

Bene Koytara Goyterey

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



Dear Friends



One of the advantages of having moved to Niamey is that we get to participate in the extracurricular activities Sahel Academy organizes. One of those activities is the annual softball tournament. And during the week preceding the tournament it was the so called 'spirit week' with each day a different theme according to which everybody can dress up. The theme of one of the days was 'emotion' and Phoebé decided to make all kinds of emoticons to stick on her t-shirt. She also decorated a pair of glasses accordingly. The jury considered her creation one of the best of the day and awarded her a prize! It made her day!

Caleb was one of the players on Sahel's high school softball team, so I (Jeannette) decided to go and be there the whole time. It started on Friday afternoon and finished Sunday afternoon. It was a nice event and for me it was also a good occasion to get a bit more acquainted with some of the other parents who have children at Sahel. Blaise was not there with us because he was just getting back to Maradi from his trip into Nigeria for teaching in several places on working with children and youth and in one place also on doing radio work. This was all organized by YWAM Nigeria. Following this trip he stayed in Maradi for another week to do follow up of the work there and two different groups had also asked him for teaching on working with children.

Our lives continue to be connected with and influenced by many people and issues, and we continue to try and make a difference. In what follows in this letter we try to give you another peek into all of that.

Yahouza tells about children's programme Quartier Libre

Quartier Libre (Free time) is a fun programme of about an hour for children developed by people who are part of YWAM. It is designed to run for a few years in the same neighbourhood (or village in our case). During the programme there is a short teaching from the Bible, but much time and attention is given to playing games. As we all know, good games help children to learn self discipline, honesty, respect for others, working together as a team, healthy competition, etc., but also it is simply a time to have fun.



Since we left Maradi, Yahouza, who had been working together with Blaise already for a few years, has continued with the others on the team to run the programme in two villages. The other day I decided to call him to ask how things were going. He told me that really in both villages the children continue to come and participate with much pleasure. Often they are already waiting for them when they arrive. Others come as soon as they hear the music (they use a portable sound system with a small generator). In the first village though, not so many children are coming now as in the beginning. When the programme started (3 to 4 years ago), about 300 children were participating. Now about 150 are coming. Yahouza tried to understand why this was and found out that simply many parents or older siblings do not want the children to come and participate in something organized by Christians. There is also a lot of "turn over" of children. Only few children continue to come from one year to the other, most of the children are new each year. This means that the children don't really have enough time to gain a good understanding of the values they are learning through the games. Sadly (at least that's how we see it), these children won't have much other opportunities to play group games in their social setting.

In the second village, however, 300 to 400 children continue to participate every other week when the team comes. There is even a small group of 5 to 8 not so young women who come to be part of the programme. They enjoy the dancing too! Here there has been much more continuity in the participation. But the programme only started 2 years ago and so it is really now that the children should start to profit from what they are learning through the teaching and the games. That is something Yahouza hopes to be finding out. But even for the first village, "we are not giving up", he said.

Radio training



Last November I (Blaise) had the opportunity for the third time in a row to participate in and contribute to a radio training organized in Lomé (Togo) by a Swiss Christian radio station. How did I get there and why did I participate? Well, it's a bit of a long story.

Ever since I was young I enjoy music very much. I even had a job as a DJ in a club for a while. But somewhat later in life and after becoming a Christian I wanted to use music to encourage people and to reach out to them. Radio offers a good platform for doing that. So I started looking for and working on creating opportunities to have airtime with existing radio stations to present Christian music and have short discussions concerning our lives as Christians to encourage Christians. At the same time radio is a safe way for people who are not Christian to learn more about what Christianity really is all about. This is also what I taught about during the training; how to share about Christianity, about the Gospel on radio in a predominantly Muslim society. How does one talk about it, what kind of language is good to use? So I often get phone calls from non-Christians who tell me how much they appreciate the programs or who have questions.

For many years now I have remained active in presenting radio programs; sometimes a bit more, sometimes a bit less, but always ongoing. While attending YWAM meetings outside of Niger in 2017 I met someone who was (and still is) working with a Swiss Christian radio station. Beside their work in Switzerland, this radio station wants to invest in helping to improve "doing radio and journalism as Christians" in francophone Africa. One thing they have been doing since 2019, is organizing one week radio training for their contacts already involved with radio from all over francophone Africa. I was invited to participate and I had the opportunity to invite a few others from Niger. These intensive weeks of training have been really profitable and have opened our eyes to aspects we had not thought about before. For example, one of the issues we studied this time was on how to recognize 'fake news'. Nowadays, especially via the internet we have access to all kinds of information. But not everything is true. So we learned about how to recognize elements in an article or report on the internet or elsewhere that should raise the red flags in our mind and make us wonder if it is indeed true?

Hervé, a journalist from Niger who participated, told me: "I was learning so much during the first and second training weeks which were organized in 2019, that I absolutely wanted to participate again in the training which was organized in November 2020. These training weeks really help me to become more professional in my work as a journalist". This was also an aspect I appreciated very much in this training. The people teaching us are really professionals and they communicated to us also the desire to really be professional in the work we do on radio. New things I learned during the different weeks concerned the subjects what all is needed to start a new radio station, how to dialogue well on radio and how to train others to do good radio programmes.



Big City Life reflections

It has been almost five months now since we moved to Niamey. And three weeks ago I (Jeannette) had the opportunity to spend a week in Maradi once again. During that week and over the past two weeks in Niamey there have been several triggers that made me reflect on the differences between life in Maradi and Niamey. When asked, I will – at least for now – reply that I prefer life in Maradi. Not only because of the work, but also because I enjoy the atmosphere of life there. In many ways life in Maradi is much more village like than city like. I find it difficult to put it into words, but there is just a different "feel" to life there than there is in Niamey.

Niamey really is the big city (though, when compared to many other capital cities, it is still not that big at all). And it has become so much more so than it used to be even as recent as 10 years ago with infrastructural improvements, in particular in the downtown area, many new buildings, and even a new airport. To put it popularly, the city has modernized in many ways. Just this morning, while I was attending softball practice of the high school team Caleb is part of, I was talking about the way Niamey has changed and continues to change rapidly with another parent who has been living in Niger since the mid 1990s.

What strikes me in particular while going around town is that with the changes in the city the poverty present in the society stands out even more. While driving around I see the new roads, nice looking restaurants, modern supermarkets or other stores, new hotels and office buildings, etc. I stop, walk into a very clean, new, well stocked, air-conditioned supermarket with automatic doors. Then when I leave again among the first things I see are people hanging around at the traffic lights, dressed in old dirty cloths, mostly looking dirty themselves too. When the traffic light is red they walk up to the cars in line to beg for food or money. Regularly also there are small children among those begging. When thinking about it, it really is the injustice in society that stands out even more here in Niamey than elsewhere in the country and it is painful to see it. Some days it frustrates me to be confronted with it over and over again because I feel that what we can do to fight against it is just so small, other days, on the contrary, I'm more positive and it stimulates me to put my heels down and realize that I'm here to do my very best to contribute to the fight against this poverty and inequality.

With our love,
Blaise, Jeannette, Caleb and Phoebé

To thank for:

- Safety during travels for Blaise and the others on the team in Nigeria.
- Caleb and Phoebé continue to do well in school.
- The various activities we are involved in in Maradi continue to go well.
- Ruth and Matthew, the two people who are taking over the administrative tasks Jeannette continued to do for the school, are learning quickly.

To pray for:

- The country and the government, especially as a new president will be installed in the coming weeks.
- The various people in Maradi managing the activities we supervise from a distance: Sunday – Soura and the outsourced professional training programmes. Yahouza – Quartier Libre Ayouba and Abou – Sowing Seeds of Change in the Sahel
- The team working on thinking through the best way forward for Sahel Academy in the aftermath of the inundations during August-September.

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Blaise, Jeannette, Caleb and Phoebé
Gaitou
BP 10469 JEMED
Niamey
Niger

Telephone: [00 227] 96 257 222
or 96 283 331
Email:
jemmaradi@gmail.com
jeannettegaitou@gmail.com

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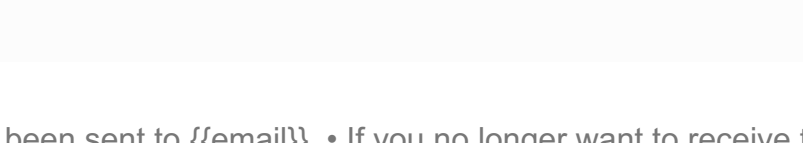
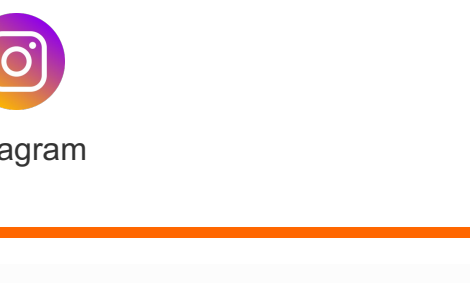
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