



# 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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On March 24, at approximately 4:25 a.m. we welcomed Elisabeth Gabrielle into the world. She was born in Aïchatou's parents' home in Zinder, Niger, although the original plan had been to go to a nearby clinic for the delivery. We're pleased to report that both baby and mother are doing well and there were no complications. Here's a photo of the family on the day of the naming ceremony—held one week after the birth. The second photo is of Ellie at 7½ weeks. As you can see, we're a family full of girls, with dad being in the clear minority!



Our family was largely split up during the last half of March and most of this past April because of the baby and other activities. Aïchatou and the girls stayed with her parents in Zinder, while I worked at the Dogon Gao Bible School to supervise the finishing of our classroom addition (see picture below). Staying with family (for up



to 40 days!) before and after a birth is pretty typical in Niger, but with the construction going on, it was better that Marie (4) and Laurey (2½) not be around too much, as we all know how curious little kids can be. Besides, they spent about four weeks with their Zinder grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, strengthening those ties and greatly added to their French and Hausa vocabularies. At the end of April, I went to the RCA Africa Missionary retreat in Kenya, so we were again apart for a week. Normally the whole family is invited to these

retreats, but traveling with a new baby and two children under 4 years of age for a four day meeting didn't seem like that good of an idea.

We're very excited about our new house addition, as it was completed just in the nick of time for our growing family. For this we are truly grateful to my home church, Ebenezer Reformed in Leighton, IA, which largely financed (and even started constructing) the building. We added a much needed storage room, a classroom for the girls and two partially-enclosed bays, of which one will be used as a garage and the other one for project materi-

als. Because we will be home-schooling our girls, as there is no other English-language instruction nearby, we decided that a separate classroom would create the best learning



environment for them, as I currently use space in our home as my primary office and Aïchatou has a baby to take care of and various household tasks to accomplish. We've been preparing an adjacent one-bedroom apartment (originally built for a single missionary) for a RCA volunteer teacher, whom we hope to recruit each year. We believe we're ready to start pre-school in the fall as both the apartment and the classroom are now largely equipped and ready. There are potentially three other missionary kids in the same age range within 3 miles of us and we'll see if they are interested in joining our little school.

Our first teacher candidate decided in early April that she wouldn't come to Niger, but the RCA Volunteer Bureau quickly found Elizabeth Wierengo of Muskegon, MI as her replacement. Elizabeth is a recent Cross-cultural Studies graduate, but was herself home-schooled, has a younger sibling the same age as Marie and has worked as a nanny. Elizabeth is certified in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and would like to also do that with Nigeriens. She only has about four months to raise about \$10,000 for her 10 months in Niger (round-trip airfare, insurance, orientation, monthly stipend, vaccinations, etc). The plan is for her to start in August. If you (or your church) would like to contribute to her fundraising,

please send a check to: Reformed Church in America; PO Box 19381; Newark, NJ 07195 and write Elizabeth Wierengo/Niger in the memo section. We would all be most grateful.

In other news, we're slowly but surely advancing on our plans to get a working irrigated garden and a goat herd started at the Bible School this fall. We've had a small setback with the failure of our multi-voltage water pump (connected to the wind and solar system) due to an electrical problem, but we believe that can be replaced. We have a back-up system in place with a second pump that uses electricity from the national grid for our current needs. School has ended this week and the students will either return to their villages or try to farm here at the school during the upcoming rainy season (usually starts in late May/early June).

#### PRAISES AND PRAYERS

1. We give thanks for the healthy birth of Elisabeth Gabrielle and the quick recovery of Aïchatou. We're proud to add Ellie to our family. Please pray that she will grow into a beautiful woman who loves Christ.
2. We're thankful for the completion of our house addition. We pray that the classroom for our girls will guarantee that our children's education will never be an issue that complicates our ability to conduct ministry in Niger or at Dogon Gao, which happens to many missionary families. Please pray that we'll always be able to attract volunteer teachers. We're grateful for Elizabeth W. and please pray that she will be able to complete her fundraising quickly and will have a positive experience in Niger with our girls as their first teacher.
3. Pray for abundant rains for this next growing season that is soon to be begin. Pray that our Bible School students and their family will have enough to eat during these "lean" months while they await the new harvest. Pray that the School will soon be able to provide other opportunities to teach them how to better provide for themselves.
4. Pray for the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Niger (EERN) and its leaders as they make decisions to advance the Kingdom in Niger.

In Christ,

*Tom and Aïchatou*

Tom, Aïchatou, Marie-Florence, Laurey and Ellie Johnson