

## Please pray ...

... that we are able to figure out how best to communicate with supporting churches and individuals while we are in the US under these abnormal consequences.

... with thanksgiving that the Lord gave us a way back to the US.

... for understanding how to move forward with the FEU ministry during this time, and after.

... with thanksgiving that we have a place to self-quarantine near family.

... that Wanda and I are able to re-center on Christ during our time self-quarantine.

... for the people of Niger, in a country with a much less developed health care system.

... that we have seen some good news in the fight against COVID-19 in the last few days.

***There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. – 1 John 4:18***

Howdy!

We are in the US. What?!? We had originally been scheduled to come back to the U.S. May 1st. Niger, in response to the COVID-19 crisis closed the airport on March 19th. All international travel was suspended. Soon after, SIM recommended those with home assignments coming up soon to take one of the repatriation flights that the embassy was trying to put together. We really felt torn about this. We did not take the first flight to allow those who had real medical reasons to leave first. We still prayed about what we should be doing. Due to other recommendations by authorities in Niger, we also had to suspend all activities at the FEU. The FEU and literacy are ministries built on relationship and personal face to face contact. That had become pretty hard to do in the current situation.

When the embassy announced a second flight in early April, we put our names in the pool for it. Then we called the travel agency we use, and asked what our options were for our existing tickets if we took the repatriation flight. We then found out that original tickets had just been canceled by Air France anyway! This did not come as a huge surprise since restrictions in Niger were building, and a date for resumption of normal international travel was being pushed further and further out. Our original flight was a definite closed door. The question was where did God want us during this time? It seemed that we could be more helpful to the FEU from the U.S. There continues to be a small FEU team in Niger that can monitor when we can reopen, and to what extent.

Eventually, the flight did come off and we left Niamey on the morning of April 10th for a 30 plus hour, six airport, four country travel odyssey back home. This included sitting on the tarmac for five or six hours (it's all a little bit blurry now!) in Sierra Leone waiting for a valve on the aircraft to respond to the open position so we could take on fuel. The crew eventually had to reboot the operating system of the aircraft (Have you turned it off and turned it back on?) to get it to work!

Observations during the trip and after have been interesting. *Disclaimer: All observations below are anecdotal and interesting, with no judgment from me on anything!*

\*Face masks: Face mask use in the three African countries we were at was fairly consistent at least among airport staff at about 70 to 80 percent, although a few of that number were not wearing them properly. It was very interesting to watch the regression of face mask use from the coast (Washington DC) to Wisconsin. In DC among the passengers and staff use was in the 75% range. In Detroit that was maybe 50%. Appleton, Wisconsin, maybe 30%. In the grocery store in the small Wisconsin town where we are self-quarantining, less than 10%!



\*Bananas: Once you have a banana plant, store bought bananas here in the US have a distinctly cardboard taste!

\*Toilet paper: We had a little extra room in a bag, so we threw in a few rolls of toilet paper. I would have never thought I would feel a compulsion to bring something as basic as toilet paper back from Niger to the US! Crazy!

\*Hugs: It is extremely hard to not hug your kids after not seeing them for the last two years! This really affected Wanda deeply. It was (and continues to be) one of the hardest parts of this return.

\*Thankfulness: If there is a good thing about situations like this, we tend to be more thankful for basics. We have a place to stay for the next 14 days to self-isolate. Chances are that we are just fine, since at least at this point, we probably had less of a chance of exposure in Niger than here. We have a fridge and cupboards that our family has filled with food. We have every basic need and more provided for us by people that love us. Beyond that, and even more basic, we have a Savior that loves and cares for us.

\*Easter: No matter where we had ended up at this time, Easter was going to be different. In Niger normal gatherings were prohibited as well. What we were able to do was reflect on God's love through Jesus. We did not have decent enough internet until later in the day to watch any services. However, due partly to jet lag, we were up at 4:30 in the morning, so we had our own little sunrise service. We read John 17-20 and talking about how if the story ended at Chapter 19, that would indeed be the end, but then there is the glorious resurrection and continuation of the story in Chapter 20. Oh how marvelous!

In any circumstance, I try to always ask if the Lord has a lesson in all that is happening. In this, I think the thing to remember is that plans can and will change. I thought I had that lesson down pretty well. On the mission field there is a constant reassessing of plans and the need to be even painfully flexible sometimes, but this is on a such a different level, that almost nothing of the original plan exists. I say this as someone who is a planner, and likes to plan to the minute detail at times. Ask Wanda! Nevertheless, there is One who is steadfast and unchanging, and One who knew about this before it even happened. Even through this, He cares for His children and desires the best for each of them, beyond any human father.

We know that how we were potentially going to visit churches and people is going to change. After our self-quarantine, we will have debriefs with our mission, except via video. We will be contacting the churches and individuals we were going to visit and offer those visits via some other format as well, or see if it can happen at all. Maybe sometime through this, some of the restrictions will be lifted and we can once again shake hands, hug, and gather together non-virtually, and without fear.

*Blessings! Randy and Wanda*

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### **How can you be involved?**

**Partner with us in prayer!** -- If you are consistently praying for us, we'd be encouraged if you dropped us a line to let us know that.

## **Partner with us through giving**

- **Online** --  
<https://www.simusa.org/give?id=065825-001&name=Potratz&dsg=Support>
- **Phone** -- 1-800-521-6449 extension 1467 or ask for donor care. They are really nice people and will answer any questions you might have.
- **Mail** -- Make check payable to SIM. In the memo note "Potratz Account 065825", and send to:  
*SIM Donor Care  
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