

Dear All,

Norton News, 2/14/07

This is going to be a short update and a longer letter to follow. These have been very difficult and stressful times for us and especially for the country of Guinea. First of all we apologize for not being in better communication, but our computer crashed two days before Christmas. We got a new one but we couldn't pick it up because it was in Conakry and there was a strike going on. The strike started Jan. 10 and let up for two weeks and is going full force again today. We were able to travel to Conakry to pick up our new colleague Andrea Herman who arrived on the 6th of February.

Unfortunately things have spiraled downhill in the country ever since then. We heard that that strike was starting up again and so we left earlier than planned. We traveled partly through the night and left early in the morning hoping to avoid any problems. Unfortunately we weren't able to get away from them all. There are people with legitimate complaints against the government who are striking and demonstrating, but thieves and ruffians also take advantage of the chaos to cause harm. These latter people set up a road block and tried to get us to get out of our vehicles so they could steal them, when we refused they broke the windows with machetes. Two windows in Andrea's car were broken and one in ours. Thank the Lord no one was injured.

We got close to small town (around 18,000) called Kouroussa which we didn't expect to have any problems, but as we approached a man on a motor-bike warned us that it was very violent and unpredictable there too. So we took a dirt road for 125kms and 5 hours later we finally made it home. After staying one night in Siguiiri we learned that they too had demonstrated and ransacked the Djoma hotel (some who are reading this may have either eaten or stayed there). More or less everything was destroyed including the non-functioning cyber cafe. It was after we heard that the prisoners had been released that we decided to make for Bamako and wait out the trouble. We needed our windows repaired and we didn't need anymore distress. In any case we are all safe and we are all sound. We're watching and praying and waiting now. I called our administrative assistant today in Siguiiri and he said that it has been very hot. There was a lot of gunfire especially by our house since that's where most of the government buildings are. We've also heard that our former residence of Kankan was very chaotic today, but as far as we know our missionary friends in that town are safe.

We are especially thankful for our missionary friends in Bamako from the Norwegian Lutheran Mission who took us in, cared for us and fed us. They had gone through a similar experience in Cote d'Ivoire so they were very sympathetic.

Before all of this happened we praised God that 8 people were baptized in the month of December (more about that in the next letter). The Church Leaders for the most part are of good spirits that these troubles will pass. We pray that that is the case.

Thanks to all who wrote notes of concern. May God bless and keep you, and pray for the country of Guinea.

In Christ,
Tim, Heidi, Philip & Leslie Norton

Dear friends,

Norton Update, 2/22/07

So the "new" news.... First, let me go backward and explain a bit about the eight people baptized in December. I had been writing about our evangelist Sacko Koulibaly going to village "L" since September. His work bore fruit and at the beginning of December seven men wrote letters to him which he delivered to me saying that they wanted to be baptized. We decided to make it a double holiday and hold the baptisms on

Christmas day. But before Christmas another young man we've known for nearly two years and shared the gospel with the entire time, finally decided that what we were saying was true. He also was baptized on the 10th of December. Our friend and partner in God's mission Moussa Traoré from Bamako came down to lead a seminar on Christian burial (you may recall our struggling with this issue with the death of our first believer in November) and stayed to baptize Sori K. on the 10th. Sori also has said he wants to serve the LORD with his life and become a pastor. The LORD seems to be preparing Sori for the hardships of serving full-time as Sori has already experienced a fair amount of persecution. At first his family rejected him entirely. After a short while his mother accepted the Sori's new faith, but his older brothers are still against him.

In any case Christmas came and it was a great day of celebration. The new believers were eager to participate in worship and read scripture, prayed and led one song of praise. One of the things we haven't been able to do is follow up a lot with them. Because the strike started on Jan. 10 we haven't been able to make it out to their village .

They left two days after Christmas and communication is nearly impossible between Siguiiri and their home. One of the seven did stay behind for further training in evangelism and discipleship, but unfortunately that too was cut short by his parents arranging a marriage. Most marriages around here are arranged and so if the parents say that it is time, there is usually little choice in the matter for either the future bride or groom.

Sacko was working hard in a new village near Siguiiri to share the gospel. At first this village was really resistant (even though they agreed to learn about Scripture) but through patient reasoning, Sacko was able to convince them, that the Scriptures are worth learning.

Another village also opened up during the strike, and had great potential. There was a large crowd there eager to learn. The teacher was a young man named Abdoulaye who was baptized a year ago. Unfortunately just before we left to Conakry to pick up Andrea, Abdoulaye learned of his mother's passing (he's from a different area in Guinea) and was going away for the death greeting.

What will happen to our seven new believers in "L"? Abdoulaye? Sacko and Sori? I would be lying if I said these weren't concerns for us. However we are all in the LORD's hands and trust in his great plan for our lives.

On that same subject many people have asked what our future plans hold. We are simply waiting out the political crisis in Guinea, and praying that it ends soon. In the meantime we hope to engage in some ministry activities here in Bamako. Andrea Herman has already met a language helper who worked with the Norwegian mission, and could help her get started with language learning. There is a large neighborhood in Bamako of Maninka both from Mali and Guinea, which I plan on visiting in the coming days.

The Norwegian mission has been extremely generous to us and we've been greatly blessed by them. They've allowed us to stay in their guesthouse until the end of this month free of charge. Hopefully by that time we will have a better idea of the situation in Guinea and know how the LORD may be leading us.

Please continue to pray for the following.

- The 8 men baptized in December that God would increase their faith
- Evangelist Sacko Koulibaly and his work in the prefecture
- The political crisis in Guinea that it may soon be over -For God's leading to make this waiting time in Bamako productive

In Christ,
Tim, Heidi, Philip & Leslie Norton