



RCA Missionary Update

from the Johnsons

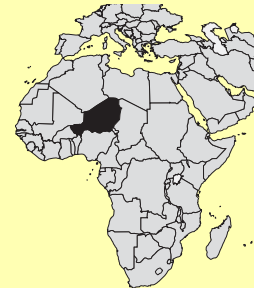
The Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN is its acronym in French) is the RCA's mission partner in Niger. Founded shortly after Niger's national independence in 1961, EERN is the oldest and largest Protestant denomination in this Muslim-majority (98 percent) country.

Located in the Sahara Desert, Niger is the world's poorest country (177th 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 two daughters, Marie-Florence and Laurey.

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,

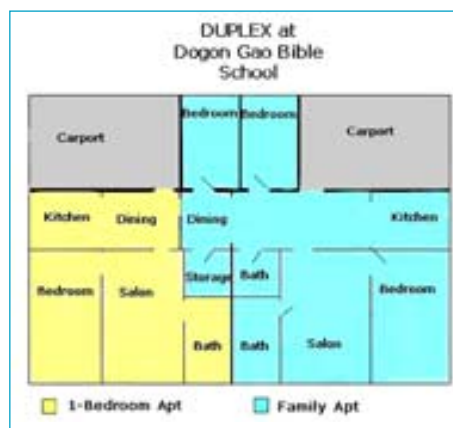
June 2007

We are finally moved into our home at Dogon Gao Bible School! After three months of repairs, painting, constructing boundary fences and gates, installing floor tile, redoing the septic system, and making cabinets for the kitchen and bathroom, we moved into the home at the end of April. We were by no means finished with the work either. Once we were in the house, we had to unpack and find room for all of our things—after four years of marriage, four other residences, and two kids—despite a lack of storage space in our new house, which has one closet and a tiny “storage room” that is largely taken up by our solar system batteries and tools. In the end, we got rid of a lot of “stuff” that we concluded that we no longer need for life out here. Even today, we continue to do some small repair work (fixing a leaky roof) and touch-up painting on the house.

So, what is our new house like? Well, the house has a complicated history. Originally conceived to house single Tom and another single RCA missionary (Barbara K.) in remote Dogon Gao, it was first constructed as two one-bedroom apartments. It was a very early joint effort

between the RCA and their partners in Niger, the EERN, when email was still fairly new to Niger and the issues of internal responsibility weren't at all clear within the EERN. Needless to say, the process of getting it built was a learning experience for everyone involved. Shortly after it was finished, it became apparent that Barbara wouldn't ever live there and that I was getting married. The RCA agreed to add two new bedrooms to make one side quarters for a family, which involved knocking out a wall and slightly reducing the size of the other apartment (see diagram) and that required some extra funds. (Thanks to all the churches and individuals who helped!) With the arrival of our two girls, it was gradually concluded that this second one-bedroom apartment would be used for future volunteer

teachers who would come to teach our children, which would permit us to stay at the Bible school. In fact, we're ready to recruit a teacher for 2008 and would like your help in finding suitable candidates. (See more details at the end of this letter for what is involved.) Ideally, we'd also like to make one more addition to the house in the near future by adding a classroom for teaching our girls, plus some more space for storage.



We do like the house despite its quirks, and it has quickly become home after so many years of annual moves. As you can see from the diagram, one bedroom is off our dining room. The floors of the addition slope slightly toward the exterior. Many of the walls are rather "rough" due to poor workmanship by the masons. The second bedroom is infested with termites and we are constantly checking to see if they are eating any of the furniture and applying poison behind them.



Tom and Aïchatou in the house at Dogon Gao

We still don't have any glass windows (just metal shutters), which means dust and rain come in. Water has been a small but manageable problem. It is being pumped by a gasoline-powered portable generator (that often breaks down) until the multi-voltage pump arrives from the U.S. for the wind system. We've experienced a large number of electrical cuts, too, although we do have solar backup. It is good for running some lights and perhaps two floor fans, but too much else and the batteries deplete rapidly. Other than those things, we're getting along just fine!

We are, indeed, enjoying the Dogon Gao community, although our interactions have been rather limited. When we first arrived at the end of the hot season, the Bible school students were toward the end of their semester and their program was already fixed. We were also busy with unpacking and fixing up. Then the rains came (early) and the students are now spending their mornings and evenings in their fields (if they didn't leave to farm in home villages). We've set up a tire swing for the dozens of students' children who are here (as well as for our kids) and they appear to love it. We also made a volleyball court, but no one seems to be around when it is cool enough to play. I'm hopeful in the summer months to come that I can find opportunities to do some language work with the students to improve my Hausa and perhaps to help them in their French and English. We'll also do some tree planting now that the rains have come. Irrigated gardening will be started once we know we have a constant (and inexpensive) supply of water. I recently began a summer leadership series with leaders of the Maradi EERN churches and some of the EERN staff (at their request!), who decided to meet once a month to learn more about healthy organizations.

I received some bad news since my last letter. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been a partner in this ministry since I began my mission career. They are making some changes in their mission organization and structure, largely due to a significant drop in funds available for missions. My PCUSA supervisor notified me in April that they will not continue supporting me past the end of my original seven-year term in June of 2008. I was very

disappointed to learn this, but the RCA has promised that they will work to pick up the rest of the cost of keeping us in the field. We had programmed to undertake our next home assignment in Oskaloosa, Iowa, this fall to visit our supporters, and we'll need to use some of the time to develop relationships with new churches and individuals, too. Please contact your synod mission stewardship coordinator if you wish to schedule us for your church.

Prayer and praises:

- Give thanks for our new home at Dogon Gao. Pray that both Aïchatou and I will soon be actively involved in the Bible school's life.
- Give thanks for the early rains that have come to our part of Niger. The longer rainy season should be good for the crops if the rains continue to be timely. Pray for the students' fields and this time of shortage before the new crops are ready.
- Pray for the leadership workshops that have begun. Pray that they will have a positive effect on church leadership and administration in the future.
- Pray for our time in the U.S. this fall. Pray that we'll find some time for rest and also be able to visit the majority of our supporting churches, and that we'll be able to replace the support lost by the PCUSA.
- Pray for Steve D. from Pella, a Northwestern (IA) College student who will stay with us for six weeks as part of a summer mission experience program. Pray that he will have a good experience and will sense where God is leading him.

Share this with possible teaching candidates:

Thomas and Aïchatou Johnson, RCA missionaries in rural Niger, need volunteers to come for nine to 11 months at a time, beginning in August or September of 2008, to teach their preschool-age girls, who will be four and a half and three years old. The RCA Mission Volunteer Program coordinates teaching volunteers for missionaries with children who live in remote areas or places where English-language instruction is not available. A furnished one-bedroom apartment will be provided; it has a kitchen, living room, running water, electricity, and basic Internet access and adjoins the Johnson house at Dogon Gao Bible School. This would be ideal for a single person or for a couple with no children at home. Other volunteer opportunities with the ministry could be found for a spouse who accompanies a teacher in Niger. Relevant degree and/or experience preferred. Recent graduates encouraged. Fundraising is required. Contact Jay Harsevoort, coordinator for volunteers, at (800) 968-3943 for more information.

Tom and Aïchatou Johnson