



Update from Tom Johnson December 2021

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:1–2).*

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! With the birth of Jesus, a great light has been given to guide all the people on earth into truth! May the light of our Savior brighten your life and illuminate your path this holiday season.

2021 has been a remarkable year for our family on so many fronts. For example, a) I left Many Hands for Haiti and began a sabbatical with no idea of the future; b) Aïchatou was hospitalized and then came home; c) We purchased our first-ever house in Pella, IA; d) we started the college-search process for our senior, Marie; e) our youngest, Thekla, began Pre-K; f) Aïchatou began working outside of the home and g) our prayers for a suitable new assignment led to my new ministry role as the Director of Equipping French-speaking Christian Leaders for the Coram Deo Association. We're thankful for God's faithfulness during this year of great change and unexpected developments.

I began my new placement with Coram Deo, based in Holland, MI, on October 1, although I will work out of my Pella, IA home. Coram Deo has already trained 100 people in their English-language commissioned pastor program and recently launched a Spanish version. French is the third most-spoken language in North America and one that is growing with recent immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean.



In this job, I am charged with reaching out to French-speaking ministry leaders and offering to help them obtain the credentials and training they need to become pastors or to further become equipped in their existing roles. In the short term, we will likely focus on immigrants and refugees from French-speaking countries. Many of these people are Christians and they want to worship with their fellow immigrants in their native languages, but they need trained pastors and other assistance in navigating U.S. and state laws for operating a church or ministry.

We're already discovering Congolese immigrants (Congo is officially a French-speaking nation, although over 200 languages are spoken there) in the Midwest that have started churches, but they are lacking credentialed pastors and the proper recognition to conduct ministry. Ideally, we'll identify individuals that will be interested in going through our competency-based training (10 competencies must be obtained in a 2-3 year process for a pastor) that can be done online.

I'll serve as the supervisor for these students and help them complete their requirements and evaluate their progress through monthly mentoring sessions and the submission of assignments. This is an alternative approach to residential study and/or seminary, as we will work with those who are already active in church and ministry leadership, but because of age, finances, and location would not otherwise be able to pursue more formal studies. Because I can read and converse in both French and English, we can assist those who have a French educational

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background (those who studied in Haiti and French-speaking Africa) but are probably not capable of full-time English studies.

On the family side, the older three girls are active in theater, speech, marching band, and choir. Marie sang, danced, and acted as “Lead Player” in the Pella Christian High production of Pippin, while Laurey was in the ensemble. Ellie performed in the eighth-grade play “Arabian Nights” and will continue acting in drama class this winter. Fall also brought us to the reality of college searching for Marie, as she will graduate in the spring of 2022! She’s applied to Dordt University in Sioux Center, IA, Northwestern University-St. Paul (MN), and Wheaton College in Illinois and wants to study music education and perhaps minor in worship arts. Laurey, now a junior, is right behind her and has begun looking into college programs, as well. Aïchatou has been busy working for a local ministry that helps trafficked teenagers.

I do have a specific financial request. Coram Deo, RCA Global Mission, and I have discovered that we need a bigger travel budget to meet potential French-background churches in Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Michigan, New York, and Canada (we have potential leads in all of these areas). While we intend to conduct the majority of the ministry online, many initial meetings still must be held face-to-face to build trust, explain our approach, and respond to questions. If your church has some end-of-the-year funds to invest in this ministry, we would be grateful. You can give those funds here: www.rca.org/johnson.



The Johnson family (left-to-right) Aïchatou, Marie, Ellie, Thekla, Laurey, and Tom

PRAYERS AND PRAISES

1. We’re very thankful for God’s providence in 2021. We’ve had many uncertain days this year and yet we have seen God answer our prayers and provide us with direction when we needed it the most.
2. Pray for Marie and Laurey as they consider their post-secondary education options, including where to attend college.
3. Pray that God will lead us to Francophone churches and individuals whom we can help in leadership development, pastor credentialing, and church growth. Pray that we will have the necessary resources to get started.