JUST SO YOU KNOW: It is neither an understatement nor an overstatement to say that the history of **BCMS** cannot be told without the story of its founder, **Mother Vera A. Stephens** or vice versa because **Mother Stephens** is **BCMS** and **BCMS** is **Mother Stephens**. So intertwined are the both stories that right from the inception each lost its individuality and became one story, rather than being told as two separate stories.

So we beg your indulgence that as you pore through our brief history you will learn a little something of how **BCMS** came into being, and also appreciate the story of the beautiful, prayerful and strong-willed woman and her quest to follow the command of the Great Commission given by her Lord and Savior; and how she would come to be loved and admired by an entire nation.

OUR HISTORY:

On September 26, 1918 a little black girl who would come to be called **Vera A. Stephens** was born in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. Young Vera would later grow up to attend the Tennyson Elementary School. From a very early age though, young **Vera** seemed to possess an apparent compassion and concern for helping those in need; and it was not uncommon to see her in the neighborhood helping to comb the hair or fetch groceries of an arthritic neighbor or even help overwhelming mothers take care of their babies.

However, when she was just a young girl of about eleven years old, under the spiritual tutelage of Bishop Eleazer E. Lenox of the Greater Holy Temple Church of God in Christ at 2673 West Lake St (now The Holy Temple Church, at 246 North California Ave.), she responded to an invitation to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as her personal savior.

One Sunday afternoon during a Missionary Service, the church was blessed with the visit of two Missionaries from Cape Palmas, Liberia in West Africa, that Vera now aged thirteen felt and heard the Lord’s call for COMPLETE DEDICATION to his service and specifically to Africa.

She not only heard the call but the Holy Spirit helped her to respond to the call and answer, “I’ll go.” This experience with the Lord changed the whole course of her life and she was frequently reminded by him of her commitment to him for service in Africa; although she would resist responding to that call for a number of years.

Notwithstanding, in her teens she attended the Lucy Flowers High School. After high school she then attended the Washburn Trade School, but still being haunted by that call upon her life and her quest for divine knowledge led her to the Great Lakes Bible School where she was the valedictorian of her graduating class.

The year she completed Bible school the Lord called her to evangelize to children in a very definite and supernatural way, and her ministry with children eventually influenced her to work with the Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) of Chicago, Illinois. Not only were neighborhood children in the Chicago area reached with the Gospel through the **Vera Stephens** ministry, but the lives of whole families were also transformed, and many others were reached who are now proclaiming the Gospel that were led to the Lord by her.

Years later **Ms. Stephens** would testify that there were many years of preparation for ministry and much impatience and rebellion on her part because she was still not comfortable with being uprooted from everything and everyone she had ever known to go all the way across the world to a country she practically knew nothing about.

She did speak of how the Lord remained faithful in his dealings with her until what seemed to be right in the middle of a very blessed ministry that she had going when she heard the Lord say “AFRICA NOW!” This time it was too powerful to ignore, and so she made plans to move to this little West African country called Liberia.

Through starting Bible classes in schools and knocking on doors in the neighborhoods in and around her community, a Ministry was established and she founded the Calvary Bible Church at 2150 West Madison Street where the Rev. William H. Bentley as of the time of this writing is the resident pastor. Many boys and girls were being reached through this work, and her ministry which was built in similar structure as the Boys & Girls Club of America was growing in strength and grace; and this, she would testify many years later, made her comfortable to the point that she began to feel maybe this was what God had intended for her.

However, while she was undergoing teacher’s training with CEF in Chicago as one of the area Directors, she heard the voice of God say “AFRICA NOW!”

She knew then that to obey was to have God’s best, but for a short while she contested his decision because she felt that at almost 50, she was too old to begin a ministry in Foreign Service. However, she also knew that he who had called her was faithful to send her, and so she heeded the call. She arrived in Liberia in February of 1966, rejoicing in the privilege of witnessing for Christ.

When **Ms. Stephens** first arrived in Africa with the blessing and support of CEF Chicago, she began an evangelism ministry which was similar to the work that she had been involved in at the Calvary Bible Church; and as the children of Liberia heard the Gospel and accepted Christ, they received bible training. Thus as a result of this, many of the children who were led to Christ and trained by her are now men and women today who are equipped, and are also winning other boys and girls and men and women to Christ.

Her Ministry in Africa became known as **Camp Bethesda**, and just like the Ministry she had operated back in her hometown of Chicago, it was children-centered. She was committed and dedicated to ministering to the whole individual, and so during camps which were operated at the end of the school year in Liberia, the children were not only taught the gospel, but they also learned to do arts and crafts on a smaller scale. So successful were her camps that both her children and their parents began to implore her to take her Ministry to the next level by converting it into a full blown school; but **Mother** **Stephens**, as she had come to be affectionately called and known, was not so sure about that, but just like she did with every uncertainty in her life, she decided to take it to her Lord in prayers.

**Mth. Stephens** loved the work she was involved in with her children, and it was safe to say at this point that her Ministry had become very successful. So being encouraged to convert her children’s camp into a school was another challenge in itself; but after much prayer and consideration she believed that the Lord was indeed behind the request for the conversion. However, rather than convert the camp to an ordinary school she was going to take it a step further and convert it into a boarding school for both boys and girls.

Well it would take a couple of years before **Mth. Stephens** would be able to see her work come to fruition, and in that time she spent it preparing for the arduous task ahead. She needed land big enough to facilitate a campus setting and also house a dormitory each for both boys and girls, and she would also need a support staff among other things; and like she had done countless times before, she set about her business with intense prayer and hard work.

She lobbied and was able to secure from the Liberian government a parcel of land on which to operate the boarding school; and she was also able to put together a support staff and a faculty to assist her in the running of the institution. So with everything in place and with a future that looked so bright and encouraging, **Mth. Stephens** and her staff would end 1982 on a high note with a Thanksgiving Service in avid anticipation for the coming year.

The year was 1983, and the month was March, and **Mth. Stephens** having been equipped with prayer and the necessary resources, opened the doors of her boarding school which she aptly named the **Bethesda Christian Mission School** (**BCMS**) which was located on the Shefflein Highway on the outskirts of the capital city, Monrovia. That first year the school was opened as an elementary school with an enrolment of 62 students (22 boys and 40 girls). The campus boasted of newly constructed cabins which served as the boys and girls’ dormitory, a chapel, a dining hall capable of seating up to 200 students, a water tower, a mission house, a sweet shop, a volleyball court and a soccer field, among other amenities.

When news of the new boarding school being run by the American missionary with the tan 1978 Ford E250 spread abroad the nation, **BCMS** became the boarding school that almost every child in and around the capital was imploring his/her parents to send them to. The school was soon upgraded to a Middle School and dormitories were erected to replace the cabins.

However, even the meteoric rise of **BCMS** did not deter **Mth. Stephens** from her objective because she always kept her focus narrowed on her vision. She wanted the children under her care to not only receive the gospel, but also receive the best education possible, while at the same time grow to be men and women of good repute and outstanding citizens of Liberia and the world.

Despite the many challenges in the country stemming primarily from the political tenor of this little West African nation, **BCMS** always seemed to weather the storm through the prayers and guidance of its Founder. However this will all prove way too cumbersome and dangerous for **Mth. Stephens** and her children when the political turmoil in the nation sparked in December of 1989; and by 1990 it had finally exploded into a full scale conflict with embers flaring up around the country.

Even when it became apparent that it would just be a matter of time before this little nation was plunged into a full scale war, and American citizens and foreign nationals were being evacuated, **Mth. Stephens** calmly refused to be evacuated from Liberia against the wishes of her staff and her family at home and back in the US. She feared for the lives of her children and she believed that to leave them and return to the US could very well put them in harm’s way; thus she thought that her presence would be enough to deter any destruction of lives and properties especially as it pertained to **BCMS**.

Thankfully students were out of school by the time the war had escalated, and so **Mth. Stephens** was on campus with just her family and a few faculty members and staff who also believed that being on campus was the safest place to be. No one, not even **Mth. Stephens** or anyone in her orbit, anticipated that this conflict would have been like no other where men would lose their mind of reasoning and result to the most heinous of crimes the nation had ever seen. **Mth. Stephens** was stripped of her only means of transportation and she and her family had to trek for hundreds of miles in an attempt to find somewhere safe, and little did anyone know that this would take a heavy toll on her health as she was well advancing in age at this time.

When it was safe enough for her to return to her campus, **Mth. Stephens** returned to **BCMS** with her family, but she was in poor health by this time. Sadly, the rough and tough conditions that she had had to deal with just to keep her and her family safe had caused her to develop stress which in turn fast tracked her declining health. Thus on April 8 1995 while surrounded by her family and few intimate friends, **Mth. Stephens** embraced the outstretched arms of her Lord and Savior and went on to glory to be with him. Her funeral service would be attended by many students past and present, along with a score of prominent Liberians and foreign nationals, including Dr. Amos Sawyer, the Interim president of the country at the time and a host of his ministers.

Legacy:

**Mth. Stephen**’s dream of raising young men and women worthy of being outstanding citizens of Liberia and the world did not falter nor fade with her passing, and today her legacy continues to be felt in her adopted nation of Liberia and the world beyond. She wanted the children under her care to not only receive the gospel, but to also receive the best education possible, while at the same time grow to be men and women of good repute and outstanding citizens of Liberia and the world. Today **BCMS** can boast of having its products in a lot of positions in the private sector and a few government offices in Liberia. Today **BCMS** can also make claim that a lot of her products are respectful and successful tax-paying citizens of other parts of Africa, Europe and North America.

It makes us so proud to say that the same fire that burned so long ago in our Founder has been set alight in us and has motivated us to rekindle our love and friendship for one another and recommit and rededicate ourselves to everything **Bethesda**.

So today our fervent hope is that tomorrow when the opportunity presents itself for somebody to write **OUR STORY**, they too should not be able to separate **OUR STORY** from the **STORY** of **BCMS**.