



# THE CHALLENGE

June 2022

## The Relentless Love of Pastor Jeremiah

A 30th Anniversary “God Story” from West Africa



**O**ur next “God Story” comes from Matt Durkee, who officially began as FIA’s Executive Director at the start of this anniversary year! Matt joined FIA in 2009 through our Water of Life well-drilling ministry in West Africa before gradually transitioning to his new role, freeing FIA’s previous director, Tim Johnston to pursue his passion for donor development. Listen as Matt unfolds a story that captures the relentless love of God through FIA’s ministry partner in West Africa, Pastor Jeremiah.\*

The terrain surrounding the village of Lougouri, Africa is relentless. Miles of reddish-brown, hard, compact dust and sand stretch on in every direction. The blistering sun and heat are equally unyielding. During the 3-month rainy season, it’s hard to imagine floods in the desert, but pounding rains slam the flat, hard crust collecting in depressions and shallow hand-dug wells. The torrential rains scour refuse, human and animal waste, and disease into these temporary water sources. The need for clean water is a perpetual struggle for the villagers of Lougouri.

Even bringing villagers the best sources of water from drilled wells is a challenge requiring unflinching grit, passionate prayer, and heavy machinery. Located deep below the surface (on average 75 meters or 82 yards) under surface soils and heavy clay, even to the depths of rock aquifers, there is available water—sometimes with flow rates up to 5,000–10,000 L/hr (1,320–2,640 gal/hr)!

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## Sharing the Truth

Friends in Action was first introduced to Lougouri by a man named Pastor Jeremiah. Pastor Jeremiah came from the city with his family to this remote community because somehow, he felt connected to the people and sensed God calling him to share the love of Christ with them. Yet, the villagers were relentless in their commitment to the Islamic faith. They worshipped Allah and feared the powers of the spirits and the Muslim clerics. The people had a fierce allegiance to their beliefs, merging traditional and ancestor worship with Islamic traditions, and viewed Pastor Jeremiah's presence as a threat.

At first, the people tried to drive Jeremiah away. They pushed him out, kicked and beat him, even stoning him and whipping him with sticks! But each time he would return and keep asking for the opportunity to share with them about God Most High and his Son Jesus. After three years of mistreatment, the pastor's persistence won out, and he was allowed to reside on the far side of the village—the farthest point from the people—and the farthest point from water.

## The Trek for Water

The process of getting water from the village well required a great deal of tenacity too. Usually, village women or children were tasked with drawing water into 20–25 L (5.25–6.5 gal) old fuel or oil jugs which they would load into a wheelbarrow or cart to haul back to their huts.

In Lougouri there was only one well. According to the law of the land, wells and water are available to anyone who has a need, but the reality was that outsiders or outcasts (such as Pastor Jeremiah and his family) had to wait until everyone else used the well before drawing themselves. With the well on the far side of the village (at least 2 km or 1.25 mi away), and needing to always be the last to use the well, Pastor Jeremiah sometimes missed out on getting any water at all. And yet, he persisted.

## FIA Arrives

After two years of the villagers' unrelenting persecution, Friends In Action heard about this faithful man of God and his fevered commitment to reach the people for Christ. Drilling a well near Pastor Jeremiah's family



promised to alleviate his long-term suffering and maybe encourage a relational approach to reaching the community as he could interact with those coming to draw water.

## Never Giving Up

Typically, in two weeks, a drilling team can provide 3-4 wells, and on one occasion, we were able to complete 7 wells! But after 11 days of dogged toil, the unyielding earth offered no water for Pastor Jeremiah and his family. Everyone was so incredibly discouraged because we were convinced that God was going to do a great work through this well. On the final day of trying, as we were saying our goodbyes, a tearful Pastor Jeremiah thanked God for the faithfulness of the FIA workers who labored so hard on his behalf. Convinced that God wanted us to see this through, my colleague and I decided to return a week later to try again.

After we left, we learned the villagers began their relentless taunts of Pastor Jeremiah again. “See, your god is not strong – he’s weak. You said that in the name of Jesus water would come – nothing good comes from the name of Jesus,” they mocked.

He assured them that the team had not given up and God was not done. They replied, “Keep dreaming. They worked very hard for nothing. No one is coming back.”

The team did not give up. They returned to begin drilling at 6:00 a.m. one morning, worked through the day and into the night, until finally at 2:00 a.m., Pastor Jeremiah had a completed well in the name of Jesus in Lougouri!



## The Lord Provides

**But our God story doesn’t end there.** Just a few short weeks later, the other well in the village went dry. The only water source left was Pastor Jeremiah’s well! The people came to ask if they could use the water. With open arms, he freely offered water as he told them about the free gift of eternal life found through Jesus.

\* Names have been changed for security reasons.

# GOD MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN:



Every day since, the villagers experience the True and Living God who says, “I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I’” (Isaiah 65:1-2).

Those who used to beat him, mock him, stone him, and abuse him, now acknowledge Pastor Jeremiah’s never-stopping, never-giving-up God Who reaches out to each of us with His relentless love. ■

# “SOUL CLEANSING” WORK IN AFRICA: FIA Volunteer, Derrin Sample



**F**or self-employed founder and operator of DS Iron, business owner Derrin Sample does everything from payroll to parts, estimating to billing, and all the project work in between. His recent experience as an FIA volunteer enabled him to trade his hectic business responsibilities for a different kind of “soul-cleansing” work in West Africa.

After 15 years working under his grandfather and uncle’s leadership, Derrin is no stranger to hard work since taking over the small-order customer segment of his family’s steel fabrication company.

“I’ve always loved helping people. I like being there for customers to bring their projects to completion, to get the job done right, and support their vision,” reflected Derrin. Currently, Derrin serves a majority of commercial clients fabricating stairs, handrails, bar joists, decking, and completing glass rails, aluminum, stainless, or any light structural iron works projects.

Through his work, he met Andy Bachert who previously was a full-time welder (now FIA’s Chief Operating Officer). “Andy and I partnered up on some projects and we would get to talking. He told me about FIA trips where tradespeople like me can make a difference around the world. I thought to myself ‘I could help in that way too.’”

While Derrin was concerned about stepping away from his bustling ironworks business for two weeks, he was committed to going. “I don’t want to look back on my life and say ‘I wish.’ I want to say, ‘I did.’”

When Derrin and his team landed, he witnessed a stark contrast between his hectic business life in Lancaster County and the poverty and challenges facing villagers in a region in which less than 0.2% have ever heard of Jesus.

While watching children collect cow dung to create fires to cook, Derrin reflected, “We just have so much to be thankful for. It opened my eyes to view how truly blessed we are and how much impact this ministry can make.”

Derrin and his team were the first wave of workers slated for Africa in 2022 to progressively construct a facility to house machinery essential to well-drilling efforts at FIA’s new basecamp of operations. Derrin and another volunteer knocked

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out 20-foot sections of trusses and sent them over to other volunteers who then put four sections together to create 80-foot trusses. More than 38 sections were completed in 2 weeks!

The team also got to see how their work supports well-drilling efforts when they were unexpectedly asked to assist in drilling a well when an existing well had gone salty. After working all day on trusses, the team then worked into the night pulling drill heads and piping to see a viable well completed to serve the missionaries living in the area.

“No one complained. Everyone was excited to be part of helping out. We learned different processes in how to drill a well and had a lot of good fun and fellowship while doing it,” shared Derrin.





## The Impact of Traveling with FIA

A typical day while serving meant up for an early breakfast and some fellowship before spending the morning welding. The team would come back for lunch to escape the heat of the day while discussing a chapter from the Book of James, and then head out to work again until the sun went down.

Derrin described his time as a volunteer as “the two best weeks ever spiritually.” Although the project was physically exhausting and the days long, the simplicity of hard work was soul cleansing for Derrin. “In Africa, it was easy to let go of material things and live simply. It was like taking a deep breath and letting go of all the stuff that complicates life, to just pray, work hard, be tired, but be at peace. It was unexpectedly refreshing.”

When asked if he would travel with FIA again, Derrin enthusiastically said, “Absolutely. Without a doubt. And it wouldn’t matter where either. Traveling with FIA is a chance to truly make a difference in the world. If it’s on your heart to help people, I would encourage anyone to go for it.” ■

# UPCOMING TRIPS:

**Friends In Action is hosting numerous additional trips in 2022 and beyond.**

There are many opportunities for those with trade skills, as well as those with just a willing heart, to play an integral part in Great Commission work either state-side or abroad.

## Check Out Upcoming Trips Online

[FIAintl.org/get-involved/trips](https://FIAintl.org/get-involved/trips)  
or turn to the next page!







# FIA Trip Updates



## AFRICA

It has been a busy time for the FIA team in West Africa, and God is moving! A recent field report shared how drilling a well for a ministry partner was an answer to a prayer 10 years in the waiting. Not only are we getting on with supporting our partners through well drilling, but we are also moving forward with the construction of the FIA base of operations. Recent US volunteer teams fabricated a massive 80' x 50' steel-truss shelter to house the drilling equipment, and the first phase of construction work (focusing on perimeter walls and the foundations for the missionary housing) has been nearing completion. Many hurdles, many challenges, but we keep moving forward. Still lots to do before the June rains begin!



## VANUATU

After being gone for almost 3 years from the field, the doors are finally open for the FIA team to get back to Vanuatu! First steps will be getting our missionary family settled in-country during August, and then the assessment will begin on the repairs and work that need to be done to get the base operational in addition to launching into the Water Project! Thanking God for our national workers and international partners who have helped maintain the mission compound until our return. Water project supplies continue to be researched and secured in anticipation of Phase One's launch.



## NICARAGUA

Visiting teams in March and April continued work to complete a laundry/shower facility at *The Spring of Living Water* community with the Rama people. God's love was demonstrated in practical ways through ditches dug, pipe laid, trusses completed, sheet metal positioned, and a water tank installed! Servicing a generator and repairing tractor hydraulic lines set the stage for future visits.



## Join Us!

Jump into what God is doing and put your heart and hands to work on an upcoming trip!

[FIAintl.org/get-involved/trips](http://FIAintl.org/get-involved/trips)

**Missouri | July 10-16, 2022**

Complete carpentry, construction, or electrical work to benefit missionaries-in-training.

**Wisconsin | July 16-31, 2022**

Benefit missionaries-in-training through construction and renovation work.

**Africa | November 5-19, 2022**

Well-Drilling

**Mexico | Winter 2022**

General vehicle maintenance/mechanics and equipment repair benefiting those serving at a medical mission in the Sierra Madres mountains.

**Vanuatu | Winter 2022**

General carpentry, interior finishing work, electrical, and plumbing to support mission work among villagers.



# FIA's Community Fun Day: A Celebration of God's Goodness



What better way to celebrate FIA's 30th anniversary than by having fun! On Saturday, May 14, 2022 hundreds of local supporters and neighbors visited FIA's Middletown, PA headquarters during our Community Fun Day event. Continuing His track record of answered prayer, God proved Himself faithful to hold off the rain as participants enjoyed a "passport" around the world through stations displaying FIA's areas of service.

Quite a variety of activities displayed God's work through FIA. The bounce house reminiscent of the Amanda Brandt Memorial Playground (part of the community transformation work among the Rama Cay in Nicaragua) brought endless giggles from high-energy children hopping and springing in every direction. Little ones were also seen using Tonka trucks to level airstrips at the corn table, paralleling our efforts enabling missionaries to connect with further unreached people groups in Papua New Guinea. Adults and children alike enjoyed experiencing some of the necessary equipment used to bring Jesus, The Living Water, to Africa and Vanuatu by trying out a hand pump and climbing into our Mack truck and construction equipment. Brave souls interacted with reptiles at the Bolivia table while our more timid friends enjoyed a balloon animal or petted the puppies at the donation station garnering support for Ukrainian refugees.

People are at the heart of FIA's mission and work, so it was fitting to see so many heartfelt conversations taking place. Under the "Mission Partner" tent, inspirational stories of God at work through other service and mission organizations like I-Tec, Ethnos360, and Crossworld challenged people to greater faith and encouraged active involvement in the Great Commission. Children learned interesting facts and heard about outreach impacts through a display presenting pictures from FIA's six countries of service.

FIA's 30th-anniversary celebrations continue throughout 2022 as we publish more "God Stories" of faithfulness and provision, as well as ramp up for our next events. **Mark your calendar to see FIA on display at The 74th Annual Rough & Tumble Threshermen's Reunion (August 17-20), The Smoketown Aviation Fair (September 24 and 25), and FIA's Annual Mission Celebration (October 28 and 29 or November 18, details on the last page). Join us for even more fun! ■**



# FIA's Memorial Campaign: A Living Tribute

FIA's Fun Day was the launching point for another 30th-anniversary initiative: The FIA Memorial Campaign. With three tiers of giving, supporters can sponsor a living tribute placed on-site at FIA Headquarters (a tree, bush, or shrub with memorial plaque) or place an engraved brick on the Memorial Walk in celebration and remembrance of a loved one or special event. Like building an altar of remembrance in the Old Testament, every brick laid and landscape cultivated is an "Ebenezer" to God for the people, projects, provision, and prayers answered that have expanded this ministry to make the global impacts of today.

It was an honor to plant the first tree to celebrate the life and contribution of Charles "Chuck" Alles for his years of faithful service supporting the Shipping Ministry as a freight forwarder. FIA staff were joined by Chuck's wife Jane and 16 other family members to recognize the impact of his service to hundreds of frontline Gospel workers through the shipment of mission-critical cargo to the far-flung regions of the world.

## Learn more

Your tax-deductible contribution to the Memorial Campaign will make a lasting impact in Jesus' Name while celebrating the people and moments that mean the most.

[FIAintl.org/memorial-campaign](http://FIAintl.org/memorial-campaign) ■



# ANNUAL MISSIONS BANQUET

3 DATES &  
3 LOCATIONS

Invitations Coming In September

Join us as we celebrate what God has done through 30 years of FIA's ministries!

**FRIDAY, OCT. 28**  
**6:00 PM**

**Lebanon Valley Bible Church**

1482 Horseshoe Pike  
Lebanon, PA 17042

**SATURDAY, OCT. 29**  
**5:00 PM**

**The Sheraton Harrisburg-Hershey Hotel**

4650 Lindle Road  
Harrisburg, PA 17111

**FRIDAY, NOV. 18**  
**6:00 PM**

**Four Rivers Environmental  
Education Center**

25055 West Walnut Lane  
Channahon, IL 60401



**FRIENDS  
IN ACTION**  
INTERNATIONAL

[FIAintl.org](http://FIAintl.org)



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