

Ministry among disenfranchised people of Mali

1. Prostitutes.

They come from all over West Africa, each with a dream, drawn to the glamour and promises of success in the capital city. Over 120 of them live and work out of cramped 8 x 10 foot windowless cubicles behind the crowded Sogoniko bus station. Most of their dreams have long been forgotten replaced by the simple need to survive. They rent their cubicles for \$ 8 dollars per day hoping that they will have enough clients to cover this basis cost. Some are obligated to join with others in order to split the cost of housing. Drugs are often used to fend off the cravings of sleep because nighttime is when the workload is the most profitable. Nutrition and food intake is not a high priority and one's health is rarely considered.

This description fits professional sex workers of just about any capital city in West Africa, but these are located in Bamako, Mali. Many of the young girls are simply looking for quick cash since their families aren't able to help them. On the other end of the spectrum are the widows, completely abandoned by their extended families, yet responsible for raising a number of children. With nearly 70 % of Malians living below the poverty line, desperation plays a major role in prostitution. Unfortunately ALL are exposing themselves to the AIDS virus, an epidemic throughout Africa which has significantly increased the risks of their profession. It is believed that 25 – 40 % of prostitutes in this part of Africa have the AIDS virus.

CAMA Services is currently looking for ways to help those seeking freedom from the bonds of prostitution and start a new life (spiritually, socially, and economically). Many of these women's stories of bondage are heart-wrenching. Even when they do break free, their former life style often returns to haunt them as seen in the following story:



When Kadjatou, a prostitute in Bamako, gave birth to her son Andre in August of 2002, she began to question whether she could really continue on with her life style. Unfortunately she had no other means to make a living, so feeling trapped, she returned to prostitution. Earlier 2002 she met Rev. Yiranou Traore, a C&MA national evangelist who shared with her about Jesus Christ. In December of that same year, Yiranou asked C&MA missionary, Carina Saarloos, to maintain contact with Kadjatou. Carina visited her weekly in front of her house to talk and pray with her. In

April 2003, Kadjatou took a huge step forward, giving her heart to the Lord and turning her back on prostitution forever. However, Kadjatou's son soon became sick and after many tests it was discovered that he had AIDS. Andre died in October 2003 but Kadjatou remained faithful to the Lord. Carina continued discipling her weekly and her faith began to grow. She received assistance to start a small business which she used to sell local clothe. Shortly thereafter, she became quite sick herself (probably due to her contracting the AIDS virus) and ultimately went to be with her Savior in March 2004.

Many of the women are foreigners with no means for returning home. A Nigerian lady named Precious, came to the Lord already before she came in Mali in the year 2000. But because of big problems in her life it was hard for her to keep following the Lord. More and more she was doing wrong things to earn money and her faith was more and more becoming dead.

Precious met Rev. Yiranou Traore in the beginning of 2001 and she was very open for his teaching and encouragement. She found a "filling in teaching job", teaching English at a school in Bamako for a while, and got some money. With this money she was able to start a small roadside restaurant in 2002 and she consecrated her life again totally to the Lord. For about a year the restaurant functioned very well and Precious was growing in her faith. But then Precious got sick and was not able to keep her restaurant open. But praise the Lord she did not turn away from the Lord this time !!!



In August 2003 She received assistance to invest in purchasing used clothing and opened a small shop along the highway. God has blessed her business and she is making enough to live. She is still growing in her faith and meets weekly for a personal Bible study time with Carina. She is a model example of someone willing to commit herself to the Lord and turn from her previous life regardless of the difficulties.

Pastor Yiranou and his wife started this ministry in 2001. Since Carina joined the team in November 2002 things are more structured and the outreach is very regularly.

Where are we at now ?

Since end of February 2005 the local government came with some bulldozers and gave everybody one hour to take everything out of the 67 houses at the Sogoniko busstation. Two hours later there was nothing else left then pumice stone. It is still a ruin there. That same day 124 prostitutes where on the street and without home and workplace.



Bamako and Segou.

In one way I really see God's hand in this. The last few months of 2004, I have been at the bus station several times with a group of visiting ladies from the U.S. who prayed very sincere for the ladies. The Spirit of God was absolutely moving out there the last few months.! On the other hand right know they are all spread out over Mali. I heard that a group of 20 ladies went to Koutiala and an even bigger group to Segou and a small group of 8 to Fana between

I found 20 others who are at small local bars in Bamako. It is hard for the team now to keep in contact with a lot of them when they are so spread out over Mali !

Future plans ?

CAMA's desire is to set up a community bank whereby other individuals like Precious can show their determination to escape from this life-style. A significant first step on their part is critical to determining their level of commitment. CAMA is thus looking for ways to provide low-interest loans and/or matching grants to help them set up small businesses.

There are also plans for a half-way house for the prostitutes.

2. Prisoners

Since around ten years, the prison has become one of the top priorities of the evangelical Christian authorities. This social ministry of the AGEMPEM is recognized by the Malian government as an institution of public utility. About twenty pastors (chaplains) from different Protestant church dominations work in this ministry all over Mali and meet once a year together for sharing and prayer. In Bamako the group meets ones a month for prayer and evaluation.

The main part of the work of this ministry consists in showing the love of Jesus Christ to prisoners by taking in charge their well being-material, physical, moral, spiritual and especially for their rehabilitation.

That's why the team of Bamako; RDC refugee Anatole, pastor Isaka Koeta, docter Ibrahima Cisse, ex-prisoner Aya Doukoure and CMA Missionary Carina go and visit weekly different prisons. To bring moral, dietary(food), medical and clothing assistance and spiritual and emotional support where necessary. We find it very important to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ through social, spiritual and material actions.



An example of changed life !
Sidibé, a prisoner serving a three-year term in the Kati prison came to the Lord in November 2003. He heard the gospel from lay-preacher Anatole Seke, who himself is a refugee from Congo but has chosen to minister in the prisons. Two days after Musa's conversion he was suddenly released from prison. Afterwards his comment was "That's the hand of the God of the Christians". He has returned twice to the prison to tell the other prisoners to give their hearts to Jesus who can set them truly free !!!

Thanks to the activities of the AGEMPEM many of our prisoners had new hope of life in the society. It had contributed to change the atmosphere in prisons.

Future plans ?

The AGEMPEM netter wishes to supervise the prisoners in the prisons and that's why they want to build a center called Philemon. This will be a rehabilitation and care center for the former prisoners but also a place of cult for penitentiaries centers.

The goal of this center is to strengthen the security around the big cities of Mali through the education and social insertion of former prisoners.

We are thinking about the following activities in the Philemon Center to learn a profession and to be productive:

Literacy, Masonry, Gardening, Breeding, Painting, Bogolan (Malian clothes painting with mud).

Conclusions:

Isaiah 55:9 says "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Several years ago people may have had thoughts like these-- the work in Mali is finished, it's time for the Church to be the Church and finish the job, Africa is reached and so on.

However, over the last three and half years God has continually reminded us that the job is not finished here. Mali was not at the top of anyone's priority list, candidates were searching for the more exciting and exotic places to go and serve God, not realizing that Mali is a place to do "extreme missions". Why do I say "extreme missions" ? Because Mali is a hot, dry, dusty land, filled with over 11 million people, most of whom have yet to be reached with the Gospel.

It may mean living in places that are difficult to reach-- no access to electric or telephone. It will mean working among people who believe that animal sacrifices, charms, praying five times a day and doing good works are practical ways to work out what hope of eternal life they may earn.

The majority of evangelical visitors to Mali say, "This is an exciting time to work here!" Never has that statement been as true as now. Our field team is growing and we are sure that in partnership with Malian Christians, we will give everyone in this country a relevant opportunity to follow Christ.

Carina Saarloos

Bamako, October 16, 2005