

Hi again Friends,

Senegal is hot. Wow. Even in the 'cool season', which it apparently is now, I'm sweating buckets (too much information, I know).

Almost immediately after our last rendezvous, I was mildly electrocuted in the internet cafe by a poorly-wired computer, but your hero escaped with only minor injuries to my hand and no (noticeable) brain damage.

Yesterday I traveled to Thiès, Senegal's second city, for a look at the work of our local partner Inter-Senegal Mission (ISM), led by José Oliviera. José (pronounced 'Joe-zay' - masculine form of Josée - like the figure skater Josée Chouinard - not sure how I know her name but I do).

ISM's work is vast, and includes a hospital and mobile medical clinic, widespread vocational training, nutrition and health training for women, church planting, microcredit, and probably other stuff I've forgotten already. Their philosophy seems a pretty simple one - the local church should be a blessing in its community. Everything they do is for the whole community, and when a church is established in a community José drills it into the heads of his workers NOT to withdraw and become a separate entity, but to stay at the centre of community life - this is music to my ears. Salt is useless if it stays in the shaker.

At one village we visited they were doing a women's program on nutrition and so there were a whole bunch of ladies there with their little bébés. That was very nice. Their scale for weighing the babies was broken and José took it upon himself to fix it on the spot. That gave me time to take a whole bunch of pictures of the women and kids.

The villages we went to were really 'villages'. As in round-mud-huts-with-thatched-roofs villages. Senegal is one of the most developed countries on the African continent, but its rural areas are still quite primitive. Life there has not changed a lot in several hundred (or even thousand) years. Maybe that's not totally fair. Certainly some improvements are evident, some made by the government (schools and, well, I guess they call those "roads") and some by ISM (clean water to some communities, health care and training).

The other exception is that I did see one cell phone owned by a villager - pretty sure that's a big exception, though. I can't imagine the reception is that great in Soma village 2 hours east of Thiès. "Can you hear me now?" "Non."

Beyond that though, they still ride around on donkeys or walk around in thin 'Jesus-sandals', they still drive herds of animals around, cook their food over open flame, and dry their crops in the sun, and they still believe that offering sacrifices to little carved pieces of wood will make for a better crop next year. Most follow a 'syncretistic' folk-Islam that fuses Muslim teaching with their traditional animistic beliefs. It's really like going back in time. Actually, now that I think of it, it's a little like Timbuktu, only different.

Today we visited another partner called PMI which has a medical centre and also trains moms about nutrition and good health for their children. PMI US sends a shipment of medicine to them annually and they make good use of it. Very good people.

Also today I had a little tour of the city of Dakar by our local Area Director Rene Mbongo. It was nice to see some of the nicer areas of the city after having spent most of my time in some of the rougher spots. It's a maritime city on the Atlantic, and to me all maritime cities are beautiful.

Now it's off to Nigeria tonight. Not sure what the email access situation will be like there, but I'll do my best to write once or twice more. Till then I am,

Your faithful correspondent,

Tom McLagan

Au revoir!

