

Training Leaders for Community Transformation in Niger

Niger has consistently ranked at the very bottom of the United Nations Human Development Index. Some indicators that reflect this underdevelopment are as follows:

- Only 40% of men and 20% of women are literate.
- There is one doctor for every 50,000 people.
- One in seven women die in childbirth.
- 40% of children under age 5 are malnourished.
- 20% of children die before their fifth birthday.
- Up to 90% of the population is involved in subsistence agriculture.

While the government of Niger is a secular democracy, about 97% of the population adheres to Islam and only 1% to Christianity. Although the Christian community is quite small, the larger society tends to look favorably upon it. Many Muslim parents strive to send their children to Christian primary schools, because of the belief that they provide a very strong education. Church-run clinics and hospitals are also heavily used.



Mission co-workers Michael Ludwig and Claire Zuhosky meet with EERN leaders. Photo provided by Michael.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) partner in Niger is the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Niger, known by the acronym EERN, which comes from the French name, Eglise Evangelique de la Republique du Niger. The EERN is a small church with about 100 congregations and 16,000 adult members and children. But at this size, they are most likely the largest Christian body in the country.

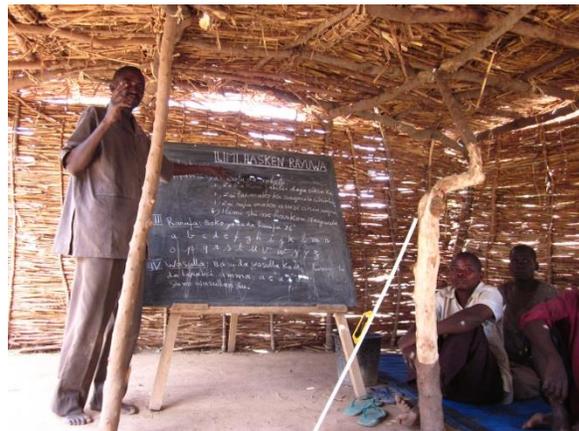
The EERN runs three Bible schools – one each at the basic, intermediate and advanced levels. The basic Bible school receives students preparing for

ministry who may never have attended school in their lives. These students are given a basic education, which often includes being taught to read and write. The intermediate school prepares students to go out and be evangelists for the church. The advanced school trains those who have served as evangelists to be pastors.

Although the role of evangelist and pastor is currently reserved for men, the wives of male students are also enrolled in the school and frequently receive the same education. In Nigerien society, because the dominant Muslim culture often restricts the ability of men to interact with women and women to interact with men, there is also a need to educate women who are spouses of pastors and evangelists. These women have a great ability to impact the well-being of women and children in Niger, and the PC(USA) wants to encourage and support this.

Currently, Rev. Michael Ludwig, a PC(USA) mission co-worker, is working with the EERN in the Bible schools. Initially called to work in the area of literacy and evangelism, the EERN also wants Michael to help them revise the curriculum used to train students at the intermediate and advanced levels. This is a wonderful opportunity to build into the curriculum elements of a Community Health Evangelism (CHE) model of mission. Such a curriculum would educate church leaders in a way that allows them to have a great impact transforming society, in areas of health and education, in addition to faith.

Another PC(USA) mission co-worker based in Niger is Claire Zuhosky. Claire has been appointed to work with youth and young adults of the EERN, as the church attempts to develop educational and skills training programs for them. Historically, Niger has struggled to equip the youth and young adults of the country with vocational, technical, and practical work skills. For this reason, the church feels called to step into the gap, to empower the youth of church and society to be a transformative force.



How can you help EERN and PC(USA) mission co-workers in their work to train leaders for community transformation in Niger?

- Support the work of EERN in training leaders for community transformation:
www.presbyterianmission.org/donate/E051746/
- Help provide sending and support costs for mission co-worker Michael Ludwig and his family:
www.presbyterianmission.org/donate/E200513/
- Help provide sending and support costs for mission co-worker Claire Zuhosky:
www.presbyterianmission.org/donate/E200517/