



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 (174th out of 177 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, Aïchatou, 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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The last few months of 2008 were especially challenging for our family, as all has not been well with Aïchatou, who has been suffering from a mental illness. We saw a psychiatrist, spent a great deal of time in prayer and we benefited from the prayers of many others. As of this writing, things seem much better for her and for us. There have been many days, however, when we wondered what the future might hold and whether we should continue to stay in this remote, rural posting. The Lord has been gracious and has not given us more than we can handle, but many questions remain and we cannot do more than literally take "one day at a time" at this juncture.

One would imagine that most work would grind to a halt during such a time of crisis, but amazingly, it has been a very productive time for me in my ministry. After years of planning and talking, we have finally launched our goat project at the Dogon Gao Bible School. Our mission partner, the EERN, finally hired a project manager, Pastor Abdou Garba, in September and we have been working together side-by-side to prepare for the goats. Having a Nigerien colleague has made all the difference as it is evidence that the church is taking ownership of the work. We've built a fence, a shelter for the goats, a guardhouse, and a barn for the project using a combination of local and modern building materials.



Here's a picture of the day the goats arrived from the government breeding center.

These goats will be used to teach the Bible School students about modern livestock husbandry techniques, but their offspring will be distributed among the students to help them with income generation, so that they'll have more resources to pay their school fees and to support their families, and once they are pastors, their churches. A technician from the breeding center will make weekly

visits to ensure that we follow recommended practices concerning their health and nutrition. The project has the potential to make a huge impact in the lives of these students, and by extension, the Church in Niger.

In other news, my long-time assistant, Usman, left our employ. At first, we were told that he just wanted a change and hoped to pursue some other opportunities abroad. When those didn't pan out, he came back to the Maradi area months later and started making some trouble for us with the government labor authorities over perceived benefits he felt he was entitled to. It was quickly resolved, but it has been sad to watch a former friend and colleague turn bitter. His replacement, Ayouba, has proven to be an excellent worker and we are really appreciative of his enthusiasm and dedication.

Our two older girls have been experiencing their first year of preschool with their volunteer teacher, Elizabeth. They are enjoying their classroom, which was built as an addition to our house in 2008. Aïchatou spends the morning with the baby, Ellie, and also does sewing, cooking and baking for the house. Ellie is busy crawling all over the house at 10 months and, despite having only two teeth, enjoys eating whatever is placed before her.

Finally, here's a photo of our family on Christmas Day. We spent the day at our home by roasting two goats (not from the school herd!) and Aïchatou prepared a rice and sauce meal for all those staff and students who stayed at the school. New Year's Day had us in Zinder, where all six of Aïchatou's brothers and sisters and their families brought in 2009 at their parents' home.



PRAYERS AND PRAISES

1. We give thanks for the arrival of 25 nanny goats and 25 young females at Dogon Gao. We pray that the goats will stay healthy and that they will serve the needs of the Bible School and its students.
2. We give thanks for Aïchatou's improved mental health and we pray that she will not suffer again in this area of her life.
3. We pray that 2009 will be a year of blessing for us in our ministry and for your families as well. We pray that the global financial downturn will not hinder our work in the mission field.
4. We are grateful for competent Nigerien colleagues who bring a love of the Lord to their work. We pray for those who enter Christian service with the primary goal of self-enrichment and who have little interest in real ministry.
5. I am thankful for the new laptop that I just received to replace the one that was irreparably damaged.

In Christ,

Tom and Aïchatou

Tom, Aïchatou, Marie, Laurey and Ellie

To access extensive information about the Johnsons, or to make a financial gift for their ministry, simply go to www.rca.org/johnson.