

The Messer Message

Ivory Coast Evacuation Updates, November 2004

Following is a series of email updates sent by the Messers during November of 2004:

Received November 8, 10:44 a.m.

Dear friends:

Well it is Sunday morning here. We thank the Lord for the morning light. Last night was rough to say the least. In case you have not heard, there is a lot of unrest in Ivory Coast at the moment. The conflict surrounds the Ivorian people and the French. Yesterday the Ivorian military attacked a rebel compound and a French military compound at the Baptist school in Boake. The attack against the French troops by 2 Russian fighter jets killed 8 French soldiers and one American (probably a missionary). In retaliation, the French military put the 2 jets out of commission when they landed to refuel in Yamousoukro. This event infuriated the population as the young people took to the streets rioting, looting, stealing, burning anything associated with the French (schools, businesses, hotels, etc.). Becky and I thought that it would end with that. However, at 11 pm last night we discovered what an angry mob of about 1,000 people could be like. The mob passed down the street throwing rocks at cars, windows, gates, everything. They tried to get our gate open to loot our house but the Lord protected us. For some reason the attack on our house stopped and the rioters moved on. (Any of you praying for us at about 6pm US). Two houses down from us lives a French family. The rioters completely looted their house. The Ivorian police were of very little help as there were only about 12 of them. Then an hour later the mob returned to cause havoc again. By this time, Yao, a man from our church had come to the front of our gate to tell the people that these are American missionaries. Our house was left alone but our light were smashed and our water meter was broken off from the pipes and water went everywhere. Well, the mob went away but the bandits and thieves decided it was their turn to take the remaining stuff from the French house. Yao even said that a police vehicle pulled up later to help themselves as well. These people do not like the French. When 4:30 am finally came I was able to take a quick nap as Yao stayed in our yard to keep guard. Becky, mamma, and the kids tried to sleep (well, at least the kids slept). It was truly a night of prayer for us. We are hoping to have Sunday services today so be in prayer for us. We do not know if the current calmness is the eye of the hurricane or the end to the chaos.

Please pray for us to have wisdom. They were not deliberately targeting us. We just happened to be in the neighborhood. Please pray for the government to get some sort of control over the situation. Our bags are packed if we have to evacuate (again) but we really do not want to go.

Well, that is all from here. How was your night?

In His utmost care,
Andy and Becky Messer

Received November 8, 4:19 p.m.

Dear friends:

Please pray for us at this time. We are safe in our home in San-Pedro for the moment. If you have not kept up with the news this day, the Ivorian military has attacked the French military in the city of Boake killing at least 8 soldiers and wounding many others. The French have returned the fight by disabling both of Ivory Coast's fighter jets. This event has spurred wide spread Ivorian retaliation against the French in the country. Currently the Ivorian military is fighting the French military at the airport in Abidjan. There are reports of widespread looting, rioting and burning of French owned businesses and schools. In our city the young people have been attacking and burning different French businesses and schools. From my house I could see smoke rising from the area of the French school but I could not hear anything. The U.S. embassy has told us to stay in our houses. We will try to keep everyone updated as to our happenings. Please pray for us. We may not be French but an angry mob cannot tell the difference. We know God is in control and we can rest assured that our lives are in his hands. We need your prayer support at this time. Bye for now.

In His utmost care,
Andy and Becky Messer

Received November 9, 9:25 a.m.

Dear Friends and Family,

Hi. Yep, we're still here and alive and well. It is Monday, Nov. 8 about 3:15 PM our time. Things have been quiet here in our neighborhood (Praise the Lord!) since yesterday. There were no more rioters last night and I actually got a decent night's rest (got up with the baby but that's normal and does not produce nausea!) I was a little paranoid at first. Nadia was tapping my wooden bed frame with her heel and it sounded like the rioters banging on gates or something. Made me all nervous. Then Andy put Lexie's tape (Patch the Pirate) on and I could only here the noise of voices... and thought it was a gang coming down our street... Finally, after checking at the windows several times, I was able to just lay down and fall asleep. Today the water company came and fixed all the broken water pipes on our street that the rioters had messed up Sat. night. As of right now, we have water, electricity, lots of food and life feels normal though my brain tells me it has changed! I have not been out, but our friends (Ivorians) have reported to us that MANY MANY (dare I say MOST) of the stores in town are completely destroyed and ransacked. People are just emptying out the businesses of the French (and many Lebanese--I don't know why except pure greed) and taking whatever they want. One of the pretty hotels here has been ransacked and the mattresses taken... Noelle (our helper) said you can buy a freezer in town for 25,000 (\$30). She said she does not want one since she knows it is stolen! It is so sad. All of our missionary friends that we have contacted are doing OK and have not been hurt in any way (Kings, Watkins, Gaults, Macks, Russels) God has protected us and we hope you will keep praying for safety. We are learning a lot about trust. We say, "safety is not the absence of danger, but the presence of the Lord," but really believing that takes some major faith. I have decided that Jesus' ability to sleep during the storm at sea must show His divinity. Either that or he was completely exhausted. I know I did not sleep Sat. night. Even when things calmed down and Andy was sitting guard (and our Ivorian friend, Yao was on guard outside to inform any rioters that we are not French) I STILL could not fall asleep. Kept hearing things and yes, worrying. Tried to talk myself out of it and pray myself out of it--at least I was not hysterical or anything. :) Anyhow, it's a battle of the mind -- do you trust God? What is true and what are you imagining? Don't try to predict the

future cuz you just don't know what is going to happen!! Does not do any good to think of all the scary "what ifs" (on the other hand, does it help to lull yourself into a dream of "all is going to come out well?") Course God does say "All things work together for good to them that love Him and are called according to His purposes." So, guess I just need to keep that in mind eh?

Well, I think most of you are getting the political news and since I don't personally know what is true and what is not, I will just share what I KNOW!

1. Lots of people here in Ivory Coast are mad.
2. They are destroying lots of property, especially French owned.
3. There has been fighting in Bouake and Abidjan (real fighting with guns...)
4. There has been rioting in other places (San Pedro and other towns as well).
5. The roads are quite blocked up so no trucks will be coming with supplies right now. I hope this will change. For now, we are well stocked (PTL).
6. I don't know if we will be leaving or staying, but for now we can't go anywhere--so we're staying for now. I'm OK with this and people seem generally friendly toward us (I've not spoken to the mob at all --don't plan to either) but Yao said they were giving the thumbs up sign at our American flag that Andy has hanging on our house.
7. I've mainly been scared of the noises and the thoughts that I've imagined. So, praise the Lord that He has protected us all and thanks for praying.
8. I have a friend here who is Ivorian (we just met recently) and her daughter is American. The daughter was going to the French school, but since it has been destroyed she has no where to go. SO, the mom (Sinnin) has asked me to let her daughter (Singa) go to school with my kids. She is in the same grade as Leah. So, as of tomorrow (Lord willing) Singa will begin coming here to do homeschool with us. Pray for me cuz I'm not TOO organized and this may be a good thing as it will FORCE me to get with the program a bit more. I hope it will also encourage Leah to do her school better (a classmate is always nice). However, if it is not working out, Sinnin knows I'll have to stop having Singa here, so please pray that if it is God's will it will work out. Singa is not saved (she has some knowledge of the gospel and goes to church, but when I talked to her, I realized she has never asked the Lord to save her). This may be a great opportunity as we do try to keep the focus on the Lord as the center of our home. However, we're human and I struggle a lot with tiredness, laziness, bad attitudes, frustration... (not all the time, but enough to make life a battle to do what is right!) We want to be a good example and more importantly, we want to please the Lord.

We covet your prayers! Seems like we either get it right and feel proud (not good) or get it wrong and feel condemned (also not good!). Need to lean on the Holy Spirit and walk with Him daily (submit to His control) to have the power to do right. It's a battle for me and for my kids.

Well, that's it from me. Andy may edit this and add his own comments. Thanks so much for the prayers, phone calls, encouraging e-mails... I do feel that we are exactly where we should be at the moment and don't really want to leave at all (just want to feel safe -- it's a woman/mom thing). Today I do feel safe. However, it's not the feelings that count. I must remind myself --IN GOD'S WILL IS THE SAFEST PLACE TO BE!!!

Love in Christ,
Andy and Becky Messer

Hi to the ones who know me (Joan Watkins), Becky's mom. Since Saturday night when the rioting began here on our street in San Pedro, my concentration and ability to think straight have taken a drastic dip below the normal for me. When fear and stress take over, I sometimes think how can it be that I am not trusting the LORD better than this?

Why does my stomach have to churn and tie up in knots so? You would think that a missionary ought to be better at trusting the Lord than ordinary people, wouldn't you? BUT, missionaries ARE ordinary people too. We are depending so much on the prayers of others to hold us up in this time of stress, danger, and weakness. Not knowing what to do, news in the country going back and forth, how to plan, and on and on. So, you see, your prayers for us are more important than ever.

As I was thinking about trusting the Lord, Abraham came to my mind. He went out "not knowing where he was going." And then I thought of Moses and the children of Israel evacuating from the country of Egypt (was it in the dead of night?), travelling and seeing Pharaoh's troops chasing them. Some of them surely must have been stressed, don't you think? Wow! God took care of them. His power is no less today. Pray not only for peace in this country and our protection, but also that our faith and trust might grow. Thank you so much for not forgetting us.

Love in our Saviour,
Joan Watkins

Received November 9, 9:42 a.m.

Dear friends:

Greetings to you all. Thanks for your prayers for our family and the other missionary families, as well as for the country. It seems to have calmed down a bit. There are many in the government who are working at bringing a peaceful resolution to the problem.

The reason for this note is to correct some misinformation that was sent in a previous e-mail with subject heading "*Update from the Messers: please pray!*" (Nov. 7, 2004). We wrote: "*Yesterday the Ivorian military attacked a rebel compound and a French military compound at the Baptist school in Boake.*" The Baptist School was not attacked by the Ivorian military. It was a French school and the Ivorian military claims that it was an accident.

And "*The attack against the French troops by 2 Russian fighter jets killed 8 French soldiers and one American (probably a missionary).*" The American was not a missionary. The man was working for an organization called W.A.R.D.A. and had gone to the French school to "be safe."

We apologize for the previous misinformation. If you forwarded any of our e-mails in the past, you may want to forward this e-mail correction to those who received it. Thanks for your help.

Received November 11, 4:58 p.m.

Dear family and friends:

Greetings to all of you. We are doing well in the strength of the Lord. As most of you know by now, Ivory Coast has gone through some serious political struggles in the last six days. The situation between the French government and Ivorian Government has not been resolved. It is calm right now in our city and most of the other major cities but like a steaming volcano, things could erupt. We are hoping and praying that we will be able to stay. There is so much work to do here with our church and ministry. If you would like to see the details on the political situation out here, go to www.Abidjan.com or www.cnn.com. We know that our lives are in God's hands. We know that none of these events are a surprise to God. We know that if we do leave the country via evacuation, the ministries will go on. Our church family here has many solid believers who are grounded well in the Word of God. Please pray for them and us to have wisdom in the days ahead. We will do our best to keep everyone posted on our activities. Bye for now.

On the front lines for Christ,

Andy and Becky Messer

Received November 20, 8:21 p.m.

Dear friends and family:

Greetings to you. We just wanted to send you a note to tell you that we made it back to the States on Thursday the 18th of November. Our evacuation began on Sunday morning the 14th after more than a week of civil unrest in the country of Ivory Coast. For those who may be curious, here are the details of the last 5 days. Buckle up!

On Sunday (14th) at 6AM, we headed out of San-Pedro in our car along with two other missionary families in another car. It was quite sad leaving our work there. The believers that we left behind were so discouraged and sad to see us going. There were no problems at any of the checkpoints along the way to Abidjan but we could sense that tensions were high with the military. At noon, we arrived in Abidjan and ate our "Last Supper" before going to the airport. While going to the airport we could see the remains of many burned vehicles as well as the destruction of many French businesses by the mobs of people just a week before. The Ivorians were revolting against the French because the French military destroyed Ivory Coast's two fighter jets and helicopters. This was Ivory Coast's only means of attacking the rebels from the air. Now the Ivorian's are accusing the French of assisting the rebels. This issue and many

others have not been resolved between the French and Ivorian governments and now most mission agencies are asking their missionaries to leave. Once at the airport (which showed evidence of violence in broken windows), we waited for the word from the Italian military that we would be included on their evacuation flight (free) to Rome, Italy. We were rather excited to hear that we would be able to go to Rome before going to the States. They assured us that we would be able to continue on to Rome after a short stop in Ghana. What they forgot to tell us was that we would have to pay for the flight from Ghana to Rome (\$900 per ticket). Well, we boarded the C-130 Italian military transport with our 20 pounds of luggage at 7:30PM. Now we know why the military wears ear plugs on their flights. No, they did not pass any ear plugs out before the flight. The plane landed in Accra, Ghana at about 10:00PM. At the airport in Accra, the airlines told us that the flight was not free and we would have to pay. What a discouragement. Needless to say, our plans changed. We found a hotel for the night (did not get checked in until after midnight) and made plans to head directly back to the States.

From Sunday night to Wednesday night we spent our time in Ghana. We found Ghana interesting and encouraging. The U.S. dollars does really well in Ghana. We could eat an omelette, toast, coffee and juice for a little more than a dollar. Not everything was that cheap but for the most part, the prices were lower than what we encountered in Ivory Coast. Well, Wednesday night at 11:30PM we left Ghana on British Air (kids crying and sleepy).

On Thursday (18th) at 7:00AM, we landed in London, England. We quickly passed through customs and headed to our next gate. While waiting at the gate for the next British Air flight to Chicago, we heard something that we did not want to hear: "The flight to Chicago has been delayed." One of the pilots was extremely sick and now we had to wait until they found another pilot. Two hours after our original departure time, we boarded our flight and headed for Chicago. Needless to say, we were late for our next flight to Charlotte, NC. What made it even worse was that British Air switched our connecting flights from American Airlines to US Air but did not tell us. They knew we were arriving late so they went ahead and made the switch to help us. They just forgot to tell us of the "small" airline change. Then while at the airport in Chicago, I got separated from Becky and the kids. They thought I had gone on to the terminal for American Airlines. Actually, I had not left the arrival terminal but they could not find me before I could tell them of the mix-up on Airlines. Chicago Airport is a big airport. For the next two hours we searched for each other. Sounds like a lot of fun with five kids.

This is Becky writing now.

You should have seen us in the airport. Kids wearing sandals with socks, wrapped in airplane blankets and looking like true vagabonds. People were not very helpful either. Just stared at us and rushed past. First we went to terminal 3 but NO Andy and the lady there said we were not booked on that flight. She suggested that I try United which was at terminal 1. Going from terminal 3 to 1 involved 4 escalators and 1 train (with my mom and 5 kids!!!--NOT FUN!!) I

was praying for God to lead me to someone helpful and finally a lady who worked for United (the second terminal we searched for Andy) was very nice and called both American and U.S. airlines and found that we were actually booked on the U.S. flight (all 3 airlines had flights to Charlotte that evening). So, we headed to terminal 2 (again, 4 sets of escalators and a train). Once at terminal 2 (U.S. Air) I entered the doors and went to the right. Turns out Andy had gone to the left. At the check in place, they only said we could not check in without our tickets (duh?) and could we please move out of the way! SO HELPFUL!!

After sitting there for a few minutes to catch our breath, bribe and threaten the kids, nurse the baby and think, I left my mom there with the kids and went to look for Andy. BOY was I relieved when I found him at the other end of that long terminal. So, I ran back to get mom and the kids and we all joined Andy at the check in point. THEN guess what. Our family was randomly selected for extra screening!! I was feeling a little ticked to tell the truth. Did I miss something? Did the last terrorist have 5 kids and a mother-in-law in tow? Anyhow, we complied as gracefully as possible. Our flight to Charlotte was slightly delayed (we were no longer surprised) and we finally left Chicago (Hallelujah!) at around 7 PM. Arrived in Charlotte around 10 PM. In Charlotte I put the kids in a wheel chair (they were so totally exhausted--were not allowed to lay on the floor on any of the flights so had been basically sitting up for over 24 hours--they did sleep but could not stretch out at all).

David was just crying with big tears rolling down his face. We were met at the airport by two friends from our church (THANK YOU SO MUCH TO Brent and Jill and to Salem for the use of the Church van). WHAT a blessing to see them!! We then drove to Winston and got home around midnight. David was dreaming in the car (again trying to sleep sitting up) and calling out, "What kind of airplane are we in now?" Pitiful.

So, we're home and though very VERY sad to have left our believers in Cote d'Ivoire, we're glad to be near family and friends here on this side. We are trying to catch up on some much needed rest and recover from a nasty cold that has passed around among us. Andy and Leah seem to be doing well at the moment. David, Nadia and Lexie are still coughing, but maybe pulling out of it and Prisca and I are feeling quite yuck still. We are SO thankful to those who prayed for us. So many people have pulled together to meet our needs (clothes, coats, groceries, diapers, toothbrushes...) I can't begin to thank everyone enough. Your love is absolutely overwhelming and --- I'm really speechless. I know that we will adjust to this and I'm sure that God has a plan in all of it. I believe it will work together for good. I feel awful about it, but I know God will bring us through. Is it just me or do the end times seem to be VERY close at hand?? I've BEGGED the Lord to come back many many times in these past few weeks. I know MANY people who have been facing difficult things (illness, political unrest, losing loved ones...) and I'm sure for all who are God's children, heaven is looking mighty appealing!! I can't tell you how much I want to see you all at the feet of Jesus Christ the lover of my soul! I know there are still many who are lost and we must not curl up into ourselves now. Let us be diligent in sharing

our faith with others while there is still time. I may be wrong, but I feel that the time is indeed short.

As for our future plans--we've just had a BIG lesson in how plans can change--we're gonna absorb this lesson a tad before we try to start again. We are hoping to be able to go to Indiana in Feb. for an 11 week training session in counseling. We are totally open to God's will and leading. We still need to talk to our Pastor and see what options we have. We are definitely NOT giving up on Ivory Coast yet. We are hoping and praying that there will (by some miracle) be a real peace in the country so that we will be able to return to the church and the ministry there. There are several men eager to serve God and study His Word and they are just going to be studying on their own and waiting for us to come back. Please pray with us that God will use this time in our lives to grow us and increase our faith and that we will be diligent to follow His leading wherever it may be! As the song says, "Where He leads me I will follow! I'll go with Him, with Him all the way!"

Prayer Requests:

1. Peace to return to Ivory Coast
2. Health and strenght for our family in the States
3. Wisdom for future plans
4. Financial needs: the evacuation trip cost us around \$4,200
5. Our church people to remain faithful during our absence

Feeling like we've fallen into a rabbit hole and passed into Wonderland,
Wishing for the Lord to come today,
Thankful for God's children and their amazing love!

The Messers

Andy and Becky

Leah, David, Nadia, Lexie and Prisca

Received November 28, 6:16 p.m.

Dear Friends and Family:

Greetings. We have now been in the U.S. for 10 days. Most of you know we had to evacuate from Cote d'Ivoire (for the 3rd time!). We left home (San Pedro) on Sunday Nov. 14th and arrived in Winston-Salem, NC on Thursday Nov. 18th after 5 days of travel (parts of which were fun and relaxing while others were stressful and exhausting). Now that is making a loooonnnngggg story short. :)

We are praising the Lord for His protection and His goodness. Also His sovereignty comes to mind. He was not at all surprised by this turn of events. It is so good to know that our Father is in control and knows what He is doing. We are thankful for His provision (people have donated clothes and shoes --or let us look through their mission closets...) We are so blessed and do not lack for anything. Reminds me of Psalm 23:1, "The

Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want!" Thank you to all who gave and all who prayed for our needs to be met. God has abundantly answered your prayers!

So we are trying to catch up on some much needed rest (what better time than the Holidays!). We are very sad to not be in our city of San Pedro, but we are thrilled to be with our wonderful church family here at Salem Baptist Church and with our other family and friends. We love you all SO much. We thank the Lord for you. You are a gift of grace (unmerited favor) from God to us. His grace just blows us away.

We do not have any solid plans as of yet (we're still kind of reeling from all the changes we've experienced in the past two weeks) but we will keep you posted as the Lord leads. We do know that we are fully committed to following our Lord and it does not matter where He leads us. For the time being, we would like to wait on Ivory Coast (things are calm there at the moment and the church is going forward even in our absence). We don't want to give up on the work or the people there before God makes it clear if that is necessary or not. IF He should change our field of service, we are still 100% willing to go wherever He leads. So, we covet your prayers during this time of uncertainty. Pray for me (Becky) as I try to keep home and home school the kids (Leah 2nd grade, David 1st grade) amidst the upheaval. They kids seem to be doing extremely well with all the changes and they are super excited to be back in America. They LOVE Salem Baptist and all their friends here. We appreciate all who have made us feel so loved and welcomed! May God bless you for your love!

Prayer Requests:

1. For our believers to remain faithful during our absence.
2. For wisdom and good health during this time.
3. For our financial needs: \$4,200 (airline tickets and travel).
4. For peace to return to Ivory Coast.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year!

Love in Christ,

Andy and Becky Messer
Leah, David, Nadia, Lexie and Prisca