

Dear Friends in Christ,

Norton April 2006 Newsletter

What a strange and wonderful calling God has given us! Sometimes when we feel the most discouraged He turns us on our heads and gives us an entirely new view of how He is working in the world. This month as we celebrated His resurrection and victory over sin, death, and the grave He also resurrected opportunities for us to share the Gospel here.

There was a large international meeting held in Siguiiri this month by the organization that is the main impetus behind the "N'ko" literacy movement. One may recall my mentioning N'ko in previous newsletters, it is the script developed by a Maninka man (Suleymana Kanté) to reduce the Maninka language to writing. Suleymana Kanté's eldest son (Suleymana himself is deceased) was at the meeting along with delegates from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mali & Senegal. Another participant was yours truly. I happened to be the only lighter skinned person in a crowded theater of about 500-700 people. There were supposed to have been delegates from the U.S.A. and the republic of Ireland, as well as Saudi Arabia, & Egypt, but they were no-shows. So I became something of an instant minor celebrity.

Since Maninka people have an "event-oriented culture" and this was a memorable event, everyone wanted to get a picture taken. Since I was the most noticeable person in the crowd, they all wanted to get their picture taken with me. I was in far more pictures that day than I was on my wedding day. Well over 100 strangers now have the smiling visage of a goofy looking white-guy as a photographic record to remind them of the conference.

Far more important than the red-eye headache I had because of the paparazzi barrage of shutters was the opportunity to speak to the group and share a little about what we are doing. The organizers gave me the microphone and I addressed the crowd telling them that I was here to share good news, and that if we know reading and writing it facilitates our knowing God. I was also interviewed by a journalist from Mali and had the occasion to expound on some of the same thoughts.

God used the time to revitalize the groups in villages where we had done chronological Bible storying and N'ko literacy to once again be seriously interested in learning more about His Word. We also received a new invitation to a town about 100 kilometers away from here, "L", which is also in the prefecture, to start evangelism there. By God's grace we plan on our first visit there next month.

Another cause for rejoicing this month was the stand one of the believers took against the lies of Satan. This fellow has been sick since October with a disease that impedes him from walking, although at point he and most of his family thought that he would die, he is still alive even if bedridden. His extended family came for to take him to their village to see a healer who would make sacrifices to gain healing. Although this is tempting for almost every person coming from an animistic background it is even more severe for someone who's suffering. By God's power he was able to tell the extended family "let's leave this one up to God and see what he does." Truly the Holy Spirit is alive and active in his heart!

Our Easter celebration was a blessed one as well with the young believers God has called from outlying villages coming in to celebrate with us. Although many have left our original group, we are thankful for the ones who have responded with joy to God's gift of grace.

In all of the challenges, joys, frustrations, and serindipitous events we thank our Lord who brought us this far and will bring His work to completion here. Please join us in our prayers:

- Thanksgiving for new opportunities to share the gospel as a result of the international N'ko conference.
- Pray for our young believers as they engage in evangelism presently and also at the new village of L. where we will visit next month.
- Pray for the people of L. that their hearts will be open to the Gospel.
- Pray for the country of Guinea that it may remain without violence or bloodshed in uncertain political times.
- Pray for our friends here as they start planting next month, that God would provide for their needs and give them an abundant harvest.

In Christ,
Tim, Heidi, Philip & Leslie Norton
LCMS World Mission
Guinea, West Africa