



# RCA Missionary Update

## from the Johnsons



The Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN is its acronym in French) is the RCA's mission partner in Niger. Founded shortly after Niger's national independence in 1961, EERN is the oldest and largest Protestant denomination in this Muslim-majority (98 percent) country.

Located in the Sahara Desert, Niger is the world's poorest country (182nd out of 182 on the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index, a composite measure of life expectancy, education, and living standard), and 50 percent of its population is under the age of 15. EERN ministries reflect this context: they focus on evangelization, education, health, and community development.

Tom Johnson, an international development specialist, and his wife, Aichatou, represent RCA missions in Niger. They have three daughters, Marie-Florence, Laurey and Elisabeth.

### Niger facts:



- Population: 11,361,000
- Size: 1,266,700 square kilometers (slightly less than twice the size of Texas)
- Major religion: 98 percent Muslim

#### MINISTRY

Community Development

#### LOCATION

Niger

#### PARTNER

Evangelical Church of Niger,  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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Dear Friends,

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Our family in Niger wishes all of you a joyful Advent season, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! While we are far away from you right now in distance, we remain close to you in spirit and in prayer through our Lord, Jesus Christ.



*The Johnson family: Tom, Aichatou, Marie, Laurey and Ellie*

The school year at the Dogon Gao Bible School recently finished with the graduation of 16 students. While only a small number of these students plan on becoming full-time evangelists with the Nigerien church, they will all be witnesses for Christ in their various endeavors throughout this predominantly Muslim land. Indeed most of our students plan on returning to their villages where they will



*16 Dogon Gao Bible School graduates and their spouses*

be farmers and/or traders, consistent with the most common Hausa occupations. Our prayer is that they will now engage in these trades for the glory of God and that their lives will draw others to know Christ.

This year's graduation ceremony proved momentous for two reasons: 1) for the first time ever, the event was held in the school's new chapel. I've detailed in previous letters how the construction of the chapel was started by the staff and students at Dogon Gao using mud bricks after years of unsuccessfully waiting for outside funds to build us a new, expensive cement-block structure. After we began our humble efforts, a church in Nigeria learned of our plan and decided to fund the enlargement of the

structure, purchase steel doors and windows and to place a steel roof on it (we had planned a thatch roof). The Christian contractor for the work saw that the Nigerian church funds were insufficient for the building to be truly usable and contributed his own money for a floor and other

necessities. The student body at Dogon Gao then designated their harvest tithe from their fields for electrifying the church, which along with the help of the local missionary family permitted the purchase of lights and ceiling fans. The sense of pride among the Nigeriens for this accomplishment was contagious and likely contributed to: 2) the 300+ visitors at the graduation pledging and giving close to \$1,200 to improve the woefully inadequate student housing at the Bible School.

In my eight years in Niger, I've never seen the Christian community rise up to a challenge of this nature for a denominational project—helping their local churches, yes, but helping a denominational school—no. Too often, it seems like the local believers expect external gifts to fund these kinds of projects, so to see them initiating the effort to help their own Bible School students was gratifying. We pray that this may signal a change, perhaps even a spiritual awakening among the Nigerien Church. Other church harvest celebrations in our area have also raised record amounts of money for the church, so we are hopeful that this will be the start of a revival and of church growth for Niger, as people are starting to think “what can we do for the Church” rather than “what can the Church do for me?”

The fall term kept us quite busy. I taught three classes: English, Project Management in the Church and Christian Community Development. In addition, I continued supervising practical work with the Dogon Gao students in the afternoons, where we focus on improving and cleaning the school's campus. The school looks great and its upkeep shows others that we are serious in all our endeavors. Our next project will be to build a latrine for the single male students.

Aïchatou home-schooled the older girls in the morning, while our youngest, Ellie, stayed with the Director's daughter. Aïchatou had the honor of delivering the first Sunday sermon in the new chapel on November 29 when she also inaugurated the Advent season using the Revised Common Lectionary Scripture. The church calendar of seasons has yet to be introduced to Niger and our initial efforts to encourage seasonal Scripture and messages seem to be appreciated by the other Bible School staff—even if the students don't quite comprehend what we're doing. We're stressing that other churches world-wide are studying the same passages today, which reminds the Nigerien Christians, who are a tiny minority in this country (less than 1% of the population), that they are part of a worldwide body of believers.



*The new school chapel at Dogon Gao*

The school's goat and garden projects are producing mixed results. We're doing better with the goats, now experiencing the second round of births from each female, although we're still not getting twins, which are necessary for the financial sustainability of the project after the RCWS start-up funds finish. Our

kid birth weights are quite high, so we know it is not nutrition. Supposedly multiple births are more common in the second and third years of a nanny's life, so maybe we just need to wait until next year. We finished our billy pen and are keeping our three billies away from the nannies until mid-February so as not to risk kidding during the hot season (and suffering excessive losses). As for the garden, we found that some students are quite hard-working and did really great, while others made only half-hearted efforts to grow food. Still, the garden is a great asset for the school and for those who want to take advantage of it; they will be able to reap some great rewards!

Our final news to share is that we've been approved for our home assignment in the U.S. from mid-May through mid-August, 2010. Priority will be given to those churches that we didn't visit in 2007.

#### PRAYER AND PRAISES

1) We want to thank all our supporting churches for their continued commitment to us and to our ministry during these troubled economic times. Niger is a long-term mission field and we're thankful that we can stay here, when we know of other mission agencies and missionaries who have serious money problems. So, we give thanks for YOU, our partners in mission!

2) Pray for growth and renewal in the Nigerien church. Pray that local believers will increase in their enthusiasm and support in advancing the Great Commission in Niger. Pray that we'll be able to fund improvements for the Bible School's student housing needs. Pray also for upcoming elections to choose new leaders in our partner church, the EERN.

3) Pray for our upcoming home assignment, that it may be a time of rest and renewal for our family and that we may attend to several personal needs.

4) Pray for our family's physical and spiritual health. Pray for wisdom in raising three girls in the Nigerien bush.

5) Pray for the country of Niger as it faces threats to its internal security (terrorists/kidnappings) and challenges in its political stability due to its President changing the Constitution to stay in power.

In Christ,  
Tom, Aïchatou, Marie, Laurey and Ellie Johnson