



A young boy displays a French Bible that was distributed by the Gideons.

# Mali

## Embracing the Hope of Christ

### Calvary Chapel Chino Hills sends mission team to Africa

Story by Beth Kelly  
Photos by Steve Hurlbert



The CC Chino Hills team rejoices with the church in worship. As the worship team plays, a young man joins in on the *djembe*, a skin-covered hand drum.

*According to the CIA's World Factbook entry for the West African nation of Mali, life expectancy is around 50 years of age while over one-third of the country lives below the poverty line. The infant mortality rate is one of the highest on the continent.*

Jeff Kerns, missions pastor of CC Chino Hills, CA, had led a short-term outreach team to the impoverished African nation of Mali. The team had just finished conducting an outreach at a Christian school they assisted. It was getting late and a chilly breeze had begun to blanket the desert night. Jeff noticed an older Mali man in the shadows who seemed to be searching for someone. Uncertain of the man's intent, Jeff introduced himself. The man replied that his name was Mohammed.

"I have walked many miles to find my son who has come here," said Mohammed. Just then, the son noticed his father and ran to greet him. Excitedly, he shared about the wonderful time he had and the new friends he had made. Jeff perceived that the father

would listen so he shared the Gospel message with him.

Mohammed heard the Good News of eternal life. He said he desired to accept Christ. After praying, he raised his hands to the heavens and cried out in his Bambara language, "I have searched for the truth and have found it—Jesus has saved me tonight!"

Jeff later commented, "Mohammed came looking for his son and found God's Son and eternal salvation in the process."

The next day, Mohammed returned. John Adewale, a Nigerian-born missionary serving in Mali and pastor of the local congregation, presented a Bible to him.



Bethany Murakami explains a Bible passage during a break at VBS.

On a typical Sunday, 40 faithful believers gather to hear John teach. They meet on the top floor of a three-story building covered with a tin roof. Colorful fabric covers the windows to combat insects, dust, and cold. In the background, the Muslim call to prayer echoes hauntingly from a distance.

In contrast to the Muslim wailing, there was joyful music at the church. Bethany Murakami, an 18-year-old Chino Hills team member, recalled the exuberant time of praise as a young man began the beat on the *djembe*. “I noticed the people’s complete joy ... their feet are moving, their hands are clapping, and they have these incredible smiles on their faces. You can just see how much they love God.”

### School Opens Doors

Several years prior, missionaries from CC Chino Hills had met John and determined to partner with his mission work. John commented on the need in his adopted country. “The area desperately needed a school. We felt that the best way to reach the people would be through their children.” The school began in 2004 with about 54 students in a one-room building lacking electricity and running water. Now, with assistance from CC Chino Hills, the school ministers to about 600 children in 12 rooms. A well dug on the property supplies clean drinking water for the school as well as the local village. The lessons are taught using the Bible as a textbook.



Pastor Jeff Kerns



*The JESUS Film* was shown using the native language. There were 500 people in attendance, which is almost the entire village. For many, it was the first film they had ever seen.



Team members from CC Chino Hills perform a drama called “Redeemer.”



A woman draws water from a well.

Bethany commented that the families want their children to attend this school despite their Muslim heritage. “They accept the knowledge that their children are getting Bible study along with the regular curriculum,” she noted. “Many of the kids don’t [initially] have a personal relationship with the Lord but their parents want this education for them.”

After their preliminary visit to Mali several years ago, short-term missionaries from CC Chino Hills were led to begin a sponsorship program for the school children. Team member Emily Stephenson commented, “You can’t just come here to Mali and then go back home and do nothing. Most kids

don’t go to school because they have to provide for their families. It’s not uncommon to see six-year-old children working or taking care of babies.” The “Love Mali” sponsorship program began in response to the need to give the children the freedom to attend

school and receive an education. Books, school supplies, uniforms, medical care, and meals are provided.

Physician Assistant Bernie Del Rosario and his medical team brought much-needed health supplies. They examined and treated the children and the school staff. One man, Mr. Amoudu, complained of always feeling sick with a headache. There was heaviness in his chest that seldom went away. Worst of all, he always was afraid. He added that all of his problems began when he started to work at the school run by the Christians.

Bernie told him, “I can fix the headache with medicine, but there is only one person who can fix the heaviness in your heart—that is the person of Jesus Christ.” Bernie presented the Gospel to him. The Muslim man gladly accepted Christ into his heart. Later they realized that the patient was the third-grade teacher at the school. Bernie added, “The heaviness in Mr. Amoudu’s heart was his struggle against the Gospel, as it had already been presented to him.”

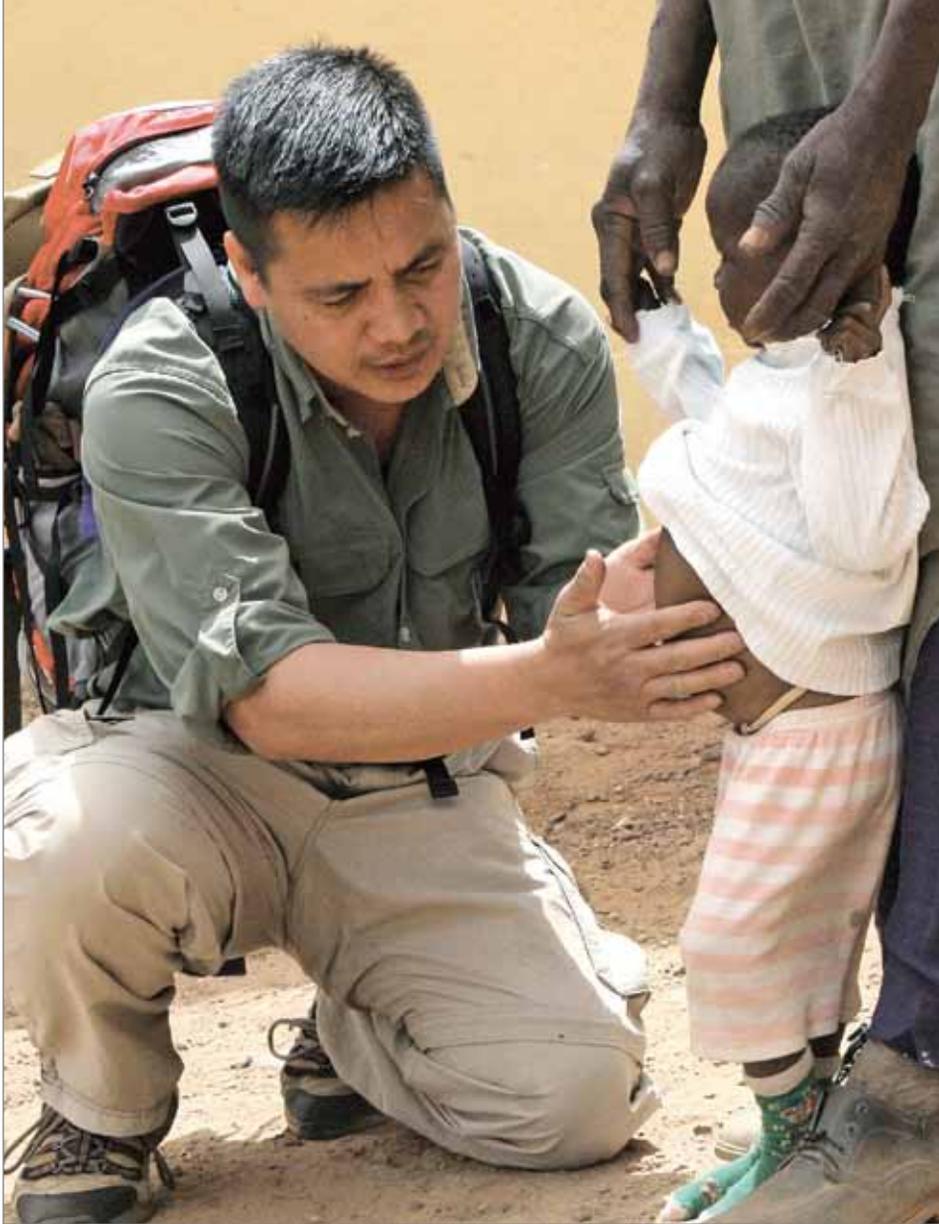
### The JESUS Film

Flyers were distributed to invite the local people to watch *The JESUS Film*. Over 500 people, almost the entire village where the school is located, came to watch. Some sat out on the edge of the darkness. After a time of worship music and a skit that explained the message of the Gospel, a hush fell over the audience as the film began. People sat in silence for the entire screening spoken in their native language—for some the first film ever witnessed.

The movie ended. The audience sat motionless, seemingly waiting. Steve Hurlbert, who was born in Nigeria to missionary parents, stepped into the crowd to share the Gospel message. Steve, an assistant pastor at CC Chino Hills, later remarked, “The people are so hungry ... to hear about this Jesus who is a loving and forgiving God—One that they could know personally.”

*“The people are so hungry ... to hear about this Jesus who is a loving and forgiving God—One that they could know personally.”*

Assistant Pastor Steve Hurlbert, CC Chino Hills



Bernie Del Rosario, a physician assistant, examines one of the kindergarten children at the school.

After the showing, Sandy Vargas noticed a young boy was being teased by a group of teens because he wanted to talk to the pastors. The boys grabbed him and dragged him away. Later he came back. "The team members led the young boy and his friend to the Lord," said Sandy. "The following day both boys came to Pastor John's church."

Pastor Jeff said, "The conditions for healthy living and for educating the children didn't exist here beforehand. Jack Hibbs, senior pastor of CC Chino Hills, and I had been approached for help. We felt that God showed us that this was His will to reach the people of Mali through a school that could give them not just a good education, but an opportunity to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ as well." ✝

*How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?*

Romans 10:14-15a

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Missions Pastor Jeff Kerns, CC Chino Hills



Team member Hector Aguirre prays with a young family as they all pray to receive Christ.