RCA Global Mission

Update from

TOM JOHNSON

March 2026

Dear Friends,

2026 has arrived with a whirlwind—both personally and globally. While every day seems to produce a new story of a changing world, I've spent the busiest three months of my missionary career onboarding 13 new Congolese pastoral candidates to the Coram Deo program—and discussing plans for another 6 from Burkina Faso and Niger.

These Congolese candidates are the result of an emerging partnership between Coram Deo, RCA Global Mission, several RCA churches in Canada, and the Evangelical Orthodox Church in eastern Congo (near Bukavu). While we're still determining the specifics of the partnership, the goal will be to train the Congolese partners to the same standards as RCA commissioned pastors. Coram Deo was originally formed for this purpose nearly 10 years ago, but to do so in French and for an overseas partner would be quite a milestone.

Because all of the details are still being worked out, but the Congolese were anxious to begin, I quickly created a short and free course based on the Bible Project video series called "How to Read the Bible," which exists in French. These 19 videos explain how the Bible includes several important themes and metaphors, which can span across both Old and New Testament books. It also discusses the various genres found in the Bible and explains the purpose of each one in separate videos. By offering this course now, it gives us an opportunity to discover to what degree the candidates were ready for study and for them to experiment with their first distance education courses. For instance, it took some time for certain candidates to get access to computers, while others learned that they could only successfully use the internet late at night to send and receive materials.

A group photo of pastors with the Evangelical Orthodox Church of Congo who will be enrolled in Coram Deo's French-language pastoral training program.

We began the "How to Read the Bible" course in late January and some of the Congolese quickly understood the expectations and soon began submitting their answers to the questions posed from the videos' content. Others have had trouble 'unlearning' certain ideas and prefer to respond to the videos based on their previous knowledge and through Google searches—neither of which are always consistent with the video series' perspectives. Also, some have had trouble interacting with the video content and applying the concepts to their own faith practices rather than just providing textual answers.

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.

The Coram Deo approach places equal emphasis on biblical knowledge as well as on the doing, serving and being a Christian believer and leader. Too often the pastors have learned hundreds of biblical facts without necessarily understanding how God has woven them all together in his plans for humanity. The Bible is God's story to redeem the world through his chosen people and it should never be reduced to "dos and don'ts".

As the only French-language instructor for the program, I select the material and the assignments and review and grade each response—so having 13 candidates sending me their answers daily in the self-paced course, has kept me in front of the computer screen throughout the week, reviewing their work and responding to their questions! However, with the insecurity of Africa and the Mideast right now, working online is arguably a good option for conducting cross-cultural ministry today!

Ellie is in the Netherlands in March for a student exchange. Here she is with her sister Marie's boyfriend, who is pursuing an advanced degree in Delft.

In other family news, our third daughter, Ellie, is now in the Netherlands for a three-week school exchange with a Christian high school in Zwolle. She will graduate in two months and plans on attending Iowa State University (ISU) for Hospitality Management/Event Management. Laurey and her fiancé have found a house in Boone, IA, that they are now fixing up and will move into after their July wedding. They'll both be seniors next fall at ISU. Marie is student teaching in a MN high school and will spend April in an international Christian school in Budapest for the elementary portion of her credentialing: thus, she will be licensed to each K-12 as a music educator (choral). She is looking to become a full-time teacher and already has three possible job offers to consider. Thekla is blossoming in 3rd grade at Pella Christian Grade School and Aichatou continues to work nights in her care facility job.

PRAYERS AND PRAISES

1. I'm thankful that I'm working with the new Congolese pastors in addition to our other candidates. Pray for balance and time management for me, as managing each person's progress leaves me little time for anything else. Also pray for the candidates' enthusiasm for the program, which will require three years to complete.

2. Pray for the older girls and their upcoming events: two graduations and a wedding. Although it doesn't look like any of Aichatou's family from Niger can come to the wedding (due to U.S. visa restrictions), she still has family in Canada, France, and the U.S., who expect to be here. We plan on live-streaming the wedding, though.

3. Please pray for additional financial support for this ministry. Because I am not overseas and the last few years have caused a lot of changes among the churches that did support me (COVID, leaving the denomination, tight budgets, and even closing), I am very much underfunded with RCA Global Mission. Please pray that God will help us find new churches and individuals to make up for what has been lost so that we can train Francophone church pastors.

In Christ,
Tom and family