



March 2022

Dear Friends,

2022 is already proving to be a year of challenges and surprises for many. As I write this, Russia is in Ukraine, fuel prices are going up and upsetting travel budgets, Aïchatou is in the hospital, I'm getting close to starting pastor training for our first French-language students, the girls are active in drama and speech events and Marie must soon decide what college to attend. Those are just a few of the situations that we're dealing with. Now is the time to live by faith and not by sight!

First, let me share Aïchatou's situation. As Christmas 2021 approached, we started seeing signs that all was not well with her, although she told us she was staying on her oral medications (she wasn't). When it came time to meet with her psychiatric care provider for a regular check-up in early January, she refused to go, claiming she wasn't sick and didn't need any treatment. As the month progressed, she withdrew from family life and had trouble staying focused on her work. We knew she needed medical attention (which she denied) and began the wearisome process of seeking court-ordered treatment. It took four weeks for this to occur from start to finish, but she finally was sent to a behavioral health treatment center in Bettendorf, IA. She will spend over four weeks there, as it takes at least that long for her injection to take effect.

Meanwhile, we still have a home to run, kids to send to school, and a ministry job with Coram Deo and the RCA to perform. We were always hopeful that we could find a few French-language students within the first year to begin the pastor training process and God led us to the International French Fellowship in Cedar Rapids, IA, which is primarily a Congolese immigrant congregation. Their current pastor, though, has been in the U.S. for almost 20 years and pastors two other small Iowa churches. He has identified five candidates that are ready to receive pastoral training and three of them are not strong enough in English to study in that language, as they previously studied in French in Congo. We're now at the point where everyone has agreed, in principle, to begin the training, we just need the agreement to be signed and a starting date to be determined. While we will likely have some in-person training, most of the two-year program will be online and each individual can go at their own pace.



The Midwest has many recent immigrant congregations that worship in French, often using another church's building.

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Day-to-day I've been keeping busy translating materials or looking for French equivalents in preparation for our studies to begin. I have also been in contact with other French speakers from Grand Rapids, Quebec, and New York, among a few other places, to explain our training program. I believe once we get our first group of Congolese students enrolled, their networks will help us identify other candidates who will be interested in training, too. As I've mentioned in other letters, the Midwest has tens of thousands of French-speaking immigrants and refugees coming here to work various agro-processing jobs—particularly in meat-packing. Many studied in their home nation's schools, which follow a French language curriculum and are capable of becoming faith leaders in their communities and churches, but still need additional biblical and theological training, which Coram Deo can provide.

And finally, our home has been a whirlwind with three girls performing in band and choir concerts, large group and individual speech contests, and eighth grade and high school plays. Marie and Laurey went to the All-State Large Group festival for their One-Act Play and Marie's Readers' Theater production. Additionally, Laurey had two events (Storytelling and Improv) advance to the Individual All-State Speech competition. Ellie performed choral, band, and acting pieces for the middle school festival and received mostly superior ratings. Additionally, Marie is now to the point where she must decide which college she wants to attend for a music education major next fall, having applied to four (Northwestern-St. Paul; Dordt, Wheaton, and Northern Iowa) and waiting to find out how much financial aid and scholarships each can offer.



Marie and Laurey were in the One-Act Large Group Play "Elephant's Graveyard" that went to All-State in March. Marie is on the right and Laurey is the clown (center).

PRAYERS AND PRAISES:

1. Pray for Aïchatou's hospitalization and new medicine to get her back on track with her mental health and work and family. Pray not only for the medicine to be effective, but pray the Lord will help her understand she needs to commit to regular treatment. Give thanks that the courts recognized her condition and required her to be treated (against her will).
2. Pray that Coram Deo's first group of Francophone pastoral students will soon begin their two-year formation. Thank the Lord for sending them to us and pray that soon more French-speakers will seek out this affordable and practical form of competency-based pastoral training.
3. Pray that the Lord will lead Marie to choose the best college for her and that He will provide for all her needs while in school. We're thankful that she has several good options.
4. Pray for the possibility to start a French-language worship service in Des Moines, IA. It's too early to say more, but there may be some opportunities to gather with French speakers in the metro area.

In Christ, Tom and family

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