

Christian school in Liberia plans to rebuild after destruction

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MONROVIA, Liberia (BP)—It wasn't too long ago Eddie Gibson was visiting the Dellanna West O'Brien School in Liberia, ducking in and out of classrooms, talking and laughing with the teachers and students.

He remembers working hard to get some ceiling tiles fixed, so the school would be the best it could be.



The Dellanna West O'Brien school building was destroyed when a man in the community who was angry over a land dispute allegedly drove a bulldozer through the campus.

But Gibson went back to a different scene March 31.

Some weeks before, a man in the community who was angry over a land dispute allegedly drove a bulldozer through the buildings on the school's campus.

“Everything is down—pillars, foundations, everything,” Gibson said. “To do anything else with the school, we would have to take everything down and rebuild.”

For him, it’s heartbreaking and personal. A Liberia native, Gibson graduated from Liberian Baptist Theological Seminary before fleeing to Alabama during the country’s civil war in 1990. His heart stayed tied to Liberia, and he felt God had given him a vision to build schools there.

One was the Marla H. Corts Mission School, a pre-K to ninth grade school in Gibson’s hometown named after the widow of former Samford University President Tom Corts. Another was the Dellanna West O’Brien School, named after the late national Woman’s Missionary Union executive director. That school is located outside Monrovia, Liberia, and serves preschool through high school students.

‘We wanted to prepare people for life’

Gibson wanted the children to have a school within walking distance where they could learn life skills and, most importantly, grow as disciples of Jesus.

“We wanted to prepare people for life,” he said.

He bought the land for the Dellanna West O’Brien School in 2003 using funds raised through Eddie Gibson International Ministries, which is based in Birmingham. During his years in Alabama, he had served as a pastor of Baptist churches and earned a Master of Divinity degree from Beeson Divinity School.

He also became close to a number of Southern Baptist missions advocates, including Corts and O’Brien.

O’Brien “listened to my heart to come back to Liberia and serve,” Gibson said, noting that she became like a “missions auntie” to him.

And after she, her husband Bill and others accompanied Gibson on a vision trip there and encouraged him to keep going, he named the school after her.

The Dellanna West O'Brien School kept growing without incident until 2015, when the controversy over the land began. For the past six years, Gibson said he's been trying to resolve it in court.

'Praying for wisdom'

But since the situation escalated, he's now focused on helping the school decide what to do next and how to keep going.

"The students, the community, our ministry supporters—everyone wants us to rebuild to the glory of God," said Gibson, who also currently serves as pastor of Brewster Road Community Church in Birmingham. "We're praying for wisdom, praying to make the right decisions."

He said the people around the school love the school so much that they named the community surrounding it Dellanna. The impact has been broad. The school has provided jobs for some in the community and taught needed job skills to others. And Gibson himself has baptized both students and teachers who have decided to follow Jesus.

Despite everything that's happened to the school's facilities, approximately 300 students haven't stopped meeting. They've completed lessons outside under trees and sat under tarps when it's rained.

"I came here (on this recent trip) to thank them for not giving up on the school," Gibson said. "My heart is aching, but I'm trusting God."

For more information on efforts to rebuild the O'Brien School in Liberia, contact the [WMU Foundation](#).