

Copeland Ramblings



Serving with NTMC in Senegal, West Africa

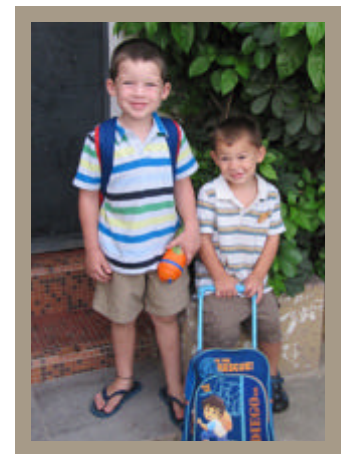
Big Changes

We would like to take a moment to update you on our situation here in Senegal. Since our arrival in West Africa a little over two years ago, Debra's health has steadily deteriorated. It is something we have tried to deal with in various ways: by visiting doctors, specialists, pursuing treatments, adjusting our environment, etc. It has been difficult to diagnose though we do know that the biggest problem Debra has is allergies. Her allergies have been quite serious and get to the point that she has difficulty breathing, her face swells and becomes incredibly itchy. A specialist here in Dakar has tried different medications and treatments to no avail. To be honest it is hard to think of more than a few days in a row during the last two years that Debra has felt well. Even during the weeks where allergies were less of a problem, Debra seems to be continually sick. Despite these difficulties we have grown to love Senegal, the field that God placed us in. We completed our orientation objectives of language and culture acquisition and I (Norm) began working in the Dakar office as government representative, IT and a member of the Service Leadership Team. Our passion and desire to assist and support church planting has only grown over our time in West Africa as we have interacted with the West African church and our coworkers working in the villages. We have developed meaningful relationships with our coworkers and have enjoyed encouraging them as we are also encouraged. This past summer Debra went home for a short trip to be a part of a couple of weddings and since her return late August her condition has become much worse. We have arrived at the point that it is difficult to function as a family and we have had to sit down and ask honest questions about what God has for us. They were difficult questions to wrestle with because of how much we have grown to love Senegal, it's people, our coworkers, and the work that God is accomplishing here. We have come to the conclusion after much

prayer and reflection that we can not continue to minister here in West Africa. I have been very proud of Debra throughout this ordeal. Despite being very sick she has continued to show a servant's heart. As we made this decision she even told me that she was completely willing to stay in Senegal and be sick if it was what the Lord wanted, but we needed to go before His throne and seek his will. We do not understand what God is doing here, but we do know without a doubt that God led us to West Africa. It has been the most difficult but important two years of our lives. God has shaped us through it and we could not ask for anything as precious as that. I pray that for the short time we have been here we have been able to encourage our team and support the church planting works. But now, we just as firmly believe that God is again rerouting us. Though we trust in God's leading in this situation, it has still been a sad and difficult time. We have shed many tears over the last week but we know that God is good, loving, kind, and sovereign, He will never do anything in our lives that goes against those qualities. Our planned departure creates some difficulties in the headquarters and so we are working with our team to decide on the timing of all of this. We want to help as much as possible to ease the transition not only for us but for everyone else.

Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and He will establish your plans.

Proverbs 16:3



So what does our future look like?

It is our strong desire and plan to continue serving with New Tribes Mission to support church planting in any way we can. Despite trials and sickness our passion to be a part of God's work planting indigenous churches around the world has not diminished. We write to you all of this because we would like your input, counsel and advice. We do not yet know where God is

specifically leading and ask you to be in prayer with us.

It is a joy to serve in Senegal as your representative and we look forward to continue representing you and serving wherever God sees fit to put us.

We will contact you all as soon as we can with information about where God may be leading.

What does this mean to you?

We will continue as missionaries with New Tribes Mission supporting church planting works around the world. We need your prayers and support now more than ever and ask you to pray for us often.

Planting churches around the world is truly a work that God designed for the whole body of Christ! God will continue using you and us to help plant churches that glorify Him!

Nothing changes as far as how we can be supported financially. Gifts can continue to be sent in the same way.

Do you have questions? We sure do! Feel free to contact us using any of the methods below and we'll do our best to answer your question.


PRAY




- Continue to pray for Deb's health. It may be still be a few months before we are able to leave Senegal.
- Pray for us as we plan our departure and say goodbye to many dear friends. Though we look forward to Debra feeling well again, it is a sad time.
- Pray for us as we begin this huge transition. Pray for us and our leadership to have wisdom as we talk about future ministry opportunities.
- Pray for our Senegalese brothers and sisters in Christ as well as our coworkers as we prepare to leave.
- Pray for Canaan and Emmaus. It is hard for them to understand what is happening.





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Dear Friends of Norm & Debra,

November 7, 2011

We praise the Lord for your faithfulness and personal interest in the ministry of this dear couple. Your prayers and support have sustained them thus far through a difficult and challenging experience of serving in West Africa. Difficult and challenging you will remember because of the unexpected change of direction for them having started in Guinea and having to leave due to civil unrest. Then there has been Debra's continual battle with health and allergies which has been a factor pretty much from the time they have come to Senegal over a year ago!

In fact, it is this battle with health that brings us to write this letter on behalf of Norm & Debra. It has become apparent to us as their leaders that we cannot simply stand by and watch this continue indefinitely. Despite excellent attitudes on the part of this couple, clearly we needed to evaluate what God wanted to show all of us. In setting a time to discuss this with them, we found out that they, too, have recently come to the same conclusion and were prepared to share with us their perspectives.

Wednesday evening, November 2nd, Norm shared with us his decision as husband and father that God was changing their direction, or at least location of ministry. While he is not sure what lies ahead, he is confident that continuing to serve in Senegal while his wife continues to suffer is not what the Lord has for them. They have worked hard to find solutions and tried all sorts of alternatives to make it "work" here. We agree. From what we understand of who God is and how He has designed Debra in this relationship – to serve as wife and mother – we do not believe Him to be asking them to continue indefinitely in a way that does not allow her to do so. Consequently, God has united our hearts in this decision; that Norm & Debra should transition out of ministry in West Africa and together with their leadership in Canada understand where God would have them fit into ministry in North America.

Please allow us to give some perspective to this situation. By no means has Debra's struggle with health kept them in any way from achieving ministry objectives. On the contrary! While battling with these health and allergy issues, they have succeeded in connecting with the local church and gaining proficiency in French. Then as Norm took on serving our field members with his computer skills, filling in for our government representative who is on home assignment and helping give leadership to our service team, he has been an indescribable blessing – not only for the services he offered, but also for the spirit of humility and servant's heart with which he offered them. It is clear that he not only was good at what he was doing, but he enjoyed it.

Perhaps what has been most impressive to us has been the way in which they have BOTH managed to communicate a positive spirit and encouraging ministry while they were hurting personally. Never once did we hear comments that reflected a sense of being victims. Only did we see a couple going deeper into their understanding of a good and faithful God in the midst of adversity. Instead of complaints we heard about lessons they were learning through their experiences – lessons of finding Him to be sufficient and worthy of their praise and their very lives. There is so much more that could be said, but hear us when we say, "We love this family and we desire God's best for them." While they will be deeply missed, we are most excited to see them both able to function as God intends them to. They have been such an example to all of us in the short difficult time they have been here. They would say, it is because of their faithful God – not because of anything about them.

Please continue to stand with this family now as they transition into what God has next for them. They need you now more than ever. We commend them to you as "good and faithful servants". May God use you to serve and bless them!

His servants of the Church,

Daniel Rabe for The Field Leadership Team – West Africa

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