

Bene Koytara Goyterey

Those who work for God's Kingdom (translated from Zarma)



Dear Friends



When I'm writing this it is just before 6 in the evening and I have been working this afternoon in my home office in Niamey. You may wonder why I start with such a seemingly totally uninteresting fact. But the point is that until a little over a week ago (early December) I would not have wanted to be working in my home office during the afternoon. It just gets too hot in there. The fact that I can now be there again in the afternoon shows that we have entered the cool season, which is just simply enjoyable.

These past couple of weeks there's been quite some travelling going on between Blaise and me. During the last week of November Blaise went to Lomé (capital city of Togo) to teach at the 4th radio conference organised by a Swiss Christian radio station. He also participated in the other three over the past two years. A few days after he came back, I went to Maradi for my usual "catching up on the ground" visit. I came back last Friday and on Monday Blaise got on the bus to go to Maradi for supervision of the work at Training Centre Caleb and the apprenticeship placements. And he will also be working on buying replacement sewing machines for Training Centre Caleb. You can read more about this below in the update about the start of the school year.

At Sahel Academy the first semester finished last week. Elementary school and middle school (including Phoebe) are enjoying their Christmas break already, only the 'high-schoolers' (including Caleb) need to finish their exams this week, and then they will have their Christmas break too. The wonderful news is that over the Christmas break the school will be able to move to its new location! Since the flood in September 2020 Sahel was using two rented large houses to do school and was looking to relocate since returning to the old location did not seem wise with the risk of recurrent flooding. Several months ago they found a suitable location with good and suitable buildings on it already. A few weeks ago sufficient funds had come in to be able to buy it! Thus, a bit of physical exercise is ensured for us parents during this Christmas season ;)

In what follows, besides the already mentioned news about the start of the school year 2021-2022, we also share with you a story from Quartier Libre – a fun open air kids program.

Start of school year 2021-2022

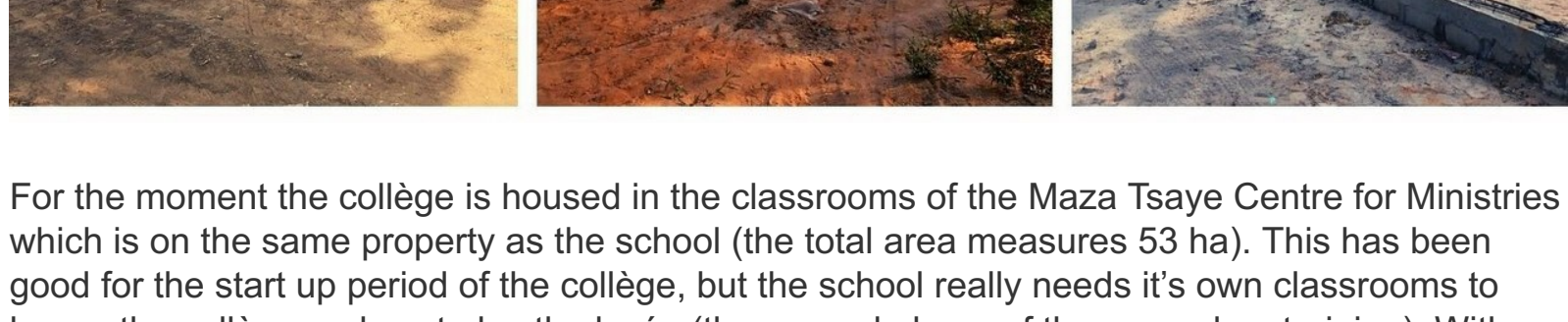


In our last newsletter I mentioned in the introduction that we would be giving some updates about the new school year which had just begun at the beginning of October in future newsletters. So, what has been happening? First of all, at Training Centre Caleb 150 girls and women entered the three year training in literacy, cloths making, knitting and embroidery. They were, of course, all very excited to start and we hope that between 75 and 100 will actually finish the training. Among the 150 is a group of 12 girls and women who are also doing the Discipleship Training School (DTS). They do the training at Training Centre Caleb in the morning and in the afternoon they have their courses for the DTS.

We are very grateful for a gift that has been promised by a church in Gouda (the Netherlands). This gift will allow us to buy 9 or 10 sewing machines to replace those among the present machines that have become unrepairable. We bought these used European or American machines (which usually are better quality than the new ones on the market here) at least 5 years ago from Nigeria. Over the past years they have been used intensively in a learning environment and so by now they are really worn out. For the moment the teacher and the students make do with a reduced number of machines.

The AECM school also opened it's gates again at the beginning of October. Even up until the first half of November a few new students continued to come. We now have 173 students in the elementary section and 30 in secondary. The secondary section (collège) has 3 levels this year. Next year the 4th level should be added, which will mean that we should have our first group receiving a AECM collège diploma in 2023! To become financially autonomous we still need significantly more students, but we are glad that numbers are increasing gradually each year. This helps to also gradually adapt to growing numbers and learn how to keep up the good quality of the teaching with bigger classes. We have to admit that we're still struggling to have truly good locally based leadership for the school, but we continue to trust that in due time we will be able to find the right people.

For the AECM school too we are very grateful for gifts that we received, in this case for the construction of additional classrooms.

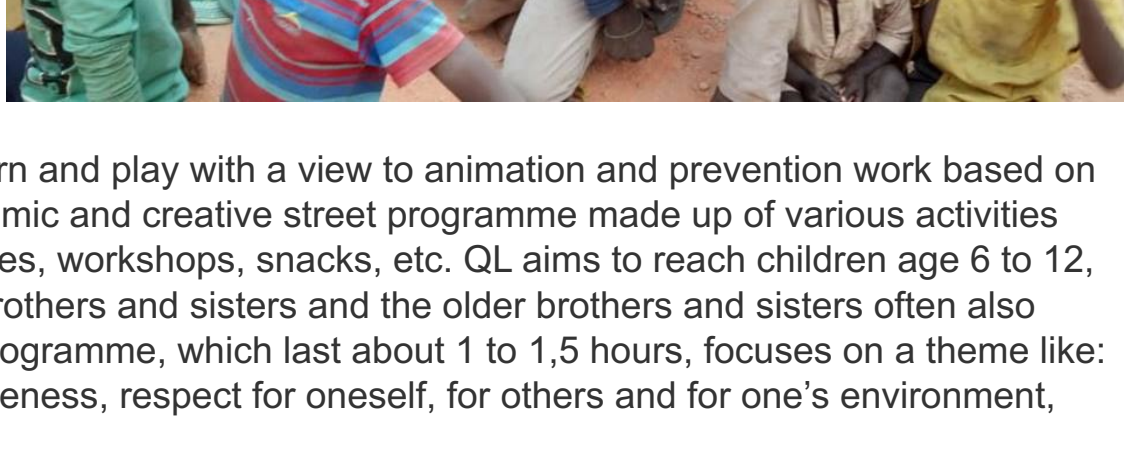


For the moment the collège is housed in the classrooms of the Maza Tsaye Centre for Ministries which is on the same property as the school (the total area measures 53 ha). This has been good for the start up period of the collège, but the school really needs it's own classrooms to house the collège and next also the lycée (the second phase of the secondary training). With the funds received thus far we have been able to put in the foundation of a first block of three classrooms and a part of the walls. We continue to look for additional funds.

Also, we are very glad that we are finally getting the playground equipment for the primary school ready. We received money for this through a gift from a church in Amersfoort several years ago, but for several reasons the realisation of this project got delayed repeatedly. Soon now, the primary school kids will be able to do some climbing and swinging!

Quartier Libre

Quartier Libre (QL) is French for 'free time'. It is also the name of a fun and educational programme for children created by King's Kids (Youth with a Mission) Switzerland. We have written about it before, because Blaise has been setting up QL in Maradi, but it has been quite a while. So, what is it about again? The programme mainly aims to reach



children where they live, learn and play with a view to animation and prevention work based on Christian values. It is a dynamic and creative street programme made up of various activities such as songs, stories, games, workshops, snacks, etc. QL aims to reach children age 6 to 12, but in our context the little brothers and sisters and the older brothers and sisters often also come to participate. Each programme, which last about 1 to 1.5 hours, focuses on a theme like: friendship, self image, forgiveness, respect for oneself, for others and for one's environment, and many more.

In Maradi there is one location where Blaise started QL about 10 years ago. At some point, several years ago, Hama took over from Blaise in this location, and continues till today. The other day I asked Hama what he has seen happening in the lives of the children over the years. According to what he shared for several young men it is doubtful that they would be where they are now without QL. "When they started coming to QL these boys were not, or hardly, going to school and it was mostly the street that was educating them. But they really enjoyed the QL programme and faithfully participated week after week. Slowly but surely they began to understand and respond to the teaching. This all was not without struggles, because it meant that they were being influenced by and starting to adhere to the values and the meaning of the way of life Jesus is teaching. This has been a difficult process for their families, who have a different understanding. But these boys persisted because they knew the reality of their life before and experienced that the life they were learning about now was so much better. I must admit that it has also helped that through contacts on our location we were able to support those boys practically. Some we could help go to a Christian centre in a nearby town where they learned to read and write in Hausa and from there they could go to Nigeria to a Bible school. A few of those boys want to be a pastor. Some others have done discipleship training and are now continuing to learn a trade. And there are some who are now in secondary school here in Maradi. Of course, it doesn't happen in this way for all the kids participating in QL. There are many kids that participate each week and many that have participated over the years, and most just come and go. And there have been disappointments of kids that we have tried to support, but who after a while, decide they don't want to go to school, or learn in another way, after all and quit. But it's so good to see these individual kids, who were on a track where they could easily end up in crime, or drugs, or a life of sheer poverty, and who are now growing into men who will be making a positive contribution to society."

Christmas and New Year's greetings



December 2021, once again we are here at the end of the year looking back at good and joyful things that happened during the year, but also at some difficult and painful things. Certainly the same is true for you who are reading this newsletter. At the same time we are looking forward to the new year 2022. We do not know yet what the year will bring. But this Christmas we are again remembering that "the Word became flesh, and lived among us" (see John 1:14); an incredible act of humility and love and grace and so many things more on God's behalf for us!

And so, through this act, God made visible for us that He is Emmanuel, God with us. This is more than worth celebrating at Christmas, and at the same time we can take it as our foundation moving into the year 2022, trusting in the presence of this God who is Emmanuel!

We wish you a blessed Christmas and shalom for the New Year.

With our love,
Blaise, Jeannette, Caleb and Phoebe

To thank for:

- Health and strength to continue our various activities, including travelling.
- That we are able to buy replacement sewing machines for Training Centre Caleb.
- The teachers at Académie Evangélique Cornerstone de Maradi who are diligently continuing their work.
- The new school location for Sahel Academy – where the whole school can be together again and where the available space is more convenient.

To pray for:

- Wisdom for the teachers and the manager (Sunday) at Training Centre Caleb while they are helping the new (larger) group of girls and women both in their practical learning and in their personal development.
- Good leadership for Académie Evangélique Cornerstone de Maradi.
- Teachers and students of Sahel Academy to be able to make a fresh new start in January at their new location.
- Good rest during the Christmas break.
- Jeff Woodke and his family; it has been over 5 years now that Jeff was taken captive. [Watch YouTube](#)

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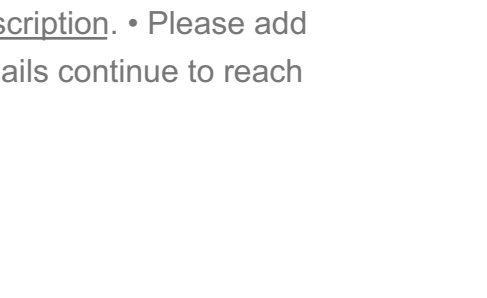
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