



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 (182nd out of 182 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

PARTNERS

Evangelical Church of Niger,
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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Dear Friends,

December 2011



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from our family to yours! We wish you all the joy of the season as brothers and sisters in Christ prepare our hearts for the coming of the Messiah, the Promised One of God.

Our fall has been a full one at the Dogon Gao Bible School and there is much news to share. In our last letter, we were waiting for our two volunteers, Ashley and Anna, to arrive in Niger after Hurricane Irene interrupted their flights out of JFK. They arrived safely, though an error on their reported arrival time meant that no one was at the airport to collect them when they landed! Fortunately, the young women had my cell number and a kind airport security officer loaned them his phone so that they could reach me and let me know that they were in Niger (one day earlier than I had been notified!).

We left Anna (from Colts Neck, NJ) in Niamey to assist our RCA colleagues, the Beebouts, while we drove back with Ashley (from Oskaloosa, IA) to rural Maradi. After a few days to get settled, Ashley began teaching Marie and Laurey with the Sonlight™ home

school curriculum, which comes with detailed teachers' guides. Meanwhile, Aïchatou started doing preschool with Ellie for two hours each morning. Ashley can only be with us for one term, as she must return to Central College in Pella to complete her student teaching requirements so that she can graduate in Spring of 2012. So, Anna will replace her as the girls' teacher when she leaves, as she'll be in Niger for at least nine months.



Ashley with Marie and Laurey in their classroom.

Our biggest challenge this quarter has been our lack of a water pump! One day after Ashley arrived, an electrical storm damaged our pump in the midst of it pumping water. We have a large hand-dug well at the school, so we had to open that and our community of 100-some people has had to rely on a bucket and a rope to get water for over 2½ months. While a multi-voltage pump that works with solar panels (along with lightening arrestors) is in route from northwest Iowa supporting churches, the good folks at Colts Neck Reformed church voted to send us the funds to purchase a 220v pump locally that we are now in the process of installing. Poor Ashley only had one day of running water at Dogon Gao before having to resort to bucket baths and having all her water delivered to her door in 6-gallon jugs (as have we)!

At the Bible School, we learned that our director for the past 18+ years will be transferred to another post in our partner church denomination at the end of 2011. Our new director comes from a large church in neighboring Maradi, though I've never worked with him. We're very hopeful that he will lead the school in some positive changes and reforms that have long been needed. Otherwise, my school involvement has continued with teaching four classes and supervising the student labor. Additionally, with funds from Fairview Reformed (IL), we built a small "pre-school" room for the children of our Bible School students using our pressed bricks (see photo). While their parents are in Bible classes, our students' children can now receive some structured instruction and supervision in their own classroom, as we've lacked a suitable space for this purpose. We hope to have the classroom all painted and ready for children when the new school year starts in January 2012. Finally, we distributed 35-odd goats (and some normal ones, too, to students right before the end of the term. They'll be expected to return offspring back to the school in the future as a form of repayment



The new pre-school classroom building at Dogon Gao with external closet.



A student receives his goat.

We welcomed our RCA Mission supervisor, Rev. Derrick Jones, to Niger in mid-November. Unlike previous visits, he was able to spend several days with us at the Bible School and experience first-hand what our lives are like. Too often we're together only in meetings or cross-country car trips to see various church projects during his time in Niger.

Our next month will keep us moving as we take Ashley back to Niamey for her return home, pick up Anna and then traverse the country to spend Christmas with Aïchatou's family in Zinder. We'll likely be back at Dogon Gao for New Year's Day.

PRAYERS AND PRAISES

- We give thanks for our two volunteers, Anna and Ashley, who are helping us educate our children and who are learning what life is like for believers outside of the U.S. Pray that God will work in these two young women's lives and that He will protect them while they are with us. Pray that we'll find a volunteer teacher for Fall 2012 (as we'll go on home assignment in January 2013).
- Pray for our new Bible School Director and that he will lead the school with integrity and wisdom. Pray for the new students who will arrive in January, that they are being truly called to ministry.
- We're thankful for our new pump from Colts Neck. Pray that the replacement solar-powered pump will soon arrive, this will let us reactivate our school gardens.
- Pray for our family's safety as we travel back and forth from Maradi to Niamey to Zinder in the upcoming month. Because of the poor harvest in Niger this fall and growing poverty, crime is rising and we also ask for protection from that threat, as we do feel the need to add extra precautionary measures here.
- Pray that the goats the students received may be a blessing in their lives and that the students will use them to bless others.

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.