



## September 2022

Dear Friends,

Summer 2022 has ended with a burst of activity in my ministry to French-speaking immigrants! When the season began, I had five students from Cedar Rapids, IA, who had started pastoral studies, with another two in Marshalltown, IA, who expressed interest. Today, I have those latter two in the program, with another one in Ohio soon ready to begin. Additionally, I have three likely candidates from Sioux City, IA, who have been endorsed by their pastor, and perhaps 2-4 from Ottumwa, IA, who are exploring the training. I've also had discussions with a Congolese individual from Grand Rapids, MI, but he has yet to formally apply.



I have been visiting these French-speaking immigrant congregations whenever I learn about them and receive an invitation to worship with them. Face-to-face and personal contacts are very important! Because I'm in the Midwest, these are the ones that are first brought to my attention. Most of these groups are small with 25-60 worshipping members, including children. They tend to be comprised of recent (last five years or so) immigrants who are working in agricultural processing plants, where speaking English isn't absolutely needed for their work. Often, they are led by lay leaders who haven't received any formal pastor or theological training, but sometimes they are led by experienced immigrant pastors who already serve in other churches—particularly in the UMC denomination.

These (largely) non-denominational gatherings exist to create a sense of community among the immigrants and because few American English-speaking congregations provide the spiritual home that they need. This isn't a "knock" against the American church, it is just a reality that not many U.S. churches are equipped or aware of how they can best serve the immigrant communities when there are such large differences in language, culture, and worship style. That's why a former cross-cultural missionary who has worshipped in both settings can help provide interpretations to those involved.

One of the policies of Coram Deo (the ministry to which the RCA has seconded me), is to only train candidates who are endorsed by their local church pastor. Therefore, we don't enroll individual students who hope to become pastors but have no stable church home or no track record of local church leadership. This is an important principle, and it reaps immediate benefits. First, it reduces the number of "spiritual dilettantes" who

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apply—those who like titles and influence but have no history of serving the church. Second, this rule makes it much easier for immigrant pastors to trust our program—we are training the men and women they want to work with and not someone whom they see as a competitor or potential disrupter.

One of my students told me that since there are few trained immigrant pastors in their communities, it isn't uncommon to see someone with modest skills and/or mixed motives step up and take on a pastoral role with neither the education nor the temperament to do so. You can imagine the trouble this could cause. Because they come from French backgrounds, our students appreciate the opportunity to study in French, since they had done their previous schooling in that language and their ministries will be among Francophone people. Several have told us that they always knew that God was calling them into the ministry, but they had never been allowed to become equipped for such a role.

### PRAYERS AND PRAISES

1. Continue to pray for the recruitment of Francophone students. We thank God that we may have over 10 students signed up within a year of starting from zero.
2. Pray for our current students to stay motivated and to keep up with their studies. We allow students to go at their own pace—which is often the only way they could get trained given their long work weeks (45+hours for six days) and their family responsibilities. Yet, it is a challenge to study when your body is tired after long days of physical work.
3. We're grateful that Marie is off to a good start at the University of Northwestern-St. Paul, where she plans on studying Music Education to be either a music teacher or a worship leader. We're thankful that everything came together for her (financial aid, high school course transfers, roommates, etc.) to confirm that this is where God wants her right now.
4. As I write this, Aichatou is again in the hospital after acting strangely at her daycare kitchen job (no kids were in danger!). It seems likely that she will be court-ordered to receive psychiatric care again at Broadlawns in Des Moines. Please pray for her healing.



*First day of school.*

