



# *the* CHALLENGE

MOVING EARTH TO SHARE HEAVEN MARCH 2024

## Watching A Vision Come To Life

WEST AFRICA

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Certainly Not Ours

Givers Turned  
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# CHARTING THE COURSE: FIA Poised For Future Growth



"And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

— Psalm 90:17 (KJV)

## A MESSAGE FROM ANDY BACHERT, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER (COO)

As we approach the end of the first quarter of 2024 at Friends in Action International (FIA), I am excited to see the incredible work the team has already accomplished. Over the years, our mission has shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the farthest corners of the world. It has touched countless lives and brought hope to the hopeless. However, in an ever-changing landscape, it is also fundamental to look toward the future and prepare for the challenges and opportunities.

### Adapting & Innovating

The "crucible" of March 2020 taught me the importance of adaptability. As the former General Manager of a \$10 million industrial company deemed "essential," we had to "pivot" and adapt to a new landscape. As the COO of FIA USA, I am responsible for ensuring that we continue to grow and evolve to remain effective in our ministry. To achieve this, we must be willing to adapt and innovate, always focusing on the ultimate goal of spreading the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. So, how can I apply the lessons learned in March 2020 as we are poised to grow in 2024?

#### 2020 Pivot 1: Invest in infrastructure and resources.

One important way we can prepare for future growth is by investing in our infrastructure and resources. This may involve upgrading our technology systems, expanding our network of volunteers and prayer warriors, or even training new staff to support our expanding operations. We can better position ourselves to take on new challenges and opportunities by strengthening our foundation.

**We must be willing to adapt and innovate, always focusing on the ultimate goal of spreading the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.**

#### 2020 Pivot 2: Develop our people.

Additionally, we must prioritize leadership development and capacity building within our organization. As our ministry grows, so must our team of dedicated staff and volunteers. This means providing training and support to help individuals develop their skills

and talents, empowering them to take on greater responsibilities and leadership roles within FIA. By investing in our people, we can ensure that we have the talent and expertise to sustain our mission for years to come.

#### 2020 Pivot 3: Foster existing relationships.

Lastly, we must remain committed to fostering strong relationships with our donors, partners, and supporters. These individuals, businesses, and organizations are crucial in fueling our mission. Without their generosity and support, our work would not be possible. By encouraging these relationships and communicating our vision and impact effectively, we can inspire others to join us in our mission of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ around the world.

Join me in looking to the future with hope and anticipation. I know God has great plans for Friends in Action International. Together, we can move earth to share heaven, bringing light to the darkest corners of the world and bearing the love of Christ to all who need it most. ■



"Except the Lord build the house,  
they labour in vain that build it..."

— Psalm 127:1 (KJV)



WEST AFRICA

# Watching A Vision COME TO LIFE



**While looking ahead to see where God is taking you, sometimes it is good to pause and remember what He has brought you through.**

**JEREMY EFFLER, WEST AFRICA FIELD LEADER**

**F**or us in West Africa, it doesn't take much to remember this all began with a bare piece of land and a heart to see God move. Over the past three years, seeing God grow the mission has been amazing and exciting. It also has been incredibly difficult. That is something we face every day as we serve here: both the good and the hard. The mission reports sent to those faithfully supporting us often include the mighty "wins" and the "God stories," showing His great faithfulness and provision.

What is often unsaid or unwritten are the journeys we endured through the deep valleys to get to those mountain heights. Both are real and true, and I've realized that it is impossible to have the mountaintop experiences without first passing through the valleys.

One mountaintop this year was the Lord's answer to a church planter's prayer, praying ten years for the provision of water. The paradox is that while he has clean water, that is what we still lack at our mission station.

We celebrate with our partners and, at the same time, experience failure after failure after months of drilling, trying to break a layer of salt water into the freshwater underneath. We're not there yet, but even as I write this, we are so close to getting it done!

This journey has helped me realize how difficult and impossible it is to climb from the depths without God's help. I also realized that we learned the deepest truths about Him in those times.

As I step out onto my porch in the cool morning air, I can already feel the heat beginning to build. I breathe in the smells of my West African home, and I can't help but feel a deep sense of peace—peace reminding me that I am exactly where God wants me to be, doing exactly what God has called me to do. I still have my moments (sometimes days) of doubt, but as I look out my door, I am surrounded by God's favor and provision for my family and the mission. God reminds me He is faithful.



## A New Chapter

Since January 2021, the hand of the Lord has transformed 12 acres of barren land into our base of operations with two mission homes, a separate workspace, half of our hanger space (where we service and maintain our equipment), and partially finished our short-term team's building. Originally a drawing, a dream, and a hope, this ministry center has become a reality.

Now that the station is livable and workable, a new chapter of ministry has begun. A shift from foundational development to expanding and developing mission partnerships and service is taking place. Our heart and desire is to build something of eternal value in our country of service. To do that, we look to join Him, where He's already working.

The Bible teaches us that unless God builds the house, the labor is for nothing (Psalm 127:1). If we push hard and fast, we miss where God is. When we slow down and focus on spending time with God, we see His opportunities. We ask God to meet us, even in the mundane, to make us aware of His presence, and to point us to serve in ways that bring eternal value. My heart as a field leader is that whatever we do, we do it in and with God's presence and seek to enjoy Him even in times of great difficulty. That is where the light of Christ will shine brightest to others.

As we look ahead, clean water projects remain our primary focus. This year, we hope to travel to a more remote region to drill. We have many other well requests in our area, but this well will take us far from our station, up to eight hours away. This new chapter sees us expanding our reach further

to support more remote missionaries serving the unreached, as by God's grace, we trust His provision to complete ten wells this year.

Station projects include completing the teams building. This multi-purpose area will allow us to host our short-term teams and (Lord willing) eventually host church services and community events. This will open the door to many possibilities, and we are excited to see how God will use it.

Months of construction and site development have created great opportunities to establish relationships with our neighbors and the local laborers working with us. We are now praying for ways to partner with our village and the surrounding community. One possibility is a request for a community well from a neighboring village with limited access to water. There is no Christian presence or ministry anywhere in this village. This could be an opportunity to see the Gospel move forward. If we decide to drill here, the Lord needs to show us how to proceed and how to get the Gospel into this village along with water. If we do this, it will stretch us – please pray for us, for wisdom!

Looking ahead, we find ourselves balancing two roles: supporting mission partners and projects and pioneering front-line Gospel work among the unreached. Pioneering is a new territory for us. We want to see His eternal purposes and Kingdom built up, not our own. We can only do what is asked by relying on God. I am excited to see what this chapter holds as the Lord transforms and strengthens our team to serve wherever He sends us. ■



A portrait of Jacob Sutton, a young man with short brown hair and a beard, smiling at the camera. He is wearing a blue t-shirt. The background is a dry, open field with scattered trees under a clear sky.

# God's Ways Are Certainly Not Ours

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." —Isaiah 55:9 (KJV)

JACOB SUTTON, FIA INTERN

It's amazing how daunting a mission trip can seem, and once you've decided to go, you envision it will end up a certain way. I set my goals, made plans, anticipated the experience, prayed, and jumped into what I thought would be a grand yet expected adventure. I expected God to follow my plan and reveal things to me through my schedule. God wants me to go here and do these things, and He will make sure it all happens when I want it to, right?



## INTERN PERSPECTIVE

I am sure you are laughing your way out of your boots because that is not how God works. When God is in control, you learn that the switchback is sometimes His straight and narrow way, and you see that the place you end up in is far better and has far more meaning than where you thought you would be.

So, how has my internship experience gone so far? One statement sums it up: "Little I expected, and everything I hoped for." I had some ideas about what I would do during this internship: ride into the depths of the countryside, do some construction work, and maybe complete some small projects to improve the mission base. Over the past six months, I have worked on many other crazy things that never made it on my list, but I don't miss the things I thought I would be doing. This is pioneering work, not yet established, and I realized that my time here would be building it up to make a place for the future workers who would come through. That mindset changed my outlook, and once I recognized that this was the role God had put me here to fill, I got set for all the crazy things that were to come.

My first introduction to God's plans being different from mine happened a few days after I arrived. We set up to work on the mission compound well at Shiloh. After several days of work trying to complete the well and getting stuck multiple times for several reasons, we finally had to stop short of completing our objective because the team had to move on to other things. After that, I knew that my work here would look a lot different than I expected.

I've worked various jobs, from clearing brush around the compound to installing pumps and solar panels to visiting villages for outreach and site planning. My main activity, besides organizing tools and materials, has been helping maintain the compound. The grass here is not like grass in the U.S. When the rainy season comes, it sometimes grows six or more inches a week. It takes a long time to cut eight acres. Under all that grass, there are still pieces of wire and metal from recent construction that mess up the cutting head and line. Our tools break down, and we have learned how important tool maintenance is because crazy things happen when we let the



grass get too tall. Last year, we installed a new gate on the front of the compound, welding new hinges. Unknown to us, sparks from the welder were deflected onto a high grass area outside the wall and caught fire. During lunch, it burned its way down the wall and caught a grass field on fire behind the compound. One of my young cousins saw the fire coming under the back gate. We quickly got the tractor to put out the fire inside the compound and then moved to put out the fast-moving grass fire on the outside. We needed a lot of water. Thankfully, we had just unpacked several long hoses from one of our containers, which we hooked up and stretched out to the far side of the fire. I was praying the fire would not reach the millet field, which was on the other side of the grass field. If it did, it would be significantly harder to stop. God be praised, we stopped it just short of the millet.

On top of the adrenaline-pumping events, we have been making steady progress in prepping the compound for the first teams of the year. We've been digging trenches and laying pipes for water lines, building a roof for our team building, and cleaning and organizing containers. We've also been at work in the community to prepare for future ministry, visiting villages to get to know the locals, building pumps and solar arrays for a local ministry couple, and one of my personal favorites was visiting a piece of land with a local evangelist to plot out the plan for a well and a development system. This well will allow him to support himself and preach in the local community. I hope we will be able to bring those plans to reality in the next couple of months.

God is at work in this world; I believe that so much more now than when I started, and my faith in it gets stronger every day. My contribution feels small, but I hope and pray God can use it to do something according to His will. I can see it, and I can't wait for what the future here will hold. ■

## Givers Turned Champions: Going Deeper with FIA

**R**oy and Marilyn Keys first heard of FIA when volunteer teams drilled a well at a Bible school in Burkina Faso, where they served as missionaries. After returning from the field in 2016, Marilyn was asked to lead their church's missions committee. Since then, Marilyn and her committee have become champions of FIA to their congregation. Marilyn posts pictures and articles from FIA's magazine, *The Challenge* to her church's missions bulletin board. During their "Moment for Missions" time at the start of services, she reads FIA thank you notes and updates. And, once a year, she provides the entire congregation with a thorough report on their support of FIA's well-drilling ministries in Africa.

God has blessed Marilyn's efforts as the congregation at Jefferson Baptist

Church provided close to \$40,000 for well-drilling last year! "Even though we are a very small, rural church, people are interested in staying connected with what's happening through their giving. I'm happy to provide those updates to encourage others," shared Marilyn.

Bill and Carol Ruhf learned of FIA through Mike and Ruth Butler, field leaders in Papua New Guinea. Over the years, the Ruhfs felt led to begin financially supporting FIA's initiatives. "We couldn't be go-ers, but we felt the Lord calling us to be faithful to contribute," shared Bill.

Bill decided to go deeper and become a champion of FIA's work by approaching the Tribes Legacy Foundation, a group committed to funding Christian outreach. "I read about FIA's need

for a solar project to benefit work among the Wewak people in Papua New Guinea and knew that this was just the kind of practical and impactful project intended for the trust," shared Bill. The Lord blessed his boldness with a \$10,000 grant toward funding the solar project!

Shannon from FIA would love to provide materials or prepare a presentation for you to share with your pastor, missions committee, grant foundation, or anyone else. Let God use you as a champion of the Great Commission by going deeper with FIA! ■

**CONTACT SHANNON MEDICH,  
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# Women's Lives Transformed

**"And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."**

**– 1 Isaiah 58:11 (KJV)**

A day in the African sunshine begins with a rooster crowing, young women starting a breakfast fire, preparing food, and sweeping out the courtyard with sounds of chatter and intermittent laughter at the Dorcas House Ministry in the small sub-Saharan country of Burkina Faso (West Africa). This month welcomes 22 vulnerable and at-risk women (ages 17-25) living in the poorest communities in the region to the ministry center as they continue their journey of opportunity, education, and identity despite their circumstances, with a willingness to hope for a better future.

The ministry began in 2008 when a group of visionary Burkinabe women within the Association of Alliance Women (UFAC) started this transformative center. The key objectives for the ministry include providing a place of safety and refuge for those who have suffered, learning basic life skills (such as reading and writing) and technical skills (like sewing, gardening, fabric dying, and soap-making) to prepare them to be self-sufficient once they graduate.

Beyond a place of teaching and refuge, this program has become a catalyst for the redemptive work of

God's love, transforming the lives of the participating women. Daily biblical teaching and Christ-centered fellowship are core components of the program.

Discipleship through relationship is the approach God uses to lead these women to understand better who He is and His love for them. Since its inception, more than 180 women have graduated from the two-year program, strengthened by what they have learned and hope-filled because of their newfound faith in the Lord.

Each year, women like Suzanne, age 18, can join approximately 20 other participants in the program. After her father's death, Suzanne lived in a cycle of poverty as she was trying to provide for her family by farming. Although very intelligent, she was not privileged to attend school past 6th grade. With no strong male figure in her family, young women like Suzanne are more vulnerable than ever. A marriage proposal to become the third wife of an older man in her village who did not share her faith in Jesus was terrifying for her.

Suzanne thrived at Dorcas House, giving 100 percent to the daily routine and helping with cooking and laundry while learning. Her bright spirit



## NEWLY SUPPORTED MINISTRY



was always contagious. After two years, Suzanne and all the graduates received a treadle sewing machine as a graduation present. The pastor from her village came to present her with the sewing machine.

Suzanne returned to her village using her machine and started a small business with her new skills. When she heard a need to help at Dorcas House, she returned for a two-year apprenticeship to help the students.

As the years have passed, increased regional instability has driven larger numbers of displaced people to the capital city. The Lord is at work bringing vulnerable and at-risk women from traditional, Muslim, and Christian backgrounds from great distances to the very doorstep of Dorcas House and giving them the opportunity for a fresh start and new life found in Him. ■

**The Dorcas House Ministry was added in October 2023 as a newly supported ministry of FIA.** FIA provides financial services supporting the administration and management of the Burkina-based program. This program is financed by way of partnerships between existing financial donors and those serving on the ground in Burkina Faso.

QUESTIONS? Contact Amy Nehlsen, US Project Manager for Dorcas House: [FIA-USA@faintl.org](mailto:FIA-USA@faintl.org).



# 2024 TRIP OPPORTUNITIES

A short-term trip can be an adventure of a lifetime! On a trip with FIA, you'll see the work of God on the mission field, be a blessing to another culture, and discover how your skills can help further the Gospel. Use your trade skills to help make Christ known by volunteering on one (or more) of FIA's upcoming trips. **Learn More:** [FIAintl.org/get-involved](https://fiaintl.org/get-involved)



## Training



**Nicaragua | June**  
Missions 101 – Introduction to missions from a field perspective.

## Well Drilling



**Mexico | November**  
Drilling community wells and mechanical services to support vehicle and equipment maintenance programs for a remote mission hospital.

## USA Teams



**Missouri | March & November**  
Interior remodel/renovation work, interior remodels of residential dwellings at ETHNOS 360 mission training center in Camdenton, MO. Need general laborers, interior finishing, plumbing, and electrical workers.

## Construction & Welding



**Nicaragua | March & April**  
Construction of a community kitchen and meeting space (installation of steel-frame structure). Need welders and general laborers.

**West Africa | March**  
Construction and site development projects, including completion of the FIA teams housing building and developing an irrigation system for the ministry centre in West Africa.

**Uganda | April**  
Construction of community outreach center and housing units for partner project. Need construction and general laborers.

**Vanuatu | June**  
Roadwork and construction for water project. Road work and excavation, remote site access, and materials stockpiling. Need equipment operators and general laborers.

**Vanuatu | June**  
Finishing FIA maintenance/mechanic workshops for the field base of operations (completing the welding of a steel-frame infrastructure, roofing and siding projects).

## Mechanical & Support Services



**Vanuatu | April**  
Mechanical services to support vehicle and equipment maintenance programs.

**Mexico | April**  
Mechanical services to support vehicle and equipment maintenance programs and drilling wells for a remote mission hospital. Need automotive mechanics.

## Special Projects



**Papua New Guinea | March**  
Solar installation partnering with ITEC, setting up solar panel array and installing solar power supply system for FIA ministry.



**FRIENDS  
IN ACTION  
INTERNATIONAL**

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