

Single Female Missionary Starts Three Churches in a Muslim Nation

Ten years ago, Claudia Wintoach set off on a vision that God gave her when she was a brand new Christian at the age of 20, to start a work in Africa. "I told God when I was first saved to send me where no one else wanted to go," she said.

Wintoach was a college student in Austria, and she changed her major to African Languages. "I had never heard of Mali, and I went there when I was in college for linguistic research for my thesis."

Mali, a predominantly Muslim nation in northwest Africa, and a former French colony, is twice the size of Texas and considered the 13th-poorest nation in the world. The average annual income is \$190 and half of the population is under 15 years of age. Besides poverty and an unstable government, one of Mali's chronic problems is the abandonment of boys by their families.

"Every good Muslim family gives one five-year-old boy away to a Muslim teacher to get points with Allah," Wintoach said. "Those boys are then forced by their teachers to beg [in order] to pay for their teacher's lifestyle. Many of them are beaten, and the older boys steal their money. When they go back to their families, the family doesn't want them. So there are thousands of boys living on the streets."

One of those boys was three-year-old Bakary. "We were ministering in another village and one of our leaders said, 'there's a three-year-old boy living on the street because his parents died,'" said Wintoach. "Of course I took him in, and I'm thinking of adopting him. No one really knows how old they are in Mali, so I ask questions such as how many rainy seasons

they have lived through.” Today Bakary loves Jesus and he is attending a private Christian school.

In 2004, Wintoch founded a church and home for children in Bamako, the capital of Mali. Bamako has a population of 2.2 million people, with 200,000 new residents moving there each year. The government gave Wintoch three-quarters of an acre to build a home for children. She lives with 16 children, and an additional 19 children spend the day at the home. At night, up to another 40 children from the streets may spend the night.

“We’ve seen healings take place, and it’s awesome to see the kids learn about Jesus and minister healing to their friends,” said Wintoch. Since 2004, her ministry, Healing 2 The Nations International, has grown to three churches, which include churches planted in the villages of Goro and Dara. Wintoch trained Paul Traore, who joined the ministry when he was 17 years old, to oversee the churches. Traore is now a pastor.

“It’s easy to start a church in a Muslim village,” Wintoch said. “You just need a couple of healings, and then they tell their friends about it and before you know it, you have a church. The hard part is finding the people and the money to do it.”

Being a single woman leading a ministry in a Muslim nation is challenging for Wintoch. However, Wintoch encourages single women who have a dream from God to pursue it.

“If you can make your dream come true, then it’s probably not from God,” she says. “I learned to totally depend on God to provide, having come to Mali with no money.”

After Wintoch graduated from college, she went to bible school in Kansas City. She returned to Austria and then tried to get back into the U.S. via Canada. Stranded in Canada with no money, she met a missionary. “The missionary suggested that I try to get in as a teacher, and I did.”

Wintoch researched schools online and contacted a small Muslim school in Mali. The school sent an email back and suggested that she come and teach German. The school hired Wintoch, and she slept the first three days on the floor of the school.

“At my first teacher’s meeting, they were telling the instructors not to require sex from the girls in exchange for good grades,” she said. Wintoch taught there for two years while the dream God had given her began to mature. One of her neighbors became a Christian two months after Wintoch’s arrival, and was a key person in starting the ministry in Bamako.

Wintoch is returning to Mali from furlough in Kansas City in late February and has been warned about military checkpoints in Bamako. Thankfully, the school and the church have not been affected by the recent attempted coup by al-Qaeda. With children depending upon her, Wintoch is returning to family.

Leilani Haywood is a Kansas City, award-winning writer and columnist. She has been published in the Kansas City Star, Metro Voice and other publications. When she’s not updating her status on Facebook or Twitter, she’s driving her three kids to school or their next rehearsal. Follow her on Twitter @leilanihaywood.