



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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Niger's rainy season will soon come to an end. We thank God for the adequate and timely rains that we've experienced this year. Harvest has already begun and it appears that it will be a good year for many Nigeriens. As of this writing, Niger's Muslims are celebrating Ramadan and while this doesn't affect the Christian population in any direct sort of way, the markets are particularly full of food, since a great deal of feasting takes place before and after the daily Ramadan fast and we appreciate the greater variety than what we normally find. Otherwise in this time of changing seasons, we'll experience a few more warm days now that the big clouds are disappearing, but the "cool" season of 60 degree nights and 90 degree days will soon be here.

During the growing season, the Dogon Gao Bible School isn't in session. A majority of the students—particularly those that are married—stay at our little campus, as they can farm ground here at the school. However some do leave us, whether to farm at their home villages or to visit family members elsewhere in Niger. So life changes here without the formal routine of the school day. Around mid-August, when the millet and sorghum are tall enough to no longer need attention—the students return and the school term recommences. Six weeks later, we take a fall break so that the students can conduct their harvest.

Now that the students have returned, I'm working with them—literally—to build a fence for the school's goat herd. The students are divided into four groups of about 15 each and from Monday - Thursday, I supervise their two weekly hours of labor that they contribute to the school. It takes a lot of time to coordinate two hours of work for 15 students. Although they are mostly young men in their 20s, they are largely unskilled and most would rather be doing something else, so it is a challenge to get it all together and to accomplish something substantial. Furthermore, 3 - 5 p.m., the time when we work, is often the hottest period of the day. It is about all this guy can do to last two constant hours in Niger's tropical sun (even with a hat!). Once we finish with the goat pens, we'll also fence in land for a school garden (thanks to funds from Faith Reformed in Zeeland, Michigan). The overall work we do will vary over time, but our general goal is to improve the facilities of the school, teach some practical work skills and, at some point, generate some income for the school and the students.

Many of you are aware that we had an assistant, Usman, who has been working with us for almost six years. He is a talented jack-of-all-trades whose knowledge of French, English, Hausa and Fulani was as useful as his ability to navigate Niger's roads and confusing markets and shops.

Usman left us in mid-September, saying that he wanted a change. We don't know more as he didn't say more, although his friend told us that he wasn't unhappy with us. While we were initially confused and disappointed, the Lord had an immediate replacement for us in a young married man named Ayouba (Job in Hausa), who lives in a nearby village and was teaching the students' children at their pre-school here at Dogon Gao. He actually has a degree from a Nigerian polytechnic school where he studied mechanics and welding. We'll employ him for a two-month trial before making any final decisions, but he seems to have a lot of potential for us and for the Bible School.



Marie and Laurey with teacher Elizabeth

In August, we welcomed Miss Elizabeth W. from Ravenna, Michigan to our home and Dogon Gao. She was recruited through RCA Volunteer Services to start teaching pre-school (in English) for our two girls in the mornings. They are in class from 8:00 a.m-12:00 p.m., with a 30 minute break at 10:00. They started school in early September and so far things have been going well, although it took Laurey over a week to accept the schedule. As you may know, we have a separate room dedicated for the classroom, which is exactly halfway between our house and the teacher's attached apartment. This has proved helpful in creating a neutral and nurturing environment, as all the school "stuff" stays there. Aïchatou has used this "freedom" from watching the older kids to travel with our baby, Ellie, and her sister to Lagos, Nigeria to visit her brother and participate in a prayer retreat. Elizabeth is also getting her first full-time taste of teaching English to the Dogon Gao students, an area where she has training (TESL/TEFL), but little practical experience.



Aïchatou, her father and Ellie

PRAYERS AND PRAISES

1. We are grateful for a good growing season and we thank God for a bountiful harvest in the Dogon Gao area. Rains were generally good this year, but there are always pockets that didn't get enough rain or, in some cases, had too much and we need to pray for those people.
2. Pray for the Bible School as we are making real progress in developing productive activities to support the work and training at the School. We're also thankful for the hiring of a new manager, Abdou Garba, for the goat herd and other productive enterprises. Pray that he will lead the school into financial sustainability. The school seems to be drawing a lot of positive attention from outside Christian organizations, which is good, but we also sense that the devil is trying hard to frustrate our plans.
3. Pray for Usman's future and that God will guide him as he seeks new opportunities. Pray that Ayouba will indeed be a god-send for both the RCA missionaries and Dogon Gao's Bible School.
4. Please pray for our family as we have recently undergone a serious spiritual attack that had the potential to harm our ministry in Niger. We can't go into more details, but know that it appears that the attack was repelled. We pray that this "rebuff" will lead to even greater "fruit" in our lives and work.
5. Pray for Elizabeth's adjustment to Niger, for her time with the girls and for her experiencing teaching English to students who have almost no English.

In Christ,

Tom and Aïchatou

Tom, Aïchatou, Marie, Laurey and Ellie Johnson