A Diary from Burkina Faso
By the Youth Mission Trip Team

Many thanks especially to Christian DeLooper, Sebastian Firrell, Daniel Grout, Daniel Herr and Ginger Strickland for their contributions.
Under the leadership of Youth Pastor Ginger Strickland, we went to Burkina Faso to help the organization Heal the World (www.Healtheworld.org). This non-governmental organization (NGO) has been set up by John W. Roberts (a former ACP member) to help the Burkinabé (the people of Burkina Faso) to learn the English language, broadening their possibilities to study and become leaders for their country. The ultimate goal of Heal the World is to set up an English-speaking University in Ouagadougou within the next 3 years. As of today, Burkina Faso has the resources to offer higher education to only 1% of its population of 26 million, so more opportunities for education are essential.

Heal the World, a Christian organization which is linked with the “Eglise AD. Beraca” (led by Pastor Frédéric Zongo), extends financial support to an elementary school in a poor suburb of the capital, Ouagadougou. The school also helps parents give their children a proper education in French and English and gives the students hot meals for lunch.

Heal the World brings American teachers to Africa so they can help French-speaking students. Part of the ACP’s contribution was to be a link between the French-speaking students and the American teachers, ensuring that everyone involved could communicate with each other and could understand the classes.

Arriving in Burkina Faso
Even before touching down in Burkina Faso, we all felt that we were about to have an experience unlike any other we had ever had. The landscape was flat and dry. Small groups of mud huts were scattered across the terrain with thin dirt roads running between them. We could make out people traveling up the roads either by foot or on bicycles - but there wasn’t a car in sight. A short time later, after getting off the plane, we stood in line in the Ouagadougou Airport waiting to go through customs. We all had similar first thoughts: “This cannot be an airport!” We were standing on dirt floors inside a hot and humid building that was small and unfinished. It seemed as if the building was still going through early stages of construction.

After going through customs and claiming our bags we exited the airport to go and take taxis to the building where we would be staying for the next two weeks. The moment we left the building we were bombarded with locals that were desperate to sell us cigarettes, food, souvenirs, or any other goods or services they could offer. It was overwhelming to have so many people surrounding us and demanding our attention but we finally loaded our baggage into the taxis and drove off towards the Heal the World center where we were staying. All the buildings we passed were no more than one storey high, and were either mud huts or small metal booths selling anything from apparel to food. I was amazed at the number of motorcycles that were on the road. Everyone that was driving on the road was on a motorcycle. Also, trash was laying everywhere in the street. Whenever we would stop at an intersection, young boys would come up to the car and knock on the windows attempting to convince us to buy whatever it was they were selling.
When we finally arrived at the Heal the World Center, we were surprised (and very excited) to walk into a huge home, fully equipped with air-conditioning, electricity and running water. We all slept very well that night.

First days in Burkina Faso
The first 2 days in Burkina Faso were the registration days for the English classes we taught to French-speaking high school students during our time in Burkina Faso. So we spent those 2 days recording students’ name, age, school, etc. in order to enroll them into our program. It was incredible to me how many people showed up and waited in line just to sign up for a 2-week English course. We ended up having around 200 students come to school everyday for 8 hours to learn English.

Starting the second day here now! We worked hard yesterday registering about 150 students and administering an entrance exam. Today we have reached a total of 187 students!

The Working Week
The days were long, with the morning lasting from 9am to 1pm and the afternoon starting at 3pm and finishing at 6pm! Some of us were also responsible for organizing games in English in order to break up the long hours of studies! We also spent some time at the school for the end of term festivities and helped them make new bricks which would be used to construct new school buildings. The school has a nice yard, covered with red local soil, with trees giving some necessary shade. The classrooms are in a one-storey building, in an L-shape around the yard. Each student had taken a written and oral exam before starting the classes, to determine their level of English, and the classes were then organized accordingly.

07 July
Today we witnessed the first of what were supposed to be one of many intense rain showers during our trip. The storm itself only lasted about 20 to 30 minutes but it was one of the strongest I had ever seen.

The students were of BAC level, so aged between 18 and 20, and it was interesting to talk with them about their vision of the world, their future and their ambitions.
To me what was just as impressive was the students’ attitude. They were not at all startled or surprised by the shattering raindrops on our sheet metal roof; they just kept on working. When the power went out, they did not stop. All they did was pull out their cell phones and kept reading. Although all of the students are used to this rain, what seemed to me like a freak storm was an everyday thing to them. Through this shower I saw the true and honest dedication of these students to learn the English language. This truly showed me why we are here and what difference we must make, however small it may be.

It is quite interesting to see that Burkina is leading studies on how to use local materials (clay) to build houses. The clay is mixed with other material like cement (in small proportion) to give it more consistency after it is compressed. Then they work on the shape of the mold in order to put bricks on top of each other without mortar. Burkina's college is working with French and American universities to develop new technology in this field.

It was also fascinating to see a pilot station which is designed to produce electricity anywhere in the world. It uses a combination of solar energy and diesel and then develops biodiesel. If this project works, it will allow every village and every community to have electricity without having long cables drawn across the country.

A nice atmosphere of friendship very quickly developed between the students and ourselves. We had a lot of fun and often shared jokes during the classes. Everyone was so happy and ready to have fun and a laugh. I think that the most touching experience was when many students decided to bring local gifts for the teachers and their helpers, to thank them for coming to Burkina Faso to help them.
**Sunday**
When we got to the church on Sunday, worship had already started. We could hear the sound of the music and the people praising God with everything they had as soon as we stepped out of the taxi. When we walked into the church we were given seats right at the front, behind the pulpit, facing the congregation. Everyone was worshiping, and many forms of worship were used during the service. This included singing, playing various percussion instruments and dancing, and in whatever way they worshipped, you could tell that they really had a focus on God, and were giving Him everything they had. Everyone was involved in the worship, and people in the congregation even joined in the instruments with percussion instruments that they had brought. The service included two sermons, one shorter one by the pastor of the church, Pastor Zongo, and one by Pastor Darrel Auvenshine who was joining us from Texas. This brought the service to about 3 hours long.

The whole service gave a new meaning to having complete faith in God. These people were very poor but they knew that something amazing was in store for their country and they had complete trust in God that he would be with the people of Burkina Faso.

*This trip has inspired me to help in any way I can and I feel that as a church we were called to help in any way we can. Whether that be simply praying for the people of Burkina Faso, sending donations to the Heal the World Organization, or continuing to send people down to Africa on mission trips, we will be helping them.*
“It was intriguing to hear from the students what they consider healthy and unhealthy food - the standards are very different!”

“I feel so excited about today. It felt like I am beginning to know a new country and culture and I felt like God was there.”
“Being a teacher will definitely help me become a better student.”

“If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand will lead me.”