



THE CHALLENGE

January 2021

COVID in the Amazon Jungle: Healing through Pastor Iver's Outreaches



He awoke in his mud hut staring at the leaf roof wondering if his nightmare was real or imagined. Something didn't feel right. He had no energy, his back ached terribly, and he felt very cold even in the thick, humid Amazon jungle air. It was hard to breathe. His chest was tight. He coughed repeatedly, trying to pull in more air.

The cough rattled through his body to the point of nearly convulsing. Too cold. Too hot. More pain. His headache was the worst of his life. He was scared to cough for fear the pressure would explode through his eyes.

Although he could see the fish his wife cooked for him, he couldn't smell or taste it. He went two days without eating, hoping he could starve out whatever was wrong. He was becoming terribly dehydrated by day three, but what help was there? His tiny village was a 5-day walk from the next village.

The way of his people had not changed much in hundreds of years. They collected and carried water by hand with no electricity, surviving on meager portions from their subsistence gardens or pulled from the waters of the Amazon.

More than 90% of our national partners in northern Bolivia contracted COVID-19 last summer. Hundreds of villagers just like this man were in desperate need of help when Pastor Iver and his team arrived.

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From Soccer to Seminary



Iver Suarez became a Christian at age 13 through an outreach hosted by a Baptist church near his home. Although he was the only believer in his family, he committed himself to attending the small church and Jesus's teachings. At age

15, Iver entered a soccer academy and was selected to play on the city's University Team of Cobija at 17. Displaying extraordinary skill, Iver became a professional soccer player for a Bolivian league.

Despite his success, **Iver felt God calling him to a life of ministry.** He saw physical and spiritual needs of his fellow Bolivians everywhere and had a deep desire to help. He left his position of prestige and attended seminary to prepare to serve in Christ's Name. While at seminary, Iver joined the Central National Church of Guayaramerin. **Friends In Action has partnered with this coalition of churches to reach indigenous people groups who have never heard the Good News.**

Iver met Pastor Saul Peralta, who heads up the Indigenous Training Center that enables new believers who lack a high-school education or live in very remote regions to evangelize their own and neighboring villages.

Iver also was introduced to Rafael Rivero who leads Inspiracion, the 24/7 Christian radio ministry that FIA partners with to reach over 200,000 villagers from isolated areas in Bolivia and Brazil.

Finally, Iver crossed paths with Manuel Bravo, the head of the medical riverboat ministry that travels deep into unreached villages along the Amazon River offering life-saving treatments and the Gospel to hundreds of people each year.

The twelve churches and senior pastors represented by the coalition recognized that the grace of the Lord was strongly at work in Iver's life. They began to mentor Iver to become the head of the Ministry of Missions for the region. As the men prayed, studied, and ministered together, Iver grew in responsibility.

Ministry During the COVID-19 Pandemic

When Manuel Bravo contracted COVID-19 and ultimately died from the virus, Manuel had already trained his replacement through the countless hours he invested into mentoring Iver. **Iver stepped forward to continue the Riverboat Ministry so critical to those in desperate need of physical and spiritual healing.**



90+% of national partners in northern Bolivia contracted COVID-19 last summer.

150 families have received provisions from Iver and Pastor Saul almost weekly since March.

12+ villagers were baptized!

2 new churches have been planted.

50 men from two villages will train monthly to become future spiritual leaders.

3 youth camps are slated during carnival days to provide a godly alternative to cultural pagan celebrations.

PRAY:



Pray for the salvation of Bolivian villagers. It is so critical to reach souls with the Gospel before the virus claims any more lives.

Pray for provision to continue the **COVID-19 relief** as well as the building and training materials needed to **expand the Indigenous Training Center.**

Pray that the efforts to make the ministries self-supporting would be profitable (such as through crop sales).

Thankfully, Iver and Pastor Saul made their way to nearby villages this year to help hundreds of people struck down with COVID-19. Since March, Iver and Pastor Saul have taken provisions to 150 families almost weekly to bring hope and healing in Jesus's Name. **Last month, more than a dozen villagers were baptized! Two new churches have been planted** in the outreach areas of Primero de Mayo and Cachuela (40 miles in opposite directions of Guayaramerin) to help spiritually feed the new believers.

Those villagers who desire even more discipleship, as well as those who learn of salvation through Inspiracion's radio ministry, are invited to go deeper into God's Word at The Indigenous Training Center. **Hundreds of villagers each year come to The Indigenous Training Center to become missionaries and teachers of their own people.** Youth conferences for hundreds more of Bolivia's youth and orphans are also held at the ITC.

Vision for the New Year

In 2021, FIA plans to continue to partner with these national pastors to expand the impact of the Training

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Center. The ITC sits on 50 acres of land which is being planted with yucca, beans, rice, and corn. These crop sales will be added to FIA donor contributions to help the national Bolivian pastors fund their ministries. **Iver and his fellow pastors will begin training 50 men from two villages each month for two intensive study days to be future spiritual leaders.** In February, the national pastors will host a graduation for those who finish the training. Three youth camps at the center are also slated during carnival days to provide a godly alternative for young people to avoid the cultural pagan celebrations.

The motivation behind partnering with Bolivian pastors like Iver through three ministries (medical missions, radio outreach, and biblical training) is to **see every people group hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.** We look forward with hope and anticipation to see The Indigenous Training Center expand to multiply the spread of God's Word further into the Amazon jungle.

"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

– 2 Timothy 2:2 ■

Treasure of Great Price

FIA Reaching “Closed” Nations

When I think of the Central Asian students from the University of Divine grace, I’m often reminded of Jesus’s parables about a treasure and a pearl in Matthew 13:44-46. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”



Friends In Action’s focus is “to support mission work in areas of limited infrastructure by using construction projects and practical service to speed the Gospel to those who have never heard.” At the University of Divine Grace, instead of constructing roads or housing, we are building into the lives of young people who come from, and are returning to, countries where the Gospel is not always welcomed. UDG provides a biblical education to

students from over 15 nationalities throughout Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Trans-Caucasus. We invest in their education knowing they will infiltrate unreached areas of the globe with the Gospel when they return home.

Many of these students have grown up in predominantly Muslim nations where it is common to never hear the Name of Jesus or have an opportunity to learn anything about His teachings.



Ibodat from Uzbekistan

Those who come to Christ often “stumble” upon Him like the man who happens upon the treasure in the field.

Ibodat from Uzbekistan shared, “I’m from a family of all Muslims. At high school, there was only one girl who was a Christian. I considered her life. It was then that I quietly prayed and asked Jesus for my own salvation.”



Nora from Kyrgyzstan

Other times, students come to Jesus after diligently searching like the merchant who is seeking the goodly pearls.

Nora from Kyrgyzstan relayed her conversion experience. “My grandfather heard about Jesus from a person visiting him in the hospital. Not long afterward, my mother accepted Christ. I was not quite sure about these new teachings. I kept going to the mosque but it felt like nothing more than tradition. I went on a two-year study in search of the Truth before I knew that Jesus is the only way to God.”

Regardless of how the students have come to know the Lord, it is clear that each of them agrees with the men in the parables that the Kingdom of God is worth losing everything to gain it. Across Central Asia, in sealed-off areas mostly comprised of former Soviet countries (today’s five “Stans”: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, as well as Azerbaijan), worship meetings are being shut down, Bibles are being confiscated, and Christians are facing frequent acts of abuse and discrimination.

Some of these students have been forsaken by their families for choosing Christ. Some have been threatened by governmental leaders and those in positions of authority in their schools and communities. They realize that following Christ may result in loss and harm.



Semeda from Tajikistan

“Half a year ago, I stood before the authorities of our country and with a great courage admitted that I was a Christian, since in our country the authorities strongly resist Christianity. I think that I am not so courageous; the Lord Himself did all this for me,” shared **Semeda from Tajikistan**.

Friends In Action is excited to work towards the goal of sponsoring the

education of 10 more students at UDG this year. (For more information about sponsorship, contact me at paulbrosey@fiintl.org or 717.546.0208.)

These young people understand that when we find a treasure like God’s Kingdom, the cost to follow Him becomes insignificant. God is leading people all over the world to the treasure and placing pearls of great value in the far-flung regions of the globe. People are finding Truth because of saints like those graduating

from UDG who declare with Paul in Philippians 3:7-8, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ...” ■

In Christ,

Paul Brosey

Project & Team Coordinator



Kaleb from Uzbekistan

THANK YOU:

Thank you for remembering these students in your prayers and giving. YOU make such a difference! Take for example **Kaleb from Uzbekistan**, who turned from self-harming and drugs after he met a man in Russia who invited him to church. Part of Kaleb’s new life in Christ led him to study at UDG. After graduation, he has returned to Uzbekistan to share Jesus with street children!

From the Director's Desk: God's Amazing Provision

After more than 40 years in some form of missionary service, I have seen God's provision in some very amazing and tangible ways. And this year has been no different.

At Friends In Action, we hear and tell lots of "God Stories." Stories about how God is working in the world, how indigenous people respond when they first hear the Name of Jesus, how volunteer believers are moved to deeper faith by serving. Stories of challenge, of triumph, of struggle, and of faithfulness. But some of my favorite stories put God's amazing provision on display.



Disciples in the Storm: Bolivia

I remember a story about Pastor Saul, one of our dear national pastors who we partner with in Bolivia. A storm unexpectedly cropped up while Pastor Saul was making his way in a tiny boat up the Amazon River to minister to a family in a remote village.

Still hours from his destination, Saul quickly pulled ashore at the closest village and ran for shelter. He banged on the door of a tiny, thatched hut, and when a man opened, he asked if he could find sanctuary inside.

The man replied, "I know that voice! Are you Pastor Saul from the radio? Are you who has been teaching me every day?"

You see, Pastor Saul had been preaching God's Word through Inspiracion, a 24/7 Christian radio outreach broadcasting into extremely remote regions of Bolivia and Brazil. The man had tuned in and been intently listening for weeks! When Pastor Saul confirmed he was behind the voice on the radio, the villager pulled him inside saying, "Yes, yes. Welcome. Come and sit. We have questions for you," and then he left.

After 10 minutes, the soaked villager came back with 10 other dripping wet men! They all piled in the hut and for the next 4 hours, they asked Pastor Saul questions, studied God's Word, and prayed.

God provided in some very unexpected ways that day: shelter for Saul and an important time of spiritual growth and fellowship for those villagers. God knows the exact time to send a storm to guide us to answer someone's prayer!

Miracle from the Sky: Papua New Guinea

God's provision is perfect. It's never early, never late, but always on time. Such was the case for Kokore, a villager from Papua New Guinea. Kokore was young, proud, and headstrong. He had gotten into a machete fight with another man from a neighboring tribe,

resulting in being stabbed through the side, barely missing his lung.

Kokore was friends with a handful of Wewak Christian villagers, although he did not believe in God himself. Losing blood quickly, his Christian friends loaded him in a boat and started towards the nearest clinic. As Kokore began to pass in and out of consciousness, they were still hours from medical help.

The Christian friends told Kokore that he should ask Jesus to help him, but he said he didn't believe. They answered that they would believe for him and began to pray for a miracle.

As they were praying, a floatplane landed right on the water near their boat! FIA team leaders were on the plane loaded with medical kits being transported to another remote village for outreach, and "just



happened" to set down there. The leaders were able to start an IV and control the bleeding while the pilot life-flighted Kokore to a clinic.

A week later, he was up and walking around testifying that only God could have saved his life!

God's Provision in 2020

Sometimes God provides in dramatic and clear ways, and other times His provision seems more subtle but never less essential. This year God's amazing provision has been on display in two very impactful ways in my everyday life.

First, through additional staff. People are the most important resource to any strong organization or ministry, and God has added to our number with these passionate and talented people!



Ainsley Archer
Agricultural Field Specialist



Barry & Kimberly Horst
Shipping Coordinator & Prayer Team Leader



Eddie and Dawn Benham
Nicaragua team leaders to the Rama Cay people



Jeremy & Jesse Effler
West Africa Field Leaders



Rob & Reba Donley
Lead Mechanic and Communication Assistant



Betty Nissley
Administrative Support



Mike Eby
IT intern

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God has also provided by answering our prayers for help with our Shipping Ministry.

For over 25 years, Dick and Linda Thomas and Mike and Sue Ward have shipped containers and pallets for over 100 ministries and 900 missionaries to many remote locations from their shipping hub in Missouri. Every shipment contains supplies critical to saving lives—both physically and spiritually, and has been a catalyst to advance the Gospel time and time again.

Through our new staff members, God has provided a way to expand Missouri's ministry to FIA's Pennsylvania headquarters. This will position us to help even more missionaries as well as speed preparations for our own projects in the field.

Even as Barry Horst was clearing out our PA warehouse space to ready the area for shipping and receiving, he saw God's provision on display again. "I was perplexed with what to do with some of the items left in the warehouse,

but then a lady from a ministry in Lancaster came in search of chairs and desks for an impoverished village in Ghana! Another day, an ABWE missionary's eyes lit up when he saw an old commercial floor sander. He was so thrilled to be able to use it on the rough, sawn floors for a house being constructed at a seminary in Papua New Guinea. The Lord orchestrated the right people at the right time to accomplish His purposes through us. That's exciting!"

As I celebrate God's provision, I always come back to His greatest gift to you and me – His Son, Jesus. What God has given us through the Gospel far outweighs every other provision we could ever seek from Him. Praying your New Year is filled with "God stories" of His amazing provision for you too! ■



Pressing On!

Tim Johnston
Executive Director

3 Ways You Can Help:

PRAY

Ask God to send more workers to FIA's transformative efforts around the world. Ask Him to show you your next step in being more involved in His Great Commission challenge!

GO

We're seeking help in the following positions:

- Office Administrator
- Human Resource Director
- Communication Assistant
- Donor Development/ Database Specialist
- Missionary Partners (Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, and West Africa)
- Spanish-Speaking Liaison (Bolivian work teams)
- Work Team Leaders (Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, and Bolivia)
- Full-Time Shipping Personnel

Interested? Contact Tim Johnston for more info:
TimJohnston@fiaintl.org or **717.546.0208**

GIVE

Reach out to us at **fia-usa@fiaintl.org** or **717.546.0208** to explore how to give your time and talent to expand God's Kingdom from home, our HQ, or in the field!



FIaintl.org



PO Box 323, Elizabethtown, PA 17022
3950 E Harrisburg Pike, Middletown, PA 17057
Phone: 717.546.0208 • **Fax:** 717.546.0214
USA Email: FIA-USA@fiaintl.org
501(c)3 Non-profit Organization



PO Box 26057, Guelph, ON, N1E 6W1
Phone: 905.642.9531
CA Email: office.fiac@gmail.com
Charity Number: 818791212RR0001