

# Alongside International Christian Development Trip

To the Linda Miclash Children's Home  
Whomgbay, Bong County  
Liberia, Africa



October 10 to 24, 2013

*Alan & Donna Lambshead*



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What would draw a person to the country of Liberia? An obscure country on the international scene, that struggled through 14 years of brutal civil war.

## One would not, except that God called him there!

That is how David Miclash describes his calling to Liberia, when God brought Dave and Linda here in 2004. God also lead them to Bishop Jerome Klibo, Head of the Association of Independent Churches of Africa (AICA), who was already serving God and his country. Together they would be a formidable force for God and good in this part of the world.

The Republic of Liberia is a country in West Africa, bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote D'Ivoire and the Atlantic Ocean. It covers an area of 111,369 square kilometres (43,000 sq mi) and is home to about 3.7 million people.



Liberia is the only country in Africa founded by the United States. English is the official language and there are also over 30 indigenous languages spoken. Although founded by freed American and Caribbean slaves, Liberia is mostly inhabited by indigenous Africans, with the slaves' descendants comprising only 5% of the population. In 1847, the country became the Republic of Liberia, establishing a government modeled on that of the United States and naming its capital city Monrovia after James Monroe, the fifth US president and a prominent supporter of the colonization. The colonists and their descendants, known as Americo-Liberians led the political, social, cultural and economic sectors of the country and ruled the nation for over 130 years. Liberia was a founding member of the United Nations.

In 1980 a military coup overthrew the Americo-Liberian leadership, marking the beginning of political and economic instability and two successive civil wars, the latter lasting 14 years, ending in 2003. These wars resulted in the deaths of approximately 250,000 people and devastated the country's economy and destroyed 95% of the country's health care facilities!



Today, Liberia is still trying to recover. Approximately 85% of the population continue to live below the international poverty line. Literacy is estimated at 60.8% (64.8% for males and 56.8% for females). In 2012 life expectancy was 57.4 years.

It is to these people God had called us to go and serve!

God knew what was ahead, He would enable us.

### **The Team:**

God began to put a unique team in place. This was not going to be the usual trip. It would hold many firsts (Dave's first trip since Linda's passing in January 2013, the first time the team would stay and work in one village) and special events (the opening & establishing of the Linda Miclash Children's Home). There were only 2 "newbies", Barbara England and Donna Lambshead.



Back Row: Barbara England, Jennifer Richards, Barbara Dawson, Ruth Markel, Sharon Crouse, Alan Lambshead

Front Row: Donna Lambshead, Karin Baar, David Miclash

Inset: Tom Newell



Our team (except for Tom, Sharon & Ruth) met for the first time on packing day and we immediately jelled making quick work of the huge job of packing 10 hockey bags full of medical supplies and glasses that would be needed to run the clinics.



Sorting & Packing Meds



Pitter patter let's get at 'er!!



Sorting & Packing Eyeglasses

Throughout the weeks leading up to the trip God continued to confirm to each of us that this was indeed His will for our lives at this time. So many little details came together and tasks that seemed insurmountable completed! The day has arrived and we were off to the airport! Everyone arrived and moved through check in and security seamlessly. This was the hurry up. Now it was the wait part. We were now a team focused on the next 14 days of serving together!

## Our travel:

Our flight was with Jet Airways to Brussels (8 hours) then a 3 hour wait in the airport. It was good to stretch our legs and walk around. Brussels Airlines flew us to Gambia (5 hours) then a 1 1/2 hour wait on the plane. During that time God introduced us to another believer that is also working in Liberia directing an organization called LACES. How exciting that God has placed these men directly across from us. From Gambia we flew to Monrovia, Liberia! For Barb England and Alan and Donna Lamshead it was the first glimpse of this country with the sun quickly setting, displaying a magnificent sunset!







It had been almost 24 hours of travel but we were here! God met our needs through a woman from Bishop Klibo's church who worked at immigration and expedited all our paper work! What a blessing she was to all of us who were very travel weary by that time.

We were greeted with wide smiles, warm hand shakes and hugs from Bishop Klibo and his team that had come to transport us. Pastor David Umune, director of TETMI in Nigeria also came and joined us for the weekend of celebrations. It took 3 jeeps packed completely to the top to transport us and 18 plus large bags!

### **First impressions:**

- warm breezes, lush and green landscapes, while also being dusty and barren, the magnificent sky ablaze with a vibrant sunset,
- hustle bustle of the city - crazy traffic!
- being the end of the work day and Friday night the streets were alive with people, markets and gatherings
- the markets were nothing like we would shop at, but this is another country!



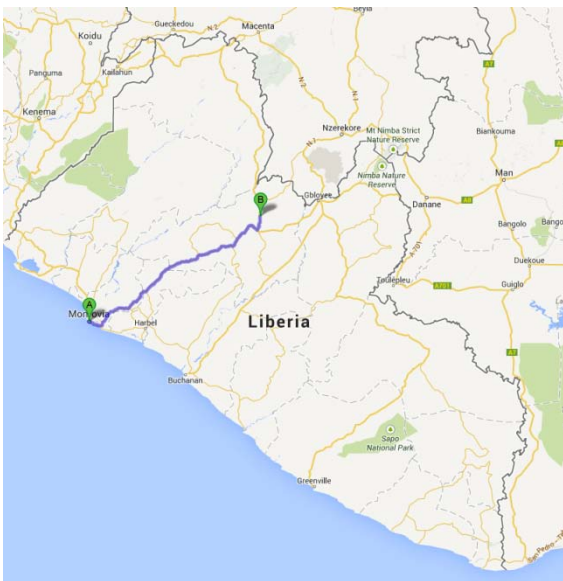


Hotel we stayed in Monrovia Friday night with an early start Saturday AM.



Saturday was an early start. Once again the 3 jeeps were loaded to maximum capacity and we began the final leg of our journey to the village of Whomgbay in Bong County.

Our destination, Whomgbay, is approximately 200 km away but a 5 hour drive. Really, how bad could the roads be that it would take that long? After an hour on the better roads I am sure that to obtain their drivers license they must do an obstacle course as that is what is seemed like as he swerved back and forth across the road circumventing as many pot holes as possible and going very slowly thru those he could not!



So much to take in as we drove! Bustling towns and markets right along the road side (it is Saturday morning), with every possible mode of transportation with impossible loads piled and tied on. Then the land would open into treed, lush expanses of rolling countryside.













## Our arrival in Whomgbay:

As we turned off the main road in Gbarnga (pronounced “banga”) we saw a large sign announcing the Linda Miclash Children’s Home. It was a very exciting and emotional moment. This was one of the reasons we had come to Liberia, to open a Children’s Home & honour a lady who loved and honoured God and loved and served the people here!



Tall poles wrapped with palm leaves and flowers began to appear along the village road. They were really quite beautiful. The people had done this in preparation of the Children’s Home dedication the next day. There was a large crowd of people all singing and dancing to welcome us as we arrived. Our first glimpse of the Linda Miclash Children’s Home, brought tears to most of our eyes! The people were so thankful to God for our coming and what we were doing for their village! It was a very humbling experience. We were so thankful that God was getting the praise as we certainly did not deserve any!









## The guest house: (our accommodations for the next 2 weeks)

One of our team members, Tom Newell, Alongside Director of Ministry had gone ahead of us by one week to buy food and to prepare the guest house for us. The house has 4 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms and a large dining / meeting area. Tom had been able to get us mattresses, fans, a small fridge and a generator. The generator was run from 6pm to about 6am allowing the fans to run all night making sleeping so much more comfortable. The village ladies kept large tubs of water in the bathroom full of well water for flushing the toilets and for bathing. God had provided an amazing place for us to stay.



The rest of the day and evening were spent unpacking our own things and having evening devotional as a team. We experienced our first evening rain storm and did it rain! Now I understand the term “torrential rain storm!”





## Meals

Thank you Tom for all your preparations in bringing food from Monrovia for the team. We could not have made it without your preparations ahead of our arrival. After Tom returned to Canada on Tuesday, Donna headed up the kitchen and guest house.

Our national cooks Selena Ellis and her assistant Rose Diailey and her little ray of sunshine Promise were fabulous to work with and made wonderful meals for us. They cooked everything over an open charcoal (made from dead rubber trees) fire on 2 small hibachi's.

All of us will remember the fresh homemade bread, buns and tea biscuits!



What a blessing these women gave us in providing healthy, tasty food. Not one person was ill the whole time we were away!



## Dedication Service of the Linda Miclash Girls Home Sunday Oct 13

Sunday started early with the local rooster beginning to crow at about 5:30 am! We were thankful that there is only a 4 hour time lag between Toronto and Liberia so there was not a lot of adjustment to be made. My devotions that morning were in Psalm 105: 1 & 2:

“give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples.  
Sing to Him, sing praises to Him, tell of all His wondrous works”

This is what we were here to do. That is what today's celebrations and dedication of the Home was about. To rejoice in God's faithfulness, goodness & His wondrous works here in this place and in our hearts!

The morning service was supposed to begin at 11am but we were informed it would begin when the Senator got here from Monrovia! Flexibility is going to be the key word here! While waiting we used the time to begin sorting through the bags of supplies we had brought and to get ready for the clinics we would run starting Monday.







The dedication service started at 2pm.

We were escorted to the church by the choir singing and playing their instruments. It was quite the procession of dignitaries. We were each formally introduced to Senator Taylor.





The church was full and overflowing. The service began by everyone walking over to the Home where Senator Taylor, Bishop Klibo and Dave participated in a ribbon cutting and official opening dedication ceremony.



The celebration continued back at the church with lots of singing by the choir, along with some children from the Home. Many spoke in appreciation of the Home coming to their district and the people's commitment to its success! Senator Taylor spoke and challenged her own people of Bong County to take responsibility for "their" Home and that God will hold them accountable if they let this gift deteriorate. It was time for them to become independent and become givers not takers. Wow what a challenge!

Dave spoke and reminded them that this is their Home now, not his and it was God who deserved the praise and glory. Dave said how excited Linda would be to know that these young girls would be able to grow up with self worth and dignity. Tom also gave a tribute to Linda that was given at her funeral in Canada using the letters of her name. Well done Tom. It was very appropriate.

The Home will be overseen and run by Selena, Bishop Klibo's sister, a very talented and efficient woman. The following Sunday Dave presented Selena with Linda's Bible. This was an amazing tender moment!









Later in the afternoon, it was so much fun when the children and adults came to hang out with us at the front porch. It ended up with us singing back and forth, each teaching the other songs. Liberians have amazing rich voices and they LOVE to sing!



## Moving In

Later that evening the first 35 girls moved into the home. What excitement there was for them and us!





## Reflections of the Day:

- touched by the ribbon cutting ceremony and how the opening of the Home is creating the future for these girls
- heart swelled watching the little girls move in
- thrilled that these girls would now be loved and cared for
- the challenge that they were now responsible for the care of the Home and the children who would come there. They were taking ownership!
- last night it was just a building, quiet and empty but tonight as the children moved in, it became a home, alive and vibrant
- how young and old love to sing and the depth of the message in the songs they sang
- gave a organizational chart which showed how we are all connected and intertwined together
- how children here are no different than at home. If you close your eyes and just listen they love to play, laugh and be where the action is!
- during the opening and while the children were moving in I am sure we heard Jesus says "let the little children come to me"
- overwhelmed by what God has done and is doing here and the privilege that God has given us to be a part of it

The last verse of the song "Find us Faithful" seemed to sum up the day:

After all our hopes and dreams have come and gone  
And our children sift through all we've left behind  
May the clues that they discover and the memories they uncover  
Become the light that leads them to the road we each must find

Chorus:

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful  
May the fire of our devotion light their way  
May the footprints that we leave  
Lead them to believe  
And the lives we live inspire them to obey  
Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful

## Sustainability for the Home:

The key to long term success for the home is a partnership with local and international people. The goal is for the Home is to be at full capacity of 100 girls and self sufficient in 10 years. At present it costs about \$1800 per month to pay for the salaries and supplies.

The barrels of dried soup mix from Ontario Gleaners and other donations that were shipped in the container from Canada will initially help to offset some of the supply costs.

The village donated 50 acres of land to plant various agricultural crops such as pineapple, banana, rice, cassava, potato greens, beans, and arrowroot. Some crops such as palm trees for oil & eventually tree crops of rubber and coco will be sold in the village and the money used to purchase other supplies for the Home. The plan is also to raise pigs, chickens and rabbits for meat at the home.

## Our Week:

Monday to Friday were just busy, busy days. Each day started with team devotions led by a different team member each day. These times were unique and special and right on target of what we needed to carry us thru that day. Each day ended with a reflection time.

Bishop Klibo started our week by sharing on John 3:16. He talked about if you take that verse out of the Bible, the Bible would completely lose its meaning. There would be no way of our going to heaven. It is the “greatest” verse in the Bible. He reminded us that this is why we are in Whomgbay. God loved us first when we were unlovable and we are here to show the Liberian people about God’s love for them too.



## Bishop Klibo

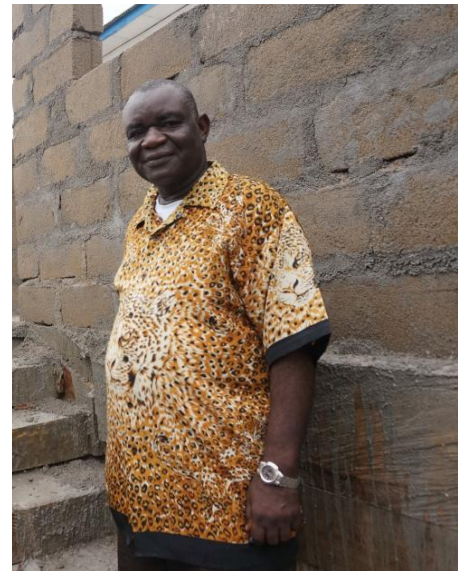
Bishop Jerome Klibo is the Executive Director of the Association of Independent Churches of Africa (AICA) which has over 150 churches in Liberia.

Bishop gave us a glimpse into his early years when he experienced a broken family, extreme poverty, horrific violence during the civil war, becoming an orphan in his teens, trying to finish school and find his place in life. During this time God spoke to him “My son, this is not the life you are going to live. You are going to be a missionary to your people”

He enrolled in Bible School and became a Pastor and has been advocating for his people since.

Bishop said “I can’t do all, but I can do some. The best thing I can do for my kinsmen is to tell them about the salvation of God.” He is leading the AICA in planting churches and building schools.

He feels he can truly say that through all of his life “It is well with my soul.”





## Clinics:

We held 6 days of medical and eye glass clinics open to the public. Usually the teams would work 3 days and then have a day off to do something “cultural”. We were too remote for this to occur so the team worked every day of the week.

Each day the clinics began with everyone meeting at the church and singing and praying with the people. They have such rich, strong, vibrant voices and they sing in harmony!

Dave explained to the people, through a translator that we were there because God sent us and because God wants them to know how much He loves them. The medical clinics were held in the church and the eye glass clinics were held in the kitchen part of the Children’s Home.



## Medical Clinic:

Many days we would arrive and there would already be more people than could be attended to that day. Soon the word spread to the surrounding villages and people would walk all day, stay overnight just to be in line the next day. Each day the tensions seem to get higher and higher as people became more and more desperate to see a doctor. Dave and Alan then worked their calming influence. Local entrepreneurs made and sold food for the people waiting in line!





The clinic team kept things running smoothly. Patients were initially assessed by 2 of our nurses Ruth and Barbara D. with 2 national translators Dormaion and Anthony assisting. Vital signs and concerns were noted and then they would go to sit in another line and wait again to see one of our doctors.



Two national doctors were working with us in the clinic. Abraham Kollie, a physician's assistant, was there all day, every day. Dr. William Negbh joined him in the afternoon and once all day.





After seeing the doctors, the people came to the pharmacy area. This was efficiently run by Jenn and Sharon. Once the prescriptions were filled Patrick, another national translator, would explain to the patients of how the medication should be taken and the correct dosages.



After lunch Dave and Alan would select really sick infants and children from those waiting in line. For the next 2 hours these were the only patients the doctors attended to. So many sweet, beautiful children! Their eyes and smiles brightened the day! Filling prescriptions for the children took more time. With children, medication dosage is by weight, so pills had to be cut and antibiotics diluted. On Tuesday, Donna began assisting in the pharmacy area in the afternoon.

After tending to the children, the doctors examined sick elderly people for about one hour. If there was still time before we lost daylight, we would attend to those still waiting in line.









## Clinic for the School and Children's home:

The last day before we left, we attended to all the children and staff from the Home. The children arrived and all sat quiet in rows. It struck us all funny that if you got that many Canadian children in one area they would not sit still or be as quiet!



We also attended to the children from the Metee Klibo School in the village. Another school in the neighbouring village also sent approximately 75 students to be examined. We could not begin to attend to these children due to time and we were also running short of meds. It was very hard to turn them away.



A total of 3235 treatments were given out over the 7 days of clinics. The majority of the medications given were for worms, infections or malaria. There were also 12 special cases that were sent to Phebe Hospital and School of Nursing and Bong County Health Services in Grbanga for treatment at Alongside's expense. Although these treatments did not seem expensive to us, for the village people it is unaffordable. We also saw some people who came with terrible scars. They shared that this was a result of what the rebels had done to them during the civil war! Thank you God, that we have never experienced such atrocities!

A real heartbreak the last day was closing the doors on the people still wanting to be seen. Even if medical care was available they could not afford it or the medications that would be required. As hard as it was, daylight was gone and also so was our God appointed time here Whomgbay.

## Eye Glasses Clinic:

Although not as busy as the medical clinic there were often 20 or more people waiting in the eye glass clinic. Karen efficiently headed up this area with Barb E. and Donna assisting. Barb soon became very expert with those needing reading glasses.

Testing for vision was difficult with the language barrier as not all spoke English. This job would have been very difficult without our national translator Mulbah. The majority of the people who came were in need of reading glasses. A total of 440 pairs of glasses were given out.

It was so much fun to watch the faces of the people when you got the right prescription and they could read or thread a needle or see far away.

- As we were leaving the clinic the first day a man came running up and was waving his cell phone. He was so excited and wanted to show us that he could now read the screen!
- The ladies who could now thread a needle
- One lady who could only read a large E on the distance chart was able to see almost 20/20! She was elderly and she began hugging us and then proceeded to do this dance around the room! The whole room clapped and cheered for her!







It was also heart breaking when people came begging you to help and there was nothing we could do. It was obvious from looking at their eyes that some form of eye disease had destroyed their vision. It was so hard to explain that we could not help them.

By the last day it was getting harder and harder to find that perfect "prescription" for people. The people found it hard to understand why we could not just give them a pair from the other bins that had a lot in them.





## Special Activities and Events:

### Presentation of hats and skipping ropes to the children in the Home.

We brought a duffle bag of knitted hats made by Grace England and Linda Miclash for the children in the home. Thursday before the clinics started, we went over to the Home and each team member had the privilege of giving a few children a hat. We also gave a number of skipping ropes for them to share.



What fun it was later that day and throughout the week to see the children wearing their hats and skipping with the ropes. Not sure how they were able to wear these hats in the heat! Even some of the matrons in the home were wearing them!





## Women's Ministry:

This was the brainchild of Jenn Richards who also coordinated the project. We held this event Saturday morning at the church.

The objective was to make a quilt with a picture of Linda Miclash (that had been transferred onto fabric) in the middle. This quilt will hang in the entrance of the girl's home that is named after Linda. Linda was an outstanding seamstress and also an avid quilter, so this was a fitting tribute to her. We knew it would have thrilled her heart to see the Canadian women and African women working together.

We had no idea how many women would come if any. Selena previously had a business teaching sewing and graciously offered to help us explain the sewing and run the event. We were all shocked when we arrived to see so many women and children already waiting for us. By the time we started there were over 100 women and about 50 children.



All the different quilting squares were laid out on tables. Each lady came and chose 2 different colours of squares, 5 of one and 4 of another to make a 9 patch block. The squares had been pre-cut and pre-marked with sewing lines. It was fun watching the ladies looking over all the options and carefully choosing "their" colours. Each block was unique and personal to that lady.

The process of putting the squares together did not always go as planned. We realized that maybe our explanation was not as good as we thought. Some of the blocks had to be taken apart and the women would start over. Even the team made mistakes that had to be taken apart!





The women loved it when we came and sat with them one-on-one to help and work with them. It was amazing to see their attitude and perseverance to make “their” block, wanting to be a part of making the quilt even though we were sure they probably did not even know what a quilt was! Some of the women took their blocks home and proudly brought them to the guest house later.

As the ladies completed their block, they wanted their picture taken with their block. They were all so proud of their accomplishments. They were also excited that they got to keep the sewing needle and take some thread home. It was fun to watch them put the needles in their hair and the needles actually stayed there!

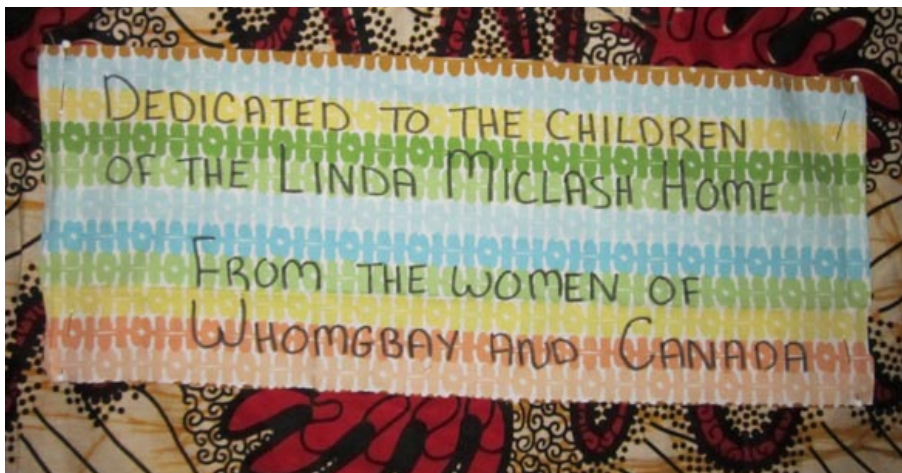


The rest of Saturday the team spent doing some minor alterations and tightening of stitches. The backing that Jenn brought accommodated 92 blocks to make the quilt. We had a problem - we had 107 blocks and so how do you choose! Jenn had to choose and the final choices were awesome! The remaining blocks Selena would use in a runner to also be on display.

In the remaining days, any free time we had was feverishly spent sewing the blocks into strips and then sewing the strips together. We felt like our “grandmothers at a quilting bee!” Before we left on Wednesday morning the strips were all together waiting for Selena to sew them onto the backing. We are looking forward to a picture of the quilt hanging in the home.







The quilt represented so many things for each of us.

- A wonderful tribute to a woman who felt that every woman deserved dignity.
- The many vibrant colours and patterns are much like our lives all different, unique, vibrant and beautiful on our own but when blended together, connected we make something spectacular that we could not do on our own.
- how our big God accomplishes big things!



## Burning and Planting the Fields:

Although we offered Dave and Alan to join us at the sewing event, the men chose to go with some men from the village to burn underbrush in preparation for planting cassava, a major food source that would be used at the home. It was a very hot sunny day and it was a very hot, exhausting job! The group of men made great progress working together.



Monday, the remaining rubble from the burn was cleared off and planting begun. The process involved bringing cassava stems harvested from some of the village farms, and cutting them into sections about 15 cm long. Some of the men from the village, along with Dave, dug short trenches about 10 cm deep. Three cassava sticks were laid beside each other in the trench, and then the sticks were buried. These groups of three cassava sticks were planted all over the field. These sticks grow roots from the buds on the sticks and the fruit of the plant is actually a root, and looks similar to a sweet potato.





## Walk through the Village:

Whomgbay is a village of over 1000 people. The people were so gracious to allow us to wander through their village to see their homes. Most homes in the village were made of poles cut from small trees that were then packed on both sides with mud. The roofs are made with palm branches or tin. Many had a building for sleeping and another with only a roof for cooking. It was interesting to see how they had personalized and decorated their homes making them unique with printing on the walls or braiding of the palm leaves. People's artistic abilities shine thru where ever you are!

The village has 2 wells that provide clean water for drinking and the people use the river water for washing clothes etc. The village is very clean and has outdoor latrines throughout so the river is much cleaner.

There was a very sobering moment in the tour when we came upon a well that had been filled in and sealed over. During the civil war the rebels had massacred many of the villagers. The well was in the middle of the town and so they made a "common" grave out of it and sealed it over as a memorial to their deaths and what they had suffered at the hands of the rebels!







The school has a school JK age 3 & 4 up to grade 8 with approximately 350 students attending.





## Sunday Service:

There were about 100 people who attended, men and women and children. Their joy and enthusiasm in praising God was contagious. A touching moment was when the pastor called the people to prayer. The people then began to pray out loud all at the same time. It was very moving to just sit and listen and realize that God hears each person as if they are the only one.



Dave presented Selena with Linda's Bible. He told her that in Canada a person's Bible would traditionally be passed on to someone in the family. Dave felt that because Selena would be the Director of the Linda Miclash Children's Home she was now part of the family and it was only fitting that she should receive it. She was very touched and moved to tears by this act of love and kindness. She said that it was better than any physical treasure she could have received and she would always treasure it.



Dave presenting Linda's Bible to Selena

Pastor Patrick



## Children's program:

At the church service, it was announced that we would be running a children's program for 3 to 13 year olds at the school from 3 to 5pm. There were varying answers to how many children we should expect. About 180 children came and many mothers wanted to give us their toddlers and babies to be a part of the afternoon too or they wanted to join in the fun also! The word 'organized chaos' would not begin to describe the afternoon! In the end a good time was had by all, but as a team we were exhausted mentally, physically and emotionally!

The children were divided up into 5 groups of mixed ages and they then rotated every 20 minutes thru the 5 different activities.

1. Story told on God's sovereignty – Barbara D
2. Story about God's omniscience - Ruth
3. Craft: colouring little wooden cross necklaces and pages - Sharon
4. Craft: bracelet braiding with embroidery thread - Karen and Barb E
5. Puppets/Singing: teaching the kids the song "MY GOD IS SO BIG" - Jenn & Donna

We would not have made it through these activities without our translators who came and helped.

The kids loved each activity and at the end of the afternoon they each received a candy. If it wasn't chaos before, it sure was when the candy came out!!!







## Packing up and Saying Good-bye:

Tuesday afternoon was spent sorting and packing up and inventorying all the supplies that we would be leaving behind. One of the most precious times was as a team sitting in the church with all the security people and translators and praying together, for one another. What a moving, uniting time this was as we poured out our hearts and petitioned our God, the same God for His care and provision here in Whomgbay and in Canada.





Wednesday morning came early! At breakfast one of the women from the village came with 4 small baskets to sell to the team. What a special souvenir to take home! They were small but they held great meaning and love! .



The good bye began by 6:45 and the cars pulled out right at 7am. There was a great deal less weight returning home. All 10 duffle bags of meds, eyeglasses and supplies that were not used up by us were left behind along with many of the clothes and shoes we each brought. Without all this weight the return drive was much easier and quicker.





We took the route through the Firestone rubber plantation. Firestone has been in Liberia since the 1920's. At one time they owned and tapped a million acres of rubber trees for production! Today Firestone's acreage is less but is still one of the country's main employers.



After a 4 hour wait in the restaurant beside the airport our flight left for home. It would be another long trip of "hurray up and then wait"! Liberia - Gambia -1 1/2 hour wait, Brussels -4hrs, Toronto for Sharon another 3 hour wait until her flight to Vancouver then on to the Island!

It is good to be home.

So thankful for the amazing trip we had together.

So thankful for the country that we were privileged enough to be born in.

So thankful to God who called each of us to become His children and to be His servants!

**TO GOD BE THE GLORY ---- GREAT THINGS HE HAS DONE!**



The Canadian and Liberian team with the children from the Linda Miclash Children's Home



## Team Memories





## Village Memories

