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Broadcasting faith in Burkina Faso

Worship in Burkina Faso is a highly oral experience. There are no bulletins, no overhead projectors. Songbooks are a rarity. Those who can read may have brought a Bible or their own personal song book – if they are fortunate enough to have one – but most sit and listen attentively.

During one worship service, a parade of women enter the back of the sanctuary, singing and swaying in time to the balifone – a traditional marimba like instrument – and drum music. In their hands, each one clutches a field hoe. The women swipe at imaginary weeds in time to the music. The hoe is a symbol of work and working together in this culture. The presentation is a call to all Christians to gather together to work for the Kingdom of God.

The children, who have had to clear out to make room at the front, peer in through glassless windows, standing on tip toes.

Pastor Coulibaly Abdias of the Orodara Mennonite Church dreams of expanding a radio broadcast ministry in this culture where oral communication is a highly valued tradition. In rural areas especially, few Burkinabe people read or write; indeed, having their own language in written form is a recent development.

In response to this communications need, Mennonite Church Canada Witness has assigned Norm Nicolson to work in a recording studio as a Vernacular Media Technician and Instructor. Nicolson continues language study in preparation for his duties.

Radio broadcasting is relatively inexpensive. Most people, even in rural areas, have a radio receiver. Although a broadcast ministry can be a complex endeavour in a country with over 60 languages, plans are to begin with Jula, the language of commerce, and then add Samogho, a local indigenous language.

Abdias says that the Mennonite Church brings the work of peacemaking to the whole evangelical community in Burkina Faso. He highlights several prayer needs: the holistic development of the church, its material and spiritual growth, and political and social stability in Burkina Faso and the surrounding region. “This whole region is very acquainted with civil wars and political turmoil,” he says, adding, “Pray for the churches to grow strong.”

Then he shares a final request that mirrors the concerns of many Mennonites in Canada. “I pray that God will help the new generation to have a strong faith and keep the ways of communion and communication with God so that they can know a better life in the future.”

We invite you to share with your congregation the following story from Burkina Faso, where Witness Workers Norm and Lillian Nicolson engage in literacy and communications projects. The story should take no more than 2 minutes to read aloud. You might also wish to include it in your church newsletter.

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 3:11