



THE CHALLENGE

JANUARY 2020

A GOD OF SECOND CHANCES: A RAMA CAY VILLAGER'S STORY

My heart melted as I listened to Peter, “Tim, I know today is a workday for the project, but can I go to the Bible teaching this morning instead?”

Up until now, Pete has been known as one of the village drunks. God has given me a soft spot for Peter. When he is sober, he is a hard worker and very respectful. The Rama Cay people of Nicaragua are normally a very stoic people who do not often express emotion. But when Pete gets drunk, he tries to express his appreciation for all that Friends in Action (FIA) has done to help him build his block home and give him work.

I have tried to encourage Peter by complementing him on his hard work and his willingness to help. I gave him my work gloves and told him I’m praying for him. He just smiled and said “uh-huh.” But today was different.



Pete’s struggles are explainable as the Rama people have experienced their fair share of hardship, sadly causing many of them to turn to the wrong things to ease their physical and emotional suffering. **Pete’s people are one of six indigenous groups left in Nicaragua. The greatest concentration of Rama is a group of 1,400 who reside on a poverty-stricken**

Continued on page 2 ►





island almost forgotten by the mainland. The island is overcrowded with over 200 families (3-4 families residing in each house).

The World Health Organization reports that malnutrition is increasing each year for Rama children in Nicaragua. The children face widespread malnutrition, inadequate water and sewage systems, and sporadic public health measures typical of impoverished nations. Nicaragua is one of the poorest nations in the Western Hemisphere. **The Rama suffer from poverty, discrimination and unemployment due to their ethnic identity.** While many Rama families survive on subsistence fishing and farming, poor soil conditions in the rainforest do not allow for extensive agriculture. The Rama attempt to cultivate small fields along riverbanks, producing only meager portions of bananas and root crops.



Since 2004, Friends In Action has worked with the Rama people to develop a new village on the nearby mainland, providing a healthy, safe place where families can remain together in a local community. To date, FIA has overseen the construction of 20 new homes, a water system, workshop, dock, pedestrian bridge, housing for work teams and national missionaries, and taught the Rama welding, woodworking, mechanical, and masonry skills.



Our most recent volunteers visited Nicaragua in late November 2019 to build The Amanda Brandt Memorial Playground. The men did a wonderful job of building and setting up eight swings, a spinner, a set of monkey bars, and a climbing unit with two slides and lots of recreational areas. Over 150 Rama gathered at the dedication of this special project. Jaime, the Rama territorial president, shared his appreciation along with Tim Johnston, Bruce McCracken, Marion (one of our national Bible teachers), and Amanda Brandt's father. God truly used this project to demonstrate His love and concern for the Rama children and their community in a very tangible way.

This June and July, FIA hosted Bible teaching sessions for the Rama people. Mother-daughter volunteers from local Pennsylvania churches experienced the

14 Rama committed their lives to Christ this summer.

9 Rama men and women have taken leadership roles within a Bible teaching team to evangelize their own people.

6 more will go to Panama this month to take a five-month Bible course led by a national missionary.

9 more villages have yet to hear the Gospel.



Great Commission together as they led teaching, songs, and crafts with 180-200 children while 25-50 parents attended adult sessions. It was one of these sessions that Pete asked to be part of.

I think my grace and patience for Pete comes because I often think of God's loving ways towards myself and each of us. **God is patient in giving us second chances.** Micah 7:18 says, "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy." I think that is why I never gave up on repeatedly inviting Pete to attend the Bible teaching—although until his latest request, he only attended an occasional meeting now and then.

I am happy to report that Peter has recently made a choice to attend all the teaching sessions offered to the Rama adults! He has not missed one since that day

(beginning in late August)! God has used your prayers and giving, and that of our volunteer teams, to open the Ramas' hearts to a second chance at life with God through Jesus. What a joy to have the village drunk be thirsty for the Word of God!

During this New Year, always remember that God offers us new beginnings and second chances—for people like Peter, and you, and me. Thank you for being a part of FIA's life-changing work with the Rama. May the Lord return His blessings as you pray and give to see His kingdom advanced.

Pressing On!

Tim Johnston

Executive Director



GOD'S FAITHFULNESS: Our New Home in West Africa



The past several months have been a whirlwind of activity as FIA readied equipment, personnel vehicles, trucks, trailers and containers for the 1,400 mile (2,200 kilometer) overland move to our new West African country of service.

In September during a maintenance and packing trip, all the vehicles that were to be moved were serviced and three 40' containers with all the well-drilling project equipment and supplies were packed. At the front end, it seemed quite a daunting task, yet after a long week of 10-12 hour days, we were able to get all the work done ahead of schedule! A miracle in itself!

Subsequent trips included meetings with lawyers and transportation/logistics officials, as well as work on the new project site to prepare for the base of operations in our new country of service.

Finally, the months of November and December brought the successful relocation of the entire FIA Water of Life well-drilling project!

We want to thank all those who have been connecting with us, praying for us, and closely following our efforts throughout this whole process. We serve the

Faithful God, and He has been faithful to bring us into something new.

For us here at FIA, there is a sense of nervous excitement over this new beginning. We have seen the fulfillment of the promise the Lord made to us through Isaiah 43:19, "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." As we look to take our first steps in our new home, we want to step cautiously and yet boldly.

I say *cautiously* because we are newcomers to this part of the continent. Although we have previous experience working alongside Africans, we are now working with new partners, among new people groups and languages. **Over the past fifteen years, we have worked in a country where roughly 1 in 4 people knew the truth of the Gospel—now we have moved into a country where less than 1 in 500 do!**

Steeped in tradition and Islam, the nations and peoples of this country are proud of their cultural and religious heritage, but they do not know the Truth. Some have been taught that Jesus was only a prophet, a good man. Some have been taught to avoid those who follow Jesus because Christians are deceitful and manipulating and seek to entice and corrupt people (especially the young) into walking away from the traditions and identity as Muslims. A great many don't know anything at all about Christ or His followers.



Living in darkness and fear, literally 75% of the population have not had any connection to any Gospel-driven message of Hope. These truths, combined with the reality that at least **40% of the population have NO ACCESS to any clean water** (UN statistic), are the greatest reasons why we see the Lord has led us to this place.

We are committed to moving forward in this new home and have already begun the process of establishing our new base of operations and officially registering there. When the Lord opens the door, walk on through!

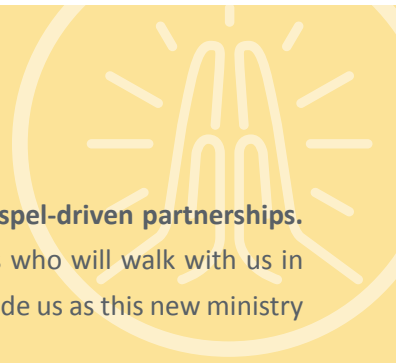
Thank you for walking this journey with us and being a part of what the Lord is doing among the last, the least and the lost of West Africa. As He is faithful, so too will we continue to press on as He provides.

In Him,

Matt Durkee

Water of Life Project, West Africa

PRAY:



Join us in asking for wise, Gospel-driven partnerships. We need people and partners who will walk with us in our new home, to help and guide us as this new ministry work is established.

Pray for His workers to join us. As Luke 10:02 says, "He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest.'"

Pray we will be bold in trusting His leading. We are looking to see where the Lord is moving (as we did when He first brought us to this place) and want to join Him there instead of moving first and then looking back after to see where He is.

Lift up our financial needs. We are still looking to see the Lord provide \$70,000 for the transition, registration and site development



So Many Reasons to Rejoice!

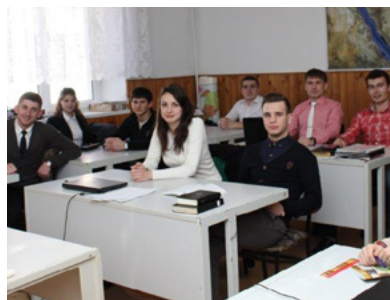
*“They tell of the power of your awesome works—and I will proclaim your great deeds. They celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.”
Psalm 145:6–8*

THANK YOU from the bottom of our hearts to each of you who faithfully pray and give to be part of God’s life-changing work in the far-flung regions of the globe! While we are excited to share our new project goals for 2020 in our next issue, here are just a few praise-worthy highlights from 2019:



BOLIVIA

- Lives were changed through 400 portable radios tuned to Inspiracion 24/7 Christian broadcasting in remote areas of Bolivia! The newly installed commercial grounding system and radio transmitter allow stronger broadcasts to reach more than 215,000 people deep in the jungle.
- We praise the Lord for the new home built for the captain of our El Misionero medical riverboat ministry. More than 1,200 villagers in remote areas along the Amazon received medical, dental, and vision care while hearing the Gospel!



MOLDOVA

- We praise the Lord for your sponsorship of three students from “closed” Central Asian countries at the University of Divine Grace, Moldova. We are happy to be part of equipping these students to take the Gospel back to their homeland countries.



RAMA CAY, NICARAGUA

- Thanks to the Lord for the two Nicaraguan Bible conferences we were able to host this summer. Fourteen Rama made professions of faith as they experienced God’s love through these teaching sessions! In addition, more than 60 students attended another Bible conference in Vanuatu to equip national pastors and missionaries to reach more villages with the Gospel.
- The Amanda Brandt Memorial Playground for the Rama Cay children of Nicaragua was completed! Significant progress was also made toward the Laundry/Shower House in the new community. Three homes were built, a well drilled producing 4-5 gallons/min., and 140 water filters will provide clean drinking water!

PAPUA NEW GUINEA



- All 14 of our national workers' children in Papua New Guinea attended school this year thanks to your sponsorship! And, more than 4,000 inmates from dozens of remote villages heard the Gospel through our prison outreach!

VANUATU



- We are so grateful for our survey and engineering teams to Vanuatu who helped ready us to bring water to 30 villages, 3 schools and 2 clinics! The NiVan chiefs are welcoming us and the Gospel as we anticipate breaking ground during the summer of 2020. Praise the Lord for the two water tanks and some funds already provided!
- Thank you for those who labored and gave to continue the work on our Vanuatu base camp. The cabins and shower house are completed and we are ready to start Phase Two of the work on the kitchen in the new year!

WEST AFRICA



- Fourteen wells were drilled in West Africa! That means more than 7,000 West Africans received clean water and a chance to hear the Gospel last year! In addition, all our equipment, personnel vehicles, and trucks are readied in our new location to reach a region where more than 75% have never heard the Good News!



GENEROUS PROVISION

- How grateful we are for the \$25,000 donated during this year's Extraordinary Give! God doubled our donors, business match, and total giving from last year! We know God will use each dollar to demonstrate His love in tangible ways to desperate people in six countries around the globe!
- The Lord provided \$50,000 through generous donors and a business match during this year's Annual FIA Banquet! What a wonderful night of powerful testimonies, fun, food, and friends. (Mark your calendar for Friday, October 30, 2020!)

LIFE-CHANGING TRAVEL ADVENTURES!



Seventy-three hard-working, talented, and big-hearted individuals just like you traveled with FIA on 11 volunteer work trips to four remote locations in 2019! These amazing “ordinary” people helped accomplish some really extraordinary projects in Jesus’ Name. We hope you will be inspired to travel with us for your own ministry adventure in 2020 and beyond!



NICARAGUA: Rama Cay

March 2019: Team members excavated and laid foundations for a Laundry/Shower house critical for better hygiene and sanitation for the Rama people.

May 2019: Volunteers attempted drilling water wells and construction of a water tower in the Rama village. Trusses were welded to prepare the Laundry/Shower House roof.

June 2019: Congregants from Lebanon Valley Bible Church hosted a Bible Conference attended daily by 120-140

villagers (70-90 adults, 40-70 children). Fourteen adults professed faith in Christ by the end of the summer!

July 2019: Mother/Daughter teams hosted a children’s Bible conference for 25-50 Rama children.

August 2019: Students from Messiah College and The Collaboratory sent a survey team to conduct water testing on the Rama Cay island.

November 2019: Volunteers completed The Amanda Brandt Memorial Playground to the delight of hundreds of Rama children. Work continued on

the Laundry/Shower Facility, in addition to well-drilling.

JOIN US IN NICARAGUA!

APRIL 2020: Experience the joy of being part of the Great Commission through helping us complete the Laundry/Shower house (assist with well drilling, septic system installation, or building bridge railing).

JULY 2020: Help evangelize and disciple the Rama people through hosting Bible conferences for adults and children.



VANUATU

April 2019: Team members assisted with plumbing, mechanical, and electrical work to prepare a basecamp for future teams assisting with a water project that will bring clean water and the Gospel to more than 3,500 NiVan villagers.

August 2019: Volunteers continued efforts on a basecamp through the

construction of floors, walls, and sheetrock installation.

September 2019: Survey teams conducted topography and road and water line surveys for the water project and a proposed conference center to house youth retreats and discipleship training.

JOIN US IN VANUATU!

JUNE 2020: Assist with the Vanuatu Conference Development project

through plumbing, painting, construction of ceilings and floors, or electrical wiring of the Multi-Purpose Building.

AUGUST 2020: Instruct pastors and missionaries from bush regions of Vanuatu at The Santos Bush Mission Conference (pastors and elders only).



NICARAGUA: Miskito

May 2019: Team members taught life-skills and evangelized villagers through pouring concrete floors and replacing rusting roofs on Miskito homes.



WEST AFRICA

Jan.-March 2019: Volunteers drilled three wells providing clean water and a chance to hear the Gospel to more than 1,500 villagers. Preparations for site relocation were begun.

To join us for a trip, learn more, or complete interest forms, visit www.fiaintl.org/get-involved/trips/.



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