

Dear Friends

Epiphany greetings from Freetown. By the time many of you receive this letter we will be in the season of Epiphany, which not only commemorates the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus, but is also a moment of sudden and great revelation. There have been a number of these for us during the last twelve months, some of which you may encounter in this letter.

We have just returned from an excellent holiday in Morocco, which not only gave us a break from Freetown, but to spend time in another African country. We were joined by Saimon and Daro, and were able to spend the Christmas period together, as we experienced a few of the beautiful and fascinating places that the country has to offer. They are still working in Cambridge and London, respectively, and Saimon has recently moved into his own one-bedroom flat.

We have now experienced a full academic year at Sierra Leone Theological College (SLTC) but in reverse, ie semester 2 followed by semester 1. Each semester has been challenging for both of us, as we were given different subjects to teach each semester, some of which demanded much research and background reading. The students are a joy to teach, and once having adjusted to the fact that we do not dictate notes, nor that we give tests and exams that demand memorisation, their participation level not only increases, but becomes more analytical and decisive. The college has a number of activities during the year, either to commemorate events, or to raise funds, all of which culminates with graduation in December, with degrees, diplomas and certificates awarded not just in Theology, but Community Development, Computer Studies and Business Management. The college also offers Distance Learning courses, and so we both travelled to Bo for classes with students in that area. Although conditions for students studying in Freetown are minimal, without electricity in their homes for many, they are blessed with an excellent library. Those doing Distance Learning rely heavily on the material provided. Access to the internet is more than a luxury! And the speed is very slow.

Janice continues to be involved in the HIV+ support project in Wellington, on the outskirts of Freetown, attending their monthly meetings. Realising that many of clients register their attendance with their thumbprint, she has managed to secure funding for facilitators training for adult literacy, and the setting up of community adult education classes, with 70 learners registered. A highlight at one of the meetings was playing "tunnel ball" with inflated condoms, - great fun!

We have been able to welcome and provide hospitality for a number of visitors during the year, and were thrilled that Saimon and Daro were able to spend time with us in early June, due to being offered free business class flights by one of Daro's friends! We were able to explore other parts of Sierra Leone, and in particular Tiwai Island. Our visitors have had to experience life as it is lived, with the usual lack of electricity and water being huge problems in Freetown. We have the loan of a small generator, which we use sparingly, to keep the fridge cool, top up batteries for various pieces of equipment and indulge in "chilling out", watching a DVD. Water comes into the compound very spasmodically, and so trips to another Methodist compound are made on a daily basis filling up the car with 5-gallon plastic drums to supply sufficient water for all living on the compound.

For the last 6 months we have been establishing a small garden to attempt to grow some of our vegetables, including the Salone staples of sweet potato leaves, cassava leaves, okra and peppers. Needless to say these have grown well, tomatoes and lettuce have not done so well. We might have got our timing wrong for planting, so will try again. However we have an abundance of pawpaw trees, and a couple of them show signs of bearing fruit. A variety of other fruit trees have also been planted, and those who live in this house after us will have the benefits.

At the time of writing, it is New Year's Day, and from our verandah we can see large banners flying from the floodlight towers in the national sports stadium, heralding the beginning of the celebrations of 50 years of independence. The Methodist Church celebrates this year 200 years since the arrival of the first missionaries from Britain, Rev George Warren and three teachers. Peter is convening the working group that is making preparations for various activities to commemorate this event. Living conditions are somewhat better than they were 200 years ago. George Warren died within 6 months, which was not unusual at that time.

We have not included any photos in this Epiphany letter, as access to the internet is extremely slow. However should you wish to see more details of life in Salone, then do have a look at our blog on ***ClarkServInSalone.blogspot.com***. We trust that 2011 will have moments of sudden and great revelation for you, and these may have a positive effect for you and those you share your life with.

Blessings

Janice and Peter

19a Old Railway Line
Tengbeh Town, PO Box 64,
Freetown, Sierra Leone
Mob: J+23278642272; P+23278601916
peterclark47@googlemail.com
clark.janice@gmail.com
Blog: ClarkServInSalone.blogspot.com