



December 2022



“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” -- Luke 2:13-14

Dear Friends:

Our family wishes you a wonderful Christmas season in which our Lord’s peace and presence surround you and your loved ones. May 2023 be a year of restoration for your soul and for whatever the enemy has stolen from you!

I am writing this newsletter just days after the Thanksgiving season. We have so much to be thankful for as Aichatou returned home in late October after a long absence and about seven weeks of hospitalization, which is what it takes to stabilize her and to have her normal personality return. She will now receive monthly injections, which should avoid the potential issues that taking daily pills causes. Already, she has been able to go back to her work in Pella, IA, and we continually see improvements in her well-being.

As the director of Equipping Christian Leaders Among French-Speaking People Groups for the Coram Deo Association, I am pleased to report that as 2022 comes to an end, we now have 10 students enrolled. Eight of them are from Iowa—five from Cedar Rapids, one from Sioux City, and two from Marshalltown—one from Ohio (and formerly from Ottumwa, IA), and one from Congo (who is being sponsored from an Ottumwa, IA, church). Other than the candidate from Congo, all of our students are Congolese immigrants to the U.S.—most of whom are working full-time jobs in agricultural processing and meatpacking.

I am grateful that God has brought these French speakers to Coram Deo and is allowing us to partner with them and their churches to provide them with pastoral training. Considering that we are in the first year of offering this kind of competency-based education, it is clear that there is interest in our program. There is a need to train potential pastors where they are-- keeping them in their homes, churches, and communities—to minister to the people they know best and save them tens of thousands of dollars in tuition and related costs of residential or commuter education.

Would you like to receive these updates digitally? Please email Kelli at kgilmore@rca.org to be added to the email list. You will receive more timely updates from the missionary you support and help us be good stewards of our resources.

I must admit that there are many challenges in keeping our students engaged and advancing in their studies, but the Coram Deo model can accommodate these difficulties without causing the students to lose their progress should they have periods when they simply can't put much time into educational pursuits. Since our students are largely early middle-aged with families and physically demanding jobs, it is not easy for them to follow normal academic calendars and course schedules. Our model requires them to demonstrate competency in 10 areas (i.e. Old and New Testament, Theology, Preaching, Church History, etc.) and we give them as much time as they need to complete a competency course.

One of my jobs is to recruit new students and determine with their local pastor if they have the character and potential to receive ministry leadership training. I then regularly meet with the students via Zoom video conferencing (or WhatsApp) to review their progress, discuss what they're learning, and encourage them. With several students, I've received their schoolwork orally and then evaluate whether they've adequately completed the assignment and have grasped the concepts. For our non-traditional students, this process is a huge help.

I'm very thankful for our supporting churches and individuals who have partnered with our family in French-language and Nigerien ministry over the years. Even though we're in the U.S. because of Aichatou's health situation, God is still allowing me, through your support, to help grow and equip the African and French-speaking churches! If you or your church would like to help us with scholarships and the purchases of French-language materials for our students, please send your gifts, made out to "Reformed Church in America," and designated "Tom Johnson" to Reformed Church in America, Attn: Finance Dept., 4500 60th St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49512, or, in Canada, to Regional Synod of Canada, PO Box 5070 STN LCD 1, Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8. You can also give online at www.rca.org/johnson.

PRAYERS AND PRAISES

1. We give thanks that Aichatou is home and back working. Please pray for her continued healing and adherence to her treatment.
2. We're thankful that Marie's freshman year at the University of Northwestern-St. Paul is going so well. She is enrolled in Music Education and taking voice, choir, piano, music theory, ethnomusicology, and Christian leadership courses. Pray for Laurey as she decides which college to choose as she completes her senior year at Pella Christian High School.
3. I'm grateful that we have 10 students in Coram Deo's French-language pastoral program. Pray for these students' success and spiritual growth and that the Lord will bring more candidates to our attention.

Tom Johnson