we discovered that this was only the second time in everyone's memory that all the priests had been able to be together to fellowship since before the war. They seemed to love it. We began the first day teaching on healing prayer and deliverance; we continued this topic for the next five sessions and the priests were really focused. There were several lively discussions on forgiveness and one priest related some particularly horrible stories to highlight the difficulty of forgiving. Although our hearts went out to the priests and other victims of violence, we continued to tell them that forgiveness is not an option. Every day when the Bishop got a chance, he prayed for the horrific Haiti tragedy. We were privileged to have Mass each day with these fine priests.

The priests were a very young crowd; most around 30- 42 years old and they really seemed to enjoy being together. Some of them came from parishes that are inaccessible except by small airplane because the roads that were built twenty years ago were not maintained due to the war. The war has changed everything. There are now only three dioceses in Liberia. The percentage of Catholics is very low, but is steadily growing. After we taught the priests we prayed with a few of them.

The Bishop was at every teaching session. Many of these men really want to be holy and are willing to walk the walk to get there. Emmanuel and Jerry gave their presentations to all 40 or so priests and they were working definitely under the anointing of the Holy Spirit! They talked with passion about being dedicated Charismatic Catholics. Emmanuel is committed to forming Catholics to evangelize within prayer groups, parishes and beyond. He talked about their journey within the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Ghana. The Diocese of Kumasi gave them property over ten years ago to build the Adom Fie Center for Church renewal. It is still under construction, and yet is now too small. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal enjoys the great collaboration of the Bishops of Ghana. It is really amazing how far Ghana has come in these last ten years. They will be a great resource for Liberia and beyond. Both of the men from Ghana knew many of the priests and some of the people in Liberia because during the war Liberia sent many of its seminarians to Ghana because the seminaries in Liberia were destroyed.



On the last evening of the Priests' Seminar, we wanted these priests to be able to have a dinner/party together. So in the planning of this meal the Monsignor also invited Archbishop George Antonysamy, Apostolic Nuncio to Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Gambia. He was delighted to be able to come to be with the priests and with us. The food was delicious: one whole huge fish, okra stew, baked chicken, steamed bananas, potato salad, rice, and fruit. Every main dish was hot with peppers and some of us had to add lots of rice to be able to eat it. The priests really enjoyed the meal since they don't know when they will be able to get together again. The Papal Nuncio wanted to know how we got started and about Renewal Ministries. He asked for our business card so that he could give the bishops of Cameroon, Sierra Leone and Gambia our information. He also asked for Neal Lozano's book *Unbound* and the companion guide, which we supplied.

We only two days with the catechists, some of whom came from long distances and others who live close by. There were also at least ten seminarians who joined us and the bishop attended to show his solidarity. In the first two sessions we gave very short teachings on the *Unbound* model of deliverance prayer. The afternoon was devoted to teaching Apologetics. Catholics are a minority here in Liberia and the catechists and their people are often challenged about their faith. The catechists play an integral part in teaching Church doctrine to the lay faithful. They labor quietly without material recompense. We are so thankful for all these men and women who work silently and steadily for the Church.

The Ghanaians shared with the catechists and it was a big hit. No one could walk away from this week and not be totally convinced that the Holy Spirit has stirred up the Catholic Church in Africa and that it has come through many movements in the Church. Each day we talked much later than the schedule called for; these catechists were hungry for knowledge and just wanted more. We ended by praying for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and new gifts to serve the Church more effectively.

On the last day of the seminar we spoke to the Catholic Charismatics from the whole country. In one of the last talks of the day Emmanuel talked about how to really grow and expand our prayer groups. We prayed over them before they left for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and gifts.

On our last day in Liberia the team departed in two cars for Our Lady of Lourdes Parish. Msgr Karnley was driving us, and Brent, Emmanuel and Jerry were in the other car. The short version of a much longer story is that our cars were separated from each other and the 2<sup>nd</sup> car stopped at the wrong church. Brent and the Ghanaian brothers walked in the church, expecting to see us there. The priest at the offertory saw the trio and was delighted. He had been to the priests' retreat and he thought that they had come to speak at his church. So all three preached and the people were thrilled. At the other church, Lloyd spoke and ended by calling on everyone to make a decision to make Jesus the Lord of their lives. The three lost men came arrived during the offertory and were welcomed warmly by the priest. After Mass we had a small Procession of the Blessed Sacrament and asked Jesus to heal. Then we were invited to the priests' house for a delicious meal of fried chicken, rice, and fruit.

Before our departure we had met with the Archbishop and the Apostolic Administrators from the other two dioceses. The Archbishop was very happy and he couldn't thank us enough. He seemed amazed by the generosity of Renewal Ministries who not only paid to bring his priests together, but even covered the gas expense to get them home. When we left for home we felt the trip had borne much fruit; all the dioceses want us back next year to prepare hearts before the national elections the following year.