



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:

September 2009



So much has happened since our last letter to you in June. We're now in the tail-end of what has been a roller-coaster rainy season. Much of Niger experienced only erratic, spotty rains

with long periods between showers and few places will reap a good harvest. However, at the Dogon Gao Bible School we've been blessed with timely rains and crops look as good as I've ever seen them, particularly for those who had access to fertilizer or livestock manure. We're very thankful and we know your prayers helped.

As promised, this summer we created a school garden with 50 6 x 8 meter plots from funds from Faith Reformed in Zeeland, MI. We built four cement water basins that are capable of holding 12 barrels/drums each and ran underground 2" pvc piping to them from the school's water supply, so they could be filled up quickly. We fenced this garden against Niger's myriad number of wandering goats, sheep, cows, camels and donkeys and placed a "goat grating" at the door so that animals couldn't easily come in, should the gate be left open. The



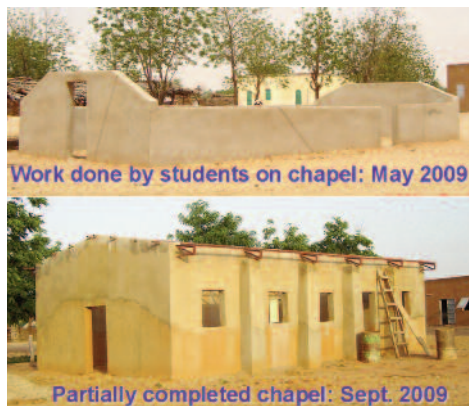
Two students preparing their garden near one of the water basins.

student response has been enthusiastic and almost all of the garden plots are under cultivation.

We're charging students rent for these plots (\$2/year), so that we'll have funds available for repairs and to replace community garden tools and also to teach them to take responsibility for the garden. In return they get a fenced-in garden plot, 3 moringa trees on each plot (the leaves are highly nutritious), two tomato plants and manure from the goat project. A SIM missionary colleague arrived with improved lettuce, eggplant, okra (gumbo), water melon and green pepper seeds and we're selling those to the students at cost. Several are asking about cabbage and potatoes and we'll see how we can help get those planted as well.

The goat project is taking up less of our time now that we're finished with constructing their facilities, but we certainly can't neglect it either, as herd health issues always exist. The rainy season brought problems with scours among the kids and some of our first-time mother goats aren't proving to be good milkers for their little ones. Along with the weak goats born during the hot season, we've lost more kids than we should have. A government veterinary technician is visiting us weekly and we're learning a lot from him—but mostly from trying to solve problems after they arrive and not learning how to prevent them. Otherwise, the natural pastures are in good shape now and the goats are grazing more and more and relying less on our stocked feed. A billy pen has been built and we'll soon have a more organized breeding program for the nannies. We do have a technical issue that we'll need some help with: how to build a machine that shreds sorghum stalks so that the goats can get the maximum benefit possible from this quality and inexpensive feed source. Any ideas?

The small mud-brick and thatch chapel that the students and I built in May took a marvelous detour to becoming something bigger and better. A former Nigerien church member now living in Abuja, Nigeria visited the school this summer and was pleased with the students' efforts. As her deceased husband had once promised to help the school with a chapel, the widow and her church decided that they would like to complete the church by raising the walls and adding a steel roof, plus steel doors and windows. For the first time in its history, the Dogon Gao Bible School should soon have a real



Before and after photos of our future student chapel: the first photo shows student-only work, while the second photo shows the progress after an Abuja, Nigeria church agreed to pay for the chapel's completion.

chapel (instead of squeezing into a classroom)! I believe there's a faith lesson here in that the funds for the chapel never arrived until the students and teachers first acted in faith by building a simple structure with the resources at hand. Here in the Nigerien church, people have been conditioned to think they can do nothing until the outside funds first come. Sadly this too often means that little gets accomplished in the church as people believe they have nothing to contribute. Not a very biblical or healthy worldview!

In my last letter I announced that Aïchatou would be working with the Words of Hope-sponsored studio in

Niger to produce health messages in Hausa that would be played on the church's regularly radio programs. We've had to postpone this project, as no volunteers were found to teach our girls. Therefore, Aïchatou is now the girls' teacher and she spends her morning with the two older girls in their classroom and the afternoons preparing for the next day, using Sonlight™ home school materials.

Ellie is being watched during these times by our guard's oldest daughter. So far so good, as Aïchatou enjoys this new-found "mission" for her time and she seems "brighter" than before.



Our three girls in August, 2009.

The Bible School started its fall term on August 15 and I've resumed my afternoons supervising the required "practical work" of the male students for the good of the school. Since it is too wet to make mud bricks, we've focused our attention on the garden and in improving the school's overall appearance. Additionally, for the first time ever, I'm teaching three courses to the Bible Students. Year 2 students are being taught "Christian Community Development" and I'm instructing Year 4 students in "Project Management in the Church." I'm teaching in French with a Hausa translator. I'm also teaching a combined class of Year 3 and Year 4 students in English, continuing where Elizabeth W, the girls' teacher in 2008-09, left off. As you can see, we're keeping quite busy!

PRAYER AND PRAISES.

- Give thanks for a good and timely rainy season for us at the Bible School. Pray for the many Nigeriens, though, who aren't as fortunate, and will struggle this year to feed their families due to a poor harvest.
- Pray for the garden and for the sheep projects that both will be fruitful and help solve the students' concerns for income and food.
- Pray for Aïchatou and the girls as they try home schooling together. Pray that it will be a rewarding experience for them.
- We're thankful for the spiritual retreat that we held in June with Christian Reformed Church in North America colleagues who work in Niger. We are finding more and more ways to share and work together in Niger because of our common values and outlooks.
- Pray for Tom's teaching and for his ongoing ministry to improve the quality of the school's facilities and its overall functioning.

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

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