

JANUARY 2020



Dear friends,

Thank you for praying! We have now been in The Gambia for a week and are really enjoying settling in! We were thankful for safe and smooth travels last week and a warm welcome from staff at GAMFES (Gambian Fellowship of Evangelical Students).



Our first observations of our new surroundings are that the weather is always sunny, the food is tasty, the people are very friendly and the beach is beautiful! We were grateful to have our first few days here to settle in and explore the local area (with our helpful tour guide Ed who stayed here almost three years ago) and have an induction from GAMFES, whose offices are across the road from us. We are already learning one of the local tribal languages, Wolof, (with mixed success!) and are getting used to being referred to as 'toubab' (white person) in the street! Chad's name has caused some amusement among the locals as in Wolof it translates as 'last

born', though he has now started explaining the Old English meaning of the name; 'warrior'.

As part of our induction we learned about the origins of GAMFES and the SMILE team. It's exciting to hear about the way God has used these ministries in The Gambia to further his kingdom. Already we have heard testimonies of people turning to him from all sorts of backgrounds and look forward to hearing many more.

While walking to and from the beach we have met lots of people who stop for a chat. Dan and Tom have found that football is an easy conversation starter (and have even found some fellow Liverpool supporters!). Ellie and I met some Gambian girls at the beach yesterday who we hope to keep in contact with. At the weekend we had our first team fitness session starting with a run – in which Bobby and Lucy outran the rest of us – followed by improvised circuits led by Grace! (video evidence is available on Instagram) Tonight we plan to try out some ultimate frisbee at the Medical Research Council compound near us.



On Sunday we attended Omega church where some previous teams have gone. It was great to worship God with brothers and sisters here and lovely to spend a bit of time with Pastor Stephen later in the day. We are very grateful for Mama who looks after us and the house while we are living here. Sophia has enjoyed chatting about cooking with her and Mama was willing to sample some of the UK-style dinners that we cooked at the weekend.



Looking around the schools we're teaching in

This week the team started at their local schools. We went round each of the schools as a team on Friday to meet the head teachers and introduce ourselves. It was encouraging to hear about the positive impact of previous teams' work in these schools and we feel excited to continue God's work there. An opportunity has arisen for Chad and Sophia to go to a school which has not had any team members for a number of years so we are praying that we might be able to make the most of this and build positive relationships for the future. Despite the challenges of transport to unknown places everybody seemed to have a good first day – largely spent observing, though some found themselves teaching a whole class!

One of the challenges we have met over the weekend has been a lack in our water supply to the house which has meant limited water is available for things like showering and washing up. Ed is in the process of trying to sort it out and while we do have plenty of access to safe drinking water we would appreciate your prayers in the decisions being made in order to try to solve the issue.

Every night we have shared round the dinner table things that we are thankful for each day. There are so many ways in which God has provided for us and blessed us in our first few days and we look forward with excitement for all that is ahead!

Praise God with us for:

- Smooth and safe travel
- The people who have welcomed us so well (particularly Mama, GAMFES staff and Omega church)
- The joy we have found in spending time in God's creation and his mighty power we are reminded of in the waves
- A happy team who are getting on well with one another

Please pray for:

- Growing relationships – both within the team and with the people we are meeting here
- Wisdom as we decide how best to spend our free time and how to get involved with church. Prayer that our seminar on 'time and priorities' this week would help us approach this well
- Good health (we have a couple of colds going round at the moment)
- A patient and gracious attitude in the unknowns of the water situation
- The lessons we are learning as a team in 1 Corinthians 8 about living distinctively for God whilst engaging with the world around us

With love from us all,

Sarah (on behalf of Ed, Tom, Lucy, Dan, Sophia, Chad, Ellie, Bobby and Grace)