



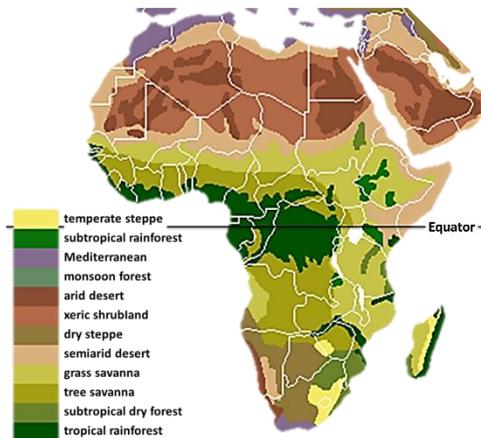
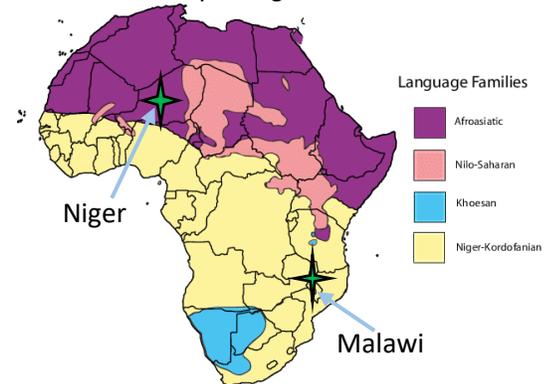
Mission Haven Update - December 2022

FROM MALAWI TO NIGER

Jim McGill and his family have been with the PC(USA) since 1995 and have been frequent residents with us. Currently, Jim is serving in Niger while his wife Jodi and 5 of their 6 children remain at Mission Haven. Jim works in Niger and South Sudan to ensure sustainability for clean water and sanitation.

For more than 20 years, our family lived in Malawi, a country in East Africa that calls itself the warm heart of Africa. To make assimilation back into a US educational system easier for our four younger children, Jodi and I sought another country in which to serve. After many months of searching, God provided the answer in Niger, West Africa. I was called by the Eglise Evangelique de la Republique du Niger (Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger), to re-establish their wholistic ministry of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), and Jodi was called to help establish a nursing school in the capital city of Niamey. Meanwhile, our children attended schools which offered American-based curriculums.

The distance between Mzuzu, Malawi and Niamey, Niger is 3,788 miles, and they are nearly diametrically opposed to each other in many ways. We left Malawi's Bantu culture with its language (in yellow) and began to learn the Hausa and Djarma cultures and Hausa language (in purple). The move also meant a shift from English to French as the working language. Jodi had learned French when teaching with the Peace Corps in Burundi, and I grew up in the D.R. Congo hearing French, but it had been almost 30 years since we spoke it regularly.



Climate, topography, and ecosystems are significantly different as well. Malawi is primarily "grass savannah" lands, while Niger is within the Sahel ("semi-arid desert"). These environmental variations produce changes in lifestyles and cultural norms regarding how water is used and valued. In Malawi, when you visit someone's home, you are offered something to eat – it could be a bowl of peanuts, roasted maize, or a meal. While in the Sahel, we learned that it is most important to immediately offer drinking water upon a guest's arrival before presenting food.

Perhaps the most significant change for us was from a predominately Christian country to a country where over 98% of its inhabitants profess Islam. In Malawi, when we entered a village, we were already a part of that community because the Church was an essential part of their culture. There, we introduced development on the coattails of being part of the Church. By contrast, the shift to Niger meant that going into villages to introduce improvements in WASH was often the first introduction to and demonstration of the love of Christ.

Yet, among Christians in both cultures, Christmas is all about sharing the love of God that was made incarnate in Jesus. There is very little gift giving at Christmas. Instead, celebration abounds through water, food, and family togetherness. The joy and generosity of God's love which Christians exemplify during Christmas seems amplified by the smaller number of Christians in Niger. Congregations literally open their gates and doors to anyone who walks by, inviting them to share a Christmas feast of mutton and other local foods. Many who walk by - primarily devote Muslims - stop, sit, and share in the feast. I can think of no other way Jesus would love to see his birthday celebrated. Blessings to you this Christmas and always.



"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." – John 1:14



Housing ~ Hospitality ~ Clothing ~ Prayer