

Sierra Leone Initiative: Intro

You'll remember that last September I spoke about a book that impacted me. *The Hole in the Gospel* by Richard Stearns the President of World Vision challenged me to understand that if we are to love God and love others we need to come to grips with two issues.



First, to love God we need to have a heart that breaks for the things that break the heart of God. To understand the heart of God all you have to do is read John 3:16. "For God so loved the world..." not just me, not just the people I know, not just the good people of the US; but the people of the world- the least, the last and the lost- men and women, boys and girls who live and die each day as a result of something as simple as a lack of clean water and from the most easily preventable diseases. To love God means loving the people that God loves!

And that brings me to loving others. When I finished reading *The Hole in the Gospel*, I knew that I had to do something; both personally and as a leader of this church. Loving others is more than words; its actions that translate love from a noun to a verb. My passion was shared by others and together we found a way to love others, the Sierra Leone Initiative.

Over the next few weeks we're going to introduce you to the Sierra Leone Initiative and the county and people of Sierra Leone. And in the process we hope that you will catch our excitement and understand that in a simple way we can Love God and Love Others by getting involved in the Sierra Leone Initiative.

So this morning let me tell you briefly what the Initiative is all about. In one sense it is commitment already over a hundred years old; a commitment of the people of Central PA to the people of Sierra Leone.

Today the Initiative is a formal relationship between the Central PA Conference of the UMC, that's you and me and the UM churches across Central PA, and the Sierra Leone Annual Conference of the UMC. The Initiative partners local churches here in Central PA with a church in Sierra Leone. As a partner church, we have made a monthly commitment of \$100 per month for the next ten years to the Initiative. That financial commitment goes to support the salaries of local pastors in Sierra Leone, including our pastor at the Yengema UMC, Rev. Do Ado-Kenge.

But that is just the beginning of what we hope will be a partnership that allows us to support the ministry of the Yengema UMC as they make disciples of Jesus Christ.

You may not think that a \$100 a month commitment is much to support the pastors of Sierra Leone. But it makes all the difference in the world when it comes to being able to put food on the table, clothe his family and send his children to school. In reality, these pastors live on only a few dollars a day.

Over the next several weeks you'll see this bag of rice up front. That 50 pound bag of rice cost me \$15.00. In Sierra Leone that same bag of rice costs nearly \$50. That's almost half of a pastor's *quarterly* salary. That doesn't leave much for all the other necessities of life.

Each week as you look at that bag of rice remember that if we are going to Love God and Love others we need to do our part to support the Sierra Leone Initiative. Next week you'll learn more about the Initiative and watch for information about some great events coming in February.