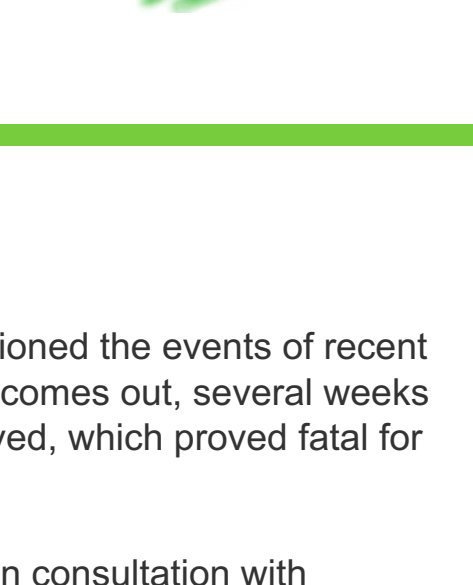


Rene Koytara Goyterey

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



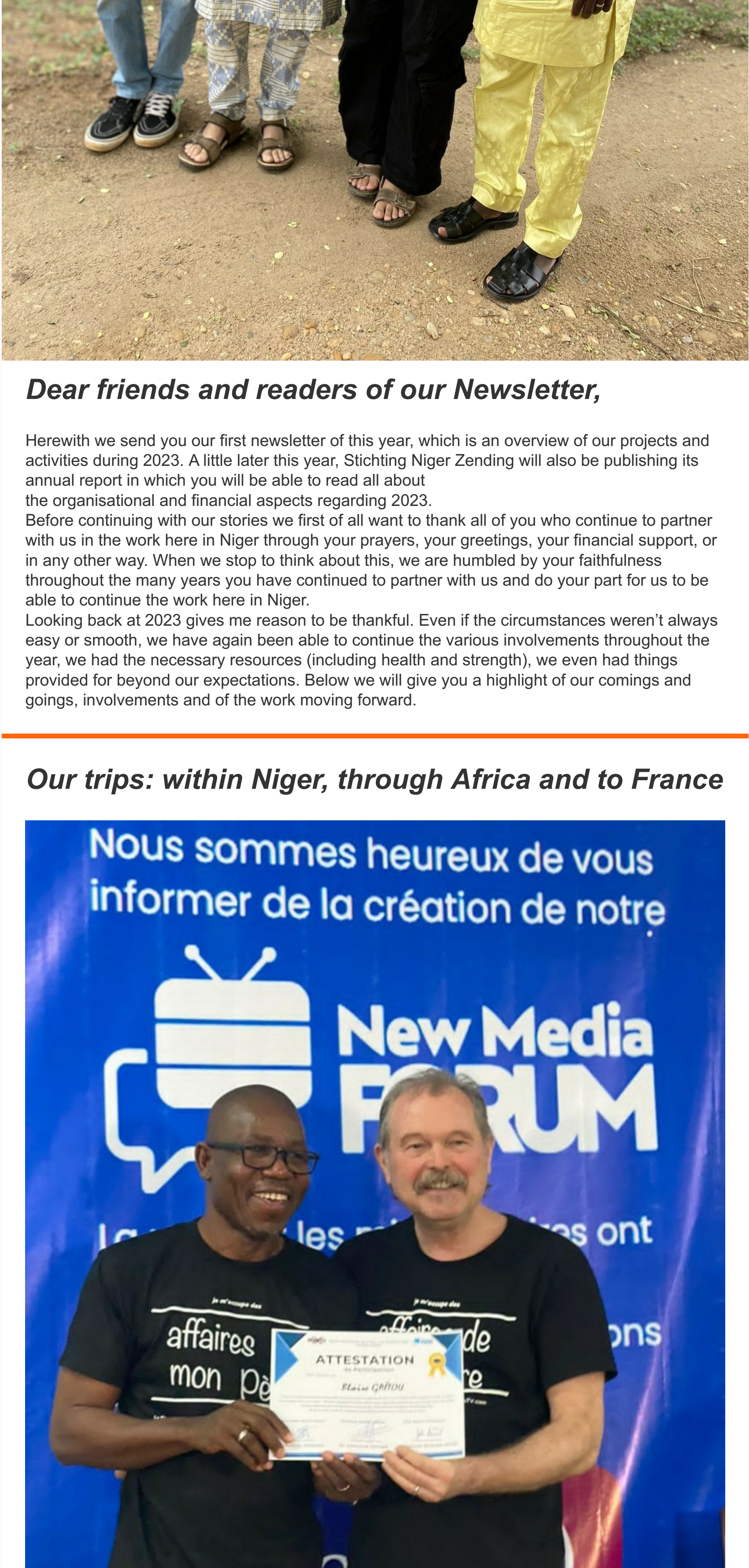
In memory of Pierre Blaise Gaitou

Although this is the annual report for 2023, we cannot leave unmentioned the events of recent times and the death of our beloved Pierre Blaise. As this newsletter comes out, several weeks have passed already. The accident in which Pierre Blaise was involved, which proved fatal for him and many others, casts its shadow over this newsletter.

The newsletter as can be read below had already been written and in consultation with Jeannette we chose not to change the content of the letter. We have adjusted the prayer points.

There will be a separate page on the website with the "in memoriam" and a biography of Pierre Blaise. We will share the direct link to this page with you in the next newsletter.

Stories from and about 2023



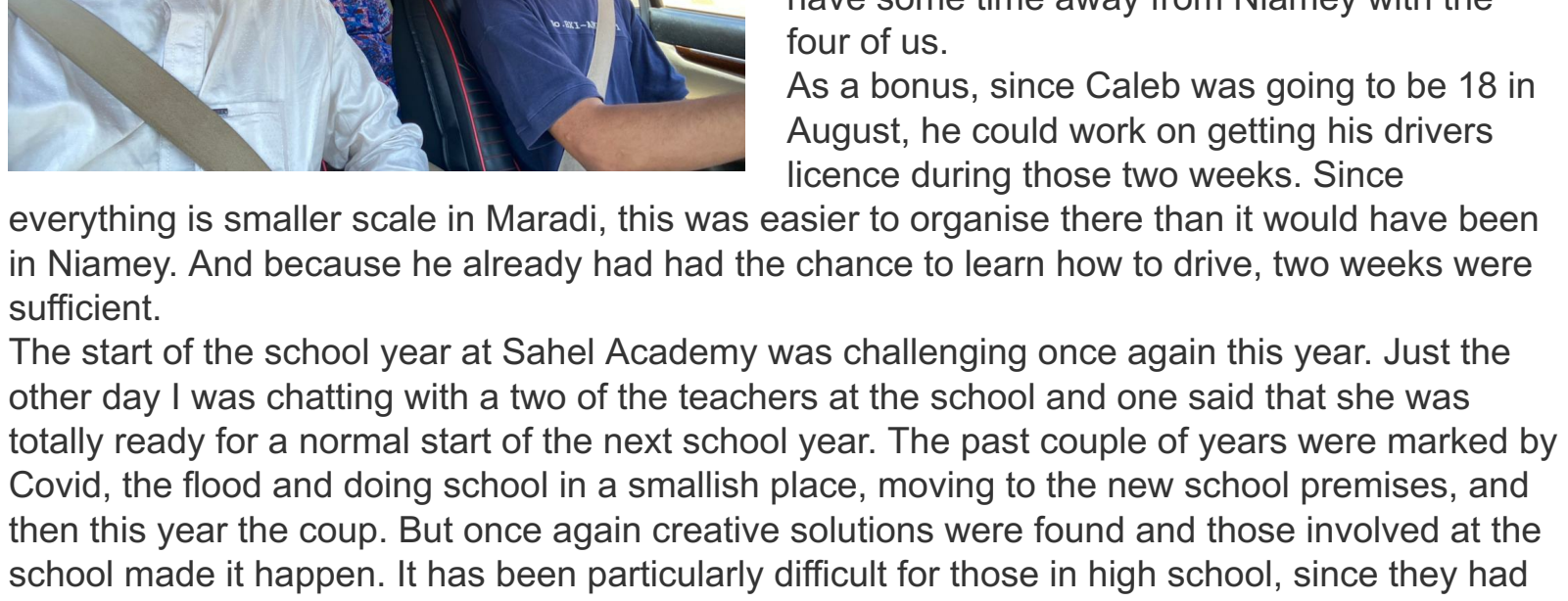
Dear friends and readers of our Newsletter,

Herewith we send you our first newsletter of this year, which is an overview of our projects and activities during 2023. A little later this year, Stichting Niger Zending will also be publishing its annual report in which you will be able to read all about the organisational and financial aspects regarding 2023.

Before continuing with our stories we first of all want to thank all of you who continue to partner with us in the work here in Niger through your prayers, your greetings, your financial support, or in any other way. When we stop to think about this, we are humbled by your faithfulness throughout the many years you have continued to partner with us and do your part for us to be able to continue the work here in Niger.

Looking back at 2023 gives me reason to be thankful. Even if the circumstances weren't always easy or smooth, we have again been able to continue the various involvements throughout the year, we had the necessary resources (including health and strength), we even had things provided for beyond our expectations. Below we will give you a highlight of our comings and goings, involvements and of the work moving forward.

Our trips: within Niger, through Africa and to France



Both Blaise and I continued our regular trips to Maradi to do the on the ground follow-up and supervision of the ongoing work there. Following the coup d'état our travels were somewhat interrupted, and more so for me than for Blaise, mostly because of the uncertainty of the whole situation and possible consequences. The idea of being in Maradi and possibly not being able to get back into Niamey, was not appealing. Other than that, I personally always enjoy being back in Maradi; away from the big city life and staying somewhere that gives me the feeling to be a bit more outside and actually getting to be with the people I work with there. And travelling got easier this past year. The part of the road that was very bad for quite a while has been completely renewed. Moreover, a new route was created which is shorter. Both these things together cut off 2.5 to 3 hours of travelling time.

Blaise's international involvements also continued this year. In February he went to Cotonou in Benin and from there continued to Lomé in Togo. This can be done quite easily since these two cities are only a few hours driving apart. In Cotonou he attended an international gathering concerning Christian TV and in Lomé the annual gathering for the Francophone Christian radio network took place. Next in May he attended a YWAM gathering in Burundi for African leaders and in July he went to France together with Boureima, one of our other Niger YWAM colleagues, to participate in the YWAM leadership and personnel conference for North Africa. All these trips were made possible thanks to financial support coming from within these various networks. Returning to Niger after the conference in France became somewhat more challenging, because the coup d'état took place while Blaise and Boureima were there. And then the borders were closed. But in the waiting and the different stages of their travels back to Africa, they experienced hospitality and the possibility to get to know other colleagues better in a way otherwise much less likely. The most challenging part for them was to understand that back in Niger we were experiencing no problems, because the news they were hearing outside of Niger gave a very different impression.

Family matters: concerning the children's studies and solar power



In between we decided to take two weeks of vacation in Maradi as a family. True, it's not exactly the ideal location for a holiday with two teenagers because there really isn't anything interesting to do, but it still seemed better to have some time away from Niamey with the four of us.

As a bonus, since Caleb was going to be 18 in August, he could work on getting his drivers licence during those two weeks. Since everything is smaller scale in Maradi, this was easier to organise there than it would have been in Niamey. And because he already had the chance to learn how to drive, two weeks were sufficient.

The start of the school year at Sahel Academy was challenging once again this year. Just the other day I was chatting with a two of the teachers at the school and one said that she was totally ready for a normal start of the next school year. The past couple of years were marked by Covid, the flood and doing school in a smallish place, moving to the new school premises, and then this year the coup. But once again creative solutions were found and those involved at the school made it happen. It has been particularly difficult for those in high school, since they had to do their classes online. And for Caleb and the three other boys in 12th grade, this has been no fun way to enter into their final year of high school. We hope thought that things will be more normal during the second semester (starting at the end of January 2024).

The power supply in Niger is not exactly very stable in general, and following the coup we had many power cuts. For back up we had a small generator. But it needed regular repairs and used a lot of fuel. So we thought that by making use of the Giving Tuesday event we could raise funds to replace the generator by solar power as our back up. However, this idea was received with much enthusiasm and generosity and generated much more funding than we would have dared to anticipate. We were overwhelmed, in a positive way, and very thankful! As a result we were able to install a more powerful system and are now largely independent from the power grid. This now not only helps us to have a stable power supply for our work and life, but it also reduces our expenses for electricity which is very welcome with so many other things becoming more expensive.



Caleb Training Centre: the students and the teachers



We are glad to be able to write that at Caleb Training Centre the work continued as usual with the girls and women continuing to learn literacy, cloths making, knitting and embroidery. They also receive teaching in the area of general housekeeping and social skills. Furthermore there is the pastoral care and counselling, because Caleb Training Centre is not just about learning a skill, it is about learning to live life better. In 2024 this present group will be finishing their training.

Last year Mrs Ramatou had decided to take on another job, but this year we were glad to be able to welcome her back. She teaches sewing and the design of cloths. Beside her, Sunday continues as the general manager, Mrs Eli as literacy teacher and pastoral counselor, Mrs Alisa as the teacher for knitting and embroidery and Mrs Aisha teaches on housekeeping and social skills.



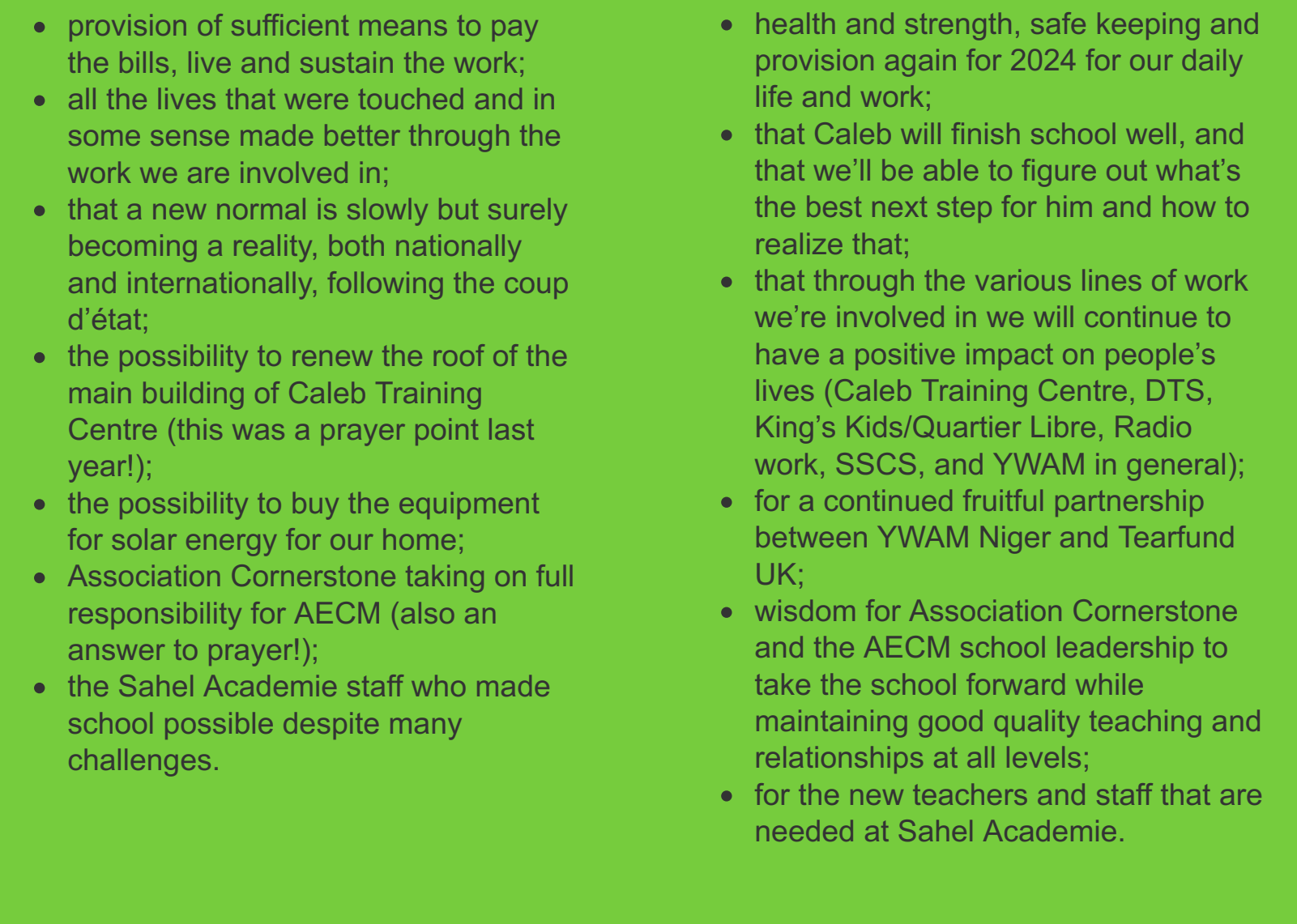
In last year's overview we wrote about the necessity and the urgency of the renewal of the roof on the main building. We were very thankful that we received a gift covering the expenses for the renewal of the roof including some additional improvements on the building.

Discipleship Training School (DTS): continuing development of the students



At the DTS too the teaching program continued throughout 2023. After the holidays from June – September 7 out of 8 students returned for their final year. The one girl that did not return got married in the mean time and her husband did not want to enable her to continue the training. That is sad, but this experience is not something we can enforce. For the other 7 though, it was very encouraging to hear their stories of how they had been using what they had been learning during the holidays. Furthermore, Sunday also shared that he saw a real change in their life since they started the training. When they came they were all withdrawn and very reluctant to do anything with the others in the group. Two year down the road they have gained much more confidence, feel free to collaborate with each other and they went from 'not knowing anything' to actively undertaking income generating activities.

King's Kids/Quartier Libre (Free Zone)

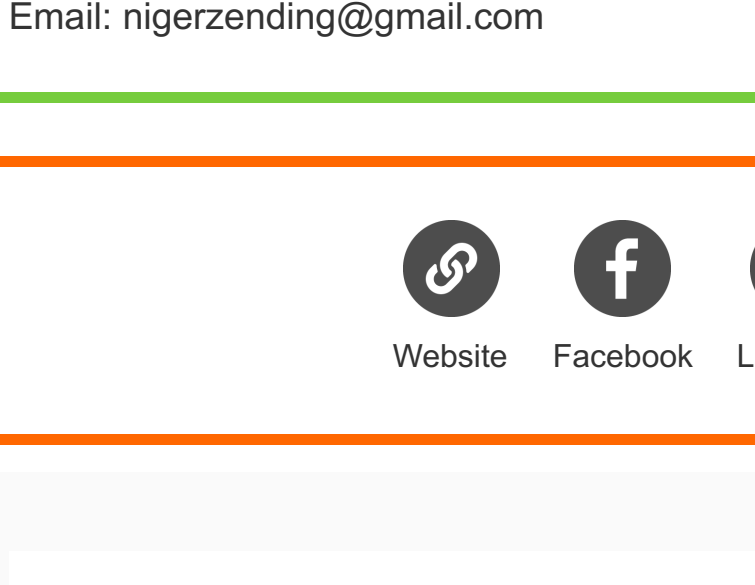


In Niamey: Concerning the King's Kids and Quartier Libre work over this past year not much was undertaken in Niamey and surroundings. There have been a few occasions where the Quartier Libre program was held, but it was not done structurally. And as for the other King's Kids activities, it has become clear that interests and priorities have changed since the start of the work (over 20 years ago!) and new ways of doing things need to be found. Moreover, there was a team of two people directly involved in this work (Blaise's role is to direct and encourage) and one of the two became very ill during the first part of the year and eventually passed away. This obviously impacted the other team member who now has to continue by himself. During the second part of the year he mostly reflected on and was searching for possibilities, opportunities and creative ideas and has made new plans for 2024.

In Maradi: In Maradi the team of volunteers faithfully continues to do the Quartier Libre program in the three villages. Throughout the year there have been a lot of problems with the car we are keeping in Maradi for this work and our other activities there too. So sometimes they were not able to go to the villages because of the car trouble. And sometimes they would go on their motorbikes. At these moments they have to run the program without a sound system, which can be quite challenging with some 200 to 300 children outside.

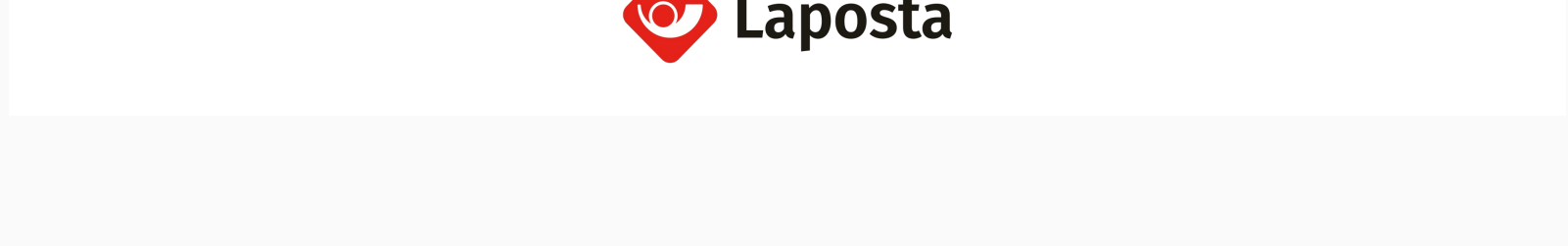
In Tahoua: In Tahoua the desire to be able to continue the Quartier Libre work exists. The reason why the team there stopped the activities is that they felt the lack of materials (mats for the kids to sit on, the snacks, and some other materials) to be able to do the work well. And they did not have the possibility to acquire it themselves. For this we are very grateful for the proceeds of an offering that was dedicated for the King's Kids work in Niger. Part of this money will be used to equip the team of volunteers in Tahoua to be able to run the Quartier Libre program there.

Radio Work



Blaise continued to animate the weekly radio programme that is funded by the church we are part of. Following the sanctions after the coup and the resulting power cuts it was a struggle to be able to do the program for a while. But toward the end of the year the radio station had been able to restore the generator and the power situation had also improved, so he was able to animate the program regularly again. During 2023 one other church member started participating in the animation of the programs in order to learn how to do this kind of work. For 2024 the plan is to train several young people from the church who are interested in radio work to also be able to animate the programs. The radio programs that were started in Maradi continue to be animated by those who took over from Blaise when we move to Niamey.

Académie Evangélique Cornerstone de Maradi – Christian elementary and middle-school in Maradi; the responsibility has been transferred.



Regarding the work at the Académie Evangélique Cornerstone de Maradi the big news over 2023 was that we were able to completely handover the responsibility for the school to Association Cornerstone at the end of the school year 2022-2023. Officially the school was under their responsibility since the start, but for various reasons this had not been effective. Now it is. This has been a big relief for Judy Evans and Jeannette. And it seems that it has greatly encouraged the local team in taking ownership of the work they are involved in at the school. At the start of the new school year 2023-2024 it became clear that the number of students in kindergarten and primary doubled. At his moment the numbers of students at the secondary level are still too small, but we hope to see a significant increase in student numbers there too starting next year. Nevertheless, with the significant increase in number at the kindergarten and primary level, the school is well underway to reach financial autonomy for its running costs. Jeannette continues to be involved on the side, because she accepted to be in charge of the management of the project for the further development of the infrastructure of the school.

Sowing Seeds of Change in the Sahel (SSCS)

During 2023 Jeannette wrote a new project plan for the next 5 years. The plan was submitted at the various levels within SIM international and accepted. It will take effect starting 1 Jan. 2024. Last year Ron Gerwing from Canada had decided to join SSCS to come alongside and support the project with his knowledge and ideas. Unfortunately, going forward we had to conclude that SSCS's way of working and Ron's way of working did not match and that it was better to discontinue the collaboration. Notwithstanding the fact that Ron is no longer with SSCS, we greatly appreciated his ideas and input and intent to continue to work with and on some of the ideas he shared with us. One of those ideas we want to continue with is the application of drip irrigation for our dry season gardening. This is a much more efficient way of irrigating than the surface irrigation method we have been using thus far. The question is though, whether or not it can be economically viable in view of the cost of investment and maintenance of the equipment.

JEMED (Youth with a Mission) general news

In the collaboration with Tearfund we experienced a significant amount of additional work during the first part of this year, because Tearfund Niger went through a series of audits. These audits included Tearfund's partners in Niger as well. As a consequence the start of the new project for 2023 was delayed by 5 months. This new project concerns the follow up for the two businesses in Maradi and we are starting up work in Tilla Kaina (gardening activities for two groups of 25 and women's savings groups). Tilla Kaina is in an area that is troubled by terrorist attacks. We hope that the work we do there will give people hope and perspective that living well is still possible there too. Others in JEMED are involved in work at 2 different primary schools, 3 training centres for girls and women, a foster programme to make it possible for children from very poor families to go to school, pastoring or being part of the leadership of churches, as well as other occasional activities.

A wonderful event during 2023 was the liberation of Jeff Woodke who had been kidnapped from his home in Abalak in 2016. This was something we and many others never stopped praying and hoping for. But when it came it was still a wonderful surprise. Together with Jeff another hostage was liberated at the same time. Furthermore, after their liberation and at different moments, the remaining hostages in the Sahel region have all been liberated too. A reason to be very Thankful!

A sad event for us in YWAM Niger during 2023 was that one of colleagues passed away after battling illness for quite a while. This did not impact directly any of our particular activities, but her passing did leave a gap in her church where she was particularly active with the children, in the work of the King's Kids here in Niamey and in the YWAM team in general.

To thank for:

- provision of sufficient means to pay the bills, live and sustain the work;
- all the lives that were touched and in some sense made better through the work we are involved in;
- that a new normal is slowly but surely becoming a reality, both nationally and internationally, following the coup d'état;
- the possibility to renew the roof of the main building of Caleb Training Centre (this was a prayer point last year!);
- the possibility to buy the equipment for solar energy for our home;
- Association Cornerstone taking on full responsibility for AECM (also an answer to prayer!);
- the Sahel Academy staff who made school possible despite many challenges.

To pray for:

- health and strength, safe keeping and provision again for 2024 for our daily life and work;
- that Caleb will finish school well, and that we'll be able to figure out what's the best next step for him and how to realize that;
- that through the various lines of work we're involved in we will continue to have a positive impact on people's lives (Caleb Training Centre, DTS, King's Kids/Quartier Libre, Radio work, SSCS, and YWAM in general);
- for a continued fruitful partnership between YWAM Niger and Tearfund UK;
- wisdom for Association Cornerstone and the AECM school leadership to take the school forward while maintaining good quality teaching and relationships at all levels;
- for the new teachers and staff that are needed at Sahel Académie.

With our love,

Blaise, Jeannette, Caleb and Phoebé

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