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A NEWSLETTER OF LIGHTBEARERS MINISTRIES | AUGUST 2008

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The Niger Diaries



Lightbearers mobilized its largest missions team ever in June when nine sojourners embarked on a two-week assignment deep into the extremely impoverished region of West Africa.



Serving one of our ministry partners in Niger, our team worked with college students, public school teachers, Christian educators, churches and full-time missionaries. With each group, our team served in practical ways and sought to bring encouragement to those who have given their lives to the cause of Christ in this Islam-dominated nation.

Niger remains a “free” country, but most expect the Islamic fundamentalist surge to change the government from one that ensures religious freedom to one that adopts the repressive nature of neighboring nations such as Egypt, Libya, and Algeria. Talk of Niger moving from an “open” to a “closed” status was commonplace, and a new sense of urgency motivated the Christians with whom our team encountered.

More than anything, it seems two key truths challenged our team: 1. Our mission to support those living for Christ in difficult areas is vital. 2. Our faith in Christ must be lived out at home and not just when we are “on a mission trip.”

The following excerpts from the journals of four team members offer a hearts-eye-view of our travelers and some insight into the needs they faced. >>

Hugh and Jason worshipping with the local Fulani, one of the target people groups of SIM Niger.



Worship

Seeing God work ... today we had the privilege to worship with a local people group – the Tamejeq. We sat together outside on mats in a partially thatched roof hut and began to enter into worship before our King. Though the words were in French, the message was the same ... “Come, be filled with the Spirit and glorify your GOD.” My heart was blessed to see God’s people raising their hands to Him with praise and worship. I was moved by their sincerity and the genuine care that they had for one another as they discussed and prayed together for one another. Thank you God for your faithfulness to your people; for providing a pastor for the church ... protect them ... give them boldness in their faith to honor You.

– Brenda Lee

Pray

Pray that the national Christians stay faithful to the Gospel and to the vision that has been set before them.

Pray that the Christian schools will find favor with the government and that the government will allow more schools to be opened.

Pray for those who will train the Christian teachers that they will not just train them to be effective teachers but also help them be faithful witnesses of the truth of the Gospel.

Pray always that the Gospel will be clearly taught for the glory of God and the salvation of many.

– Louella Terry

Passion

What stood out the most to me was the passion of the believers in Niger. It was obvious that the easiest road to take for the people of Niger would be to claim to be a Muslim. The hardest road would be to reject Islam and openly follow Christ. Following Christ in most cases means being rejected by the community and family and being alone to find provision for your family. Regardless, the faces that worshipped Christ in Niamey glowed with peace and joy. Their dependency for Christ to be their sole provider created an environment of vibrant worship.

– April Bader



Sights

People washing clothes in river

All of the garbage on the side of the roads

Meat with flies on it

A lot of colorful lizards

Women dressed in beautiful African attire

Men dressed in traditional African robes

People going to the bathroom in public

Women carrying things on their heads

Camels on the street

Cars and bikes intermixing on the streets

Everything was brown and sandy

Trees growing in sand

The airport was very outdated; it was from the 1950s

– Hugh Medal

Niamey, Niger — Too Much Rock for One Fist

Clayton Clark



There is foosball in Niamey. On a street near the zoo, there is a homemade foosball table. It's rather po-dunk, but it works beautifully (better than a Sportcraft, if you ask me). There is a slot for a 25-franc piece, and 10 balls come rolling out.

There were two beggar boys, so we played a game. The team had walked up the street for souvenirs. Part of the team was bartering for fabric just a stone's throw away. I was in a world of my own, playing foosball in Niamey. A man tried to step in, take one boy's place. I told him no, I would not play him. He backed off. I played the boys and they beat me, bad.

Soon there was a whole crowd of beggar boys. They came from back alleys and curbsides. I played another game, against two different boys—this time I had a very timid kid on my team. We swapped again for a third game, three more boys who had not yet played. I left 25 francs and they played a fourth game, and I caught up with the team.

They play good foosball in Niamey, real good foosball. They play foosball like I play foosball: no spins, goalie shots are worth two points.

It's easy to forget that people are people when they live on the other side of the world. They live and laugh and love just like us. They enjoy a good time. Smile. Hug. Feel lonely. Appreciate friendship. The kids like to wrestle. They play foosball. God made Nigeriens with the same steady hand with which He created me; maybe even took a little more time on them.

Their struggles are the same. They struggle with loving people, with loving God, with sin. They hear lies. Many live lies. Their whole culture is a lie. My same struggles.

They have different struggles, too. They struggle to eat. Many sleep on the ground, on the street. They have diarrhea their whole lives, and worms. Malaria if they are unlucky. They see death everyday.

I have a bed.

In my life, there is this incredible need for Christ. Huge need. They have the same need for Christ. No different: They have fallen, they are unfulfilled, they are without peace, without joy. But for the grace of God, I am no different.

Well, I have a bed, with a box spring.

There were four boys who lived near our guesthouse. They were just like my three brothers and me. They were all about wrestling and catching lizards and throwing balls. My prayer is not for them to have a bed with box springs, although I'm sure they would be grateful. My prayer is that they would become like Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel. My prayer is that my brothers and I would praise our Father side by side with those four boys, before the glorious throne.

Side by side the foosball gang, as well.

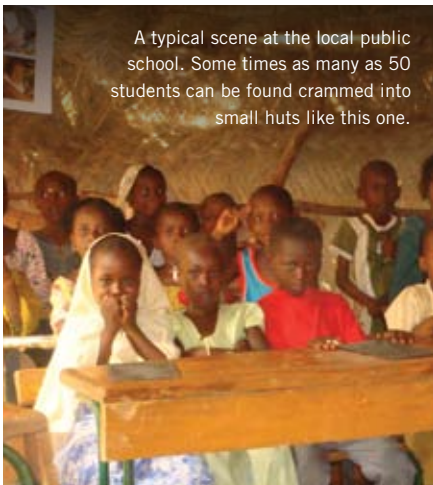


On the way to visit a remote village, the van breaks down on the side of the road. Sarah, Amy, Brenda and April seen here praying for what God had in store for them.





Hugh playing with three local girls who stay with one of the missionary women.



A typical scene at the local public school. Some times as many as 50 students can be found crammed into small huts like this one.



Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca, Morocco



Computers used by local college students that were purchased by Lightbearers



Global-minded

During our trip to Niger, God opened my eyes to the extreme need that so many people face. And, it isn't just physical need, though I have never seen people in more desperate and dismal circumstances. I have never seen with my own eyes children who are starving, people living without even the most basic of needs, or living conditions so atrocious. The smells, the sights, the sounds ... They are in spiritual bondage beyond what I can imagine or describe.

Did my presence help anyone in even the slightest way? I doubt it. But, I did walk away a changed person. ... I don't feel called to full time missions. Yet, I certainly feel called to do whatever I can do help ... all people lost, struggling, drowning. Why is my next-door neighbor who doesn't know the Lord any different than these people? How is it that I can travel half way around the world and cross-cultural and language barriers to present the Gospel to the lost, yet I can't cross the street to offer the same hope to the lost here?

I also walked away with an incredible sense of gratitude. Why am I so blessed? Why has God showered me with such physical wealth, as well as spiritual blessing? How can it be that I was spoon-fed the Gospel from birth, and there are those who have never heard His name? I cannot answer these questions, but I do know that to whom much is given, much is required. I pray I would not forget how much I've been given or ever take it for granted. May I use my blessing to bless others and the Lord.

– Sarah McClain

Disease

In four days I saw a wider range of disease and illness than I've seen in 10 years in the states ... malaria, tetanus, typhoid, and severe malnutrition. It was overwhelming. Despite these difficulties, the Lord used the experience to confirm my call to medical missions. ... I'm so grateful for this trip and the way the Lord used it in my life.

– Jason Foster

Luxuries

We hosted a “Ladies Spa Night” for the long-term missionaries, setting up make-shift pedicure stations. ... Washing their tired and dusty feet caused me to reflect on how many luxuries that I have here in the States and how I consider some of them necessities. The Nigerian missionaries showed, by example, how to live for Christ and not for things; they’ve given up the luxuries of bath tubs and air conditioners to spread the gospel. Harder than it looks, but worth it all to them.

– Amy Gibson

Faith

(Our partners) accomplishments so far are fueled by faith. I was in awe. I still am. God is amazing! I admire these guys so much and long to take my faith to the parameters of my own society and stretch them. Role models.


– Jason Howard

Future

In the next two years, the fundamentalist Muslims have a goal to start an Islamic mosque and school in 2,000 new communities in Niger alone. In these communities, the focus will be to train the children in Islamic thinking. One of the missionaries who has been serving in Niger for 15-plus years stated that she expected Niger to be a closed country within five years.

Urgency to take action has gripped the missionaries. There is a huge need to train the next generation of children in Christian schools. The missing key is Christian teachers. Like a broken record, again and again the need for Christian teachers was stressed to us. The missionaries were grateful that there was an organization in the world that understood this urgency and would come along side them in this effort.

– April Bader

More on the experiences and personal reflections from the West Africa trip can be found on the Lightbearers’ Web site. Other trips like this are forming for 2009. For more information, e-mail april.bader@lightbearersconnects.com. 

sparks

> BRIEF NEWS, BIG IMPACT

Lightbearers’ Gatherings

Dallas – Oct. 11

Northwest Arkansas – Oct. 18

Watch your mailbox for details.

Barista? Tortilla Maker? Surfer? Commercial Fisherman? Agriculturalist? We have a specific request for you!

Interested in serving, sending or going? We are in the process of formalizing our 2009 short-term trips. Contact us if you are interested in learning more.
april.bader@lightbearersconnects.com

Open House BBQ

University of Arkansas – Sunset House
Sunday, Aug. 17, 6-8 p.m. –

Join us for food, fellowship and the first glimpse at the new Sunset Home! Open to all! RSVP by Monday, Aug. 11.



The fall semester is at hand. Please pray for our Discipleship Leaders as they mentor a new group of students.

Welcome to our staff!

Sarah McClain and Amy Gaddy





a final word

by Kevin McCollum, *Lightbearers Executive Director*

Taking a “Time out” to Reflect



In 1999 while serving in Chennai, India I experienced the stern presence of our loving Father. I had been teaching “junior pastors” during a week of training aimed at equipping them for their eventual return to their home villages. Although the teaching was a joy, my body began to revolt under the weight of the South Indian summer and a growing fever from within. Malaria? I hoped not. One of the pastors I worked with the day before was infected with it, and he was miraculously healed when we prayed for him. Whatever my illness, I wouldn’t escape it so readily.

As the fever increased I was forced to suspend my teaching, confined to a small cot in a room with only a gentle breeze to chase the heat. I was low. I began to grumble at the Lord and asked, “What am I doing here?” “Why did you send me to India, only to suffer in bed with fever?”

Almost immediately I recognized the presence of the Lord. The faces of the men I had just left were brought to mind. Men eagerly striving to be “workmen approved” for the Gospel ministry; men of suffering, their bodies marked from the rejection of their own people. Many of them asked

not for the relief from suffering but for the courage to persevere as a bold witness for Christ.

Like a child in “time out,” I began to reflect. I thought of my misplaced devotion for personal comfort and the resources I had at my disposal. I thought of the great wealth, ingenuity, strength and unique position God has given the U.S. (It’s staggering if you think about it.)

It was a humbling reflection.

God blesses His children with resources and calls them to apply those resources to His work. Simple. Yet, somehow I had missed it. I had always viewed our call to support the advancement of the Gospel as a financial one, missing the broader scope of non-financial resources.

Several years after my return from South India, God directed me to a fledgling organization bent on mobilizing a wide range of resources for Great Commission work. Akin to the story line in the movie *Schindler’s List*, Lightbearers brings the struggle of faithful believers to intersect with the wealth and talent of people in a position to help. I knew this was my place to serve.

It’s exciting to see so many who are beginning to understand their role in the Great Commission. What a joy to hear the testimonies of those on the front lines who have received vital supplies (tires, computers, Bibles, frisbees ...), wise counsel (Bible training, business consulting, medical helps ...), finances, and prayer.

Lightbearers is no longer a fledgling organization, but our original passion to mobilize and connect resources to Great Commission projects has not eroded. Your partnership is vital to our task. 💧

“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.” – Hebrews 13:2


LIGHTBEARERS
ministries

mobilize+connect money prayer manpower

Our Purpose: To mobilize and connect money, prayer, and manpower to projects of Great Commission ministries in the 10/40 Window.

Our Mission: To build renewable sources of finances, prayer, and manpower through discipleship housing and donor development.