



'God is bringing water today'

A TRIP TO CENTRAL AFRICA shows the all-encompassing need for clean water – and the floodgates it opens.

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE



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In the village of Maloun, Madeleine Digle talks about the “many, many, many” years her family has lived without clean water. She doesn’t know her exact age (somewhere in her 80s or 90s). She moves slowly and wasn’t able to join the celebration when Hope Springs International announced that it would drill a new water well to replace the village’s 50-year-old one. (The dirty water from the current well is in the bowl at bottom.) But after the celebration she emerged from her thatch-roof home and shouted joyously, praising God for the gift of clean water.

DONO-MANGA, Chad

Water, please.” That’s the most common phrase heard around the table as a team of American Christians gathers under an open-air pavilion at the home of their African hosts.

The missionaries, from Hope Springs International, are weary after a day pulling teeth, playing soccer and even removing a spider from a child’s ear in heat exceeding 100 degrees.

Now they’re thirsty. Very thirsty.

A young woman named Prudence Rimorbe appears, almost angelic in a flowing blue West African dress, bearing bottles of water and cola on a silver platter. The Americans lavish praise on her. They ignore the colas and take liter bottles of pure water, slick with condensation.

A few miles away, across twisting, dusty pathways, women struggle to draw a few drops of water from a shallow well in the village of Maloun. Dug 50 years ago, the well is nearly dry in the final weeks before the rainy season. And the water it produces is light brown, undrinkable.

As the well has dried, the village has dwindled, community leaders say. Only a few souls remain, and they spend hours walking to other water sources, including a river a few miles away, to get enough to make it through the day.

Nothing teaches the importance of water like a mission trip to Central Africa.

The life-sustaining liquid comprises nearly 60 percent of the human body and covers more than 70 percent of the planet — though only about 0.4 percent of the world’s water is usable by its 7 billion inhabitants.

And here in southern Chad, it’s all too rare — especially clean, drinkable water free of the parasites and bacteria that rob this continent of its life and vitality.

This village, Dono-Manga, is the home of Prudence Rimorbe’s father, Pierre, who first encountered Churches of Christ when he lived in northern Nigeria. He was baptized and studied at the School of Biblical Studies in Jos, Nigeria, before returning home in 2006 to plant a church.

The church grew, but not as fast as the needs in his community. Children were dying of malnutrition, cholera and other preventable, water-borne diseases. Many had been orphaned by the continent’s HIV/AIDS crisis. Others lost parents who served in Chad’s military and died fighting against the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram or in the Darfur conflict in neighboring Sudan.

Pierre Rimorbe sent out an SOS to his Nigerian brethren: “Come help us save lives so that we’ll have more chances to save souls.”

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Pierre Rimorbe



The journey from Chad's capital, N'Djamena, to the village of Dono-Manga, about 250 miles away, took the Hope Springs team nearly 18 hours. Obstacles included potholes, rutted dirt roads and a flat tire. The return journey was significantly shorter, though the four-vehicle convoy did have to stop for a passing herd of camels.

Republic of Chad

POPULATION: 15.8 million. **LANGUAGES:** French and Arabic (official), Sara (in the south), plus more than 120 different languages and dialects. **RELIGION:** 52.1 percent Muslim, 23.9 percent Protestant, 20 percent Catholic, 4 percent other (for many Chadians, animist beliefs are combined with other faiths).



HISTORY: A collection of kingdoms and sultanates dominated Central Africa until the French colonized Chad, controlling it from 1900 to 1960. The new nation endured three decades of civil war and invasions by Libya before peace was restored in 1990.



CHURCHES OF CHRIST: While working with correspondence students in Cameroon, Paul Kudi Eti and Jean Boido met contacts in Chad. Some were baptized and helped form Churches of Christ near the Cameroon border in 1990. Chadian David Nassa helped plant churches in the capital, N'Djamena. Churches in New York and Switzerland have supported the work.

HOPE SPRINGS INTERNATIONAL: The nonprofit seeks "lasting change, one village at a time." The NorthField Church in Gallatin, Tenn., houses its U.S. offices. Among its board of trustees are members of NorthField and Churches of Christ in the U.S. and Africa. Website: www.hopespringsint.com.

SOURCES: CIA World Factbook, "Churches of Christ Around the World" by Mac Lynn. Maps via Wikimedia Commons.

An SOS from 'of all places, Chad' leads to the transforming of a ministry – and lives

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In northern Nigeria, workers with a Christian relief group were facing an uncertain future when they received the plea from Dono-Manga.

Arewa Aid, launched by missionaries Brad and Jennifer Blake, was drilling water wells and building medical clinics. But the arrival of Boko Haram had disrupted the work, and the Blakes had returned home.

"It looked like we may not be able to continue," said Lee Hodges, a long-time preacher and ministry trainer for Churches of Christ who had just joined Arewa Aid as development director. "But with God's help things turned around, literally, when we received an SOS call from, of all places, Chad."

Ibrahim Rambli, an evangelist in Maiduguri, Nigeria, who worked with Arewa, wasn't even sure where Dono-Manga was. Rambli, who grew up in a Muslim home but had converted to Christianity and studied at the School of Biblical Studies, knew Pierre Rimorbe.

The church Rambli served had plenty of its own challenges, he said, but the mission-minded congregation was eager to help.

So the African Christians and their American counterparts with Arewa, renamed Hope Springs International, began repairing water wells in Dono-Manga and surrounding communities.

"We happened to luck upon a World Bank program that enabled us to drill additional wells, 30-plus, at a ridiculous price of only \$1,000 apiece,"



Diana Rodriguez comforts one of her dental patients at the Jordan Health Center.

said Hodges, now president of Hope Springs International.

That ministry opened the floodgates to others. Pierre Rimorbe became Hope Springs' on-site coordinator for Dono-Manga and helped launch a medical clinic, a school that serves more than 1,000 students and a foster care program that helps nearly 100 children who lost parents to disease or war.

As stability has slowly returned to northern Nigeria, Hope Springs continues its work there. Rambli serves as director of operations for Africa and accompanied the mission team to Dono-Manga.

Despite the challenges he's seen in his homeland and here in Chad, "everyone lives in hope that it will get better someday," Rambli said. "With



A girls leads her class in reciting a French paragraph at the Christian school.

this high degree of hope, even in the challenges we have, we don't give up.

"We keep pushing on, we keep believing that things might get better."

Clean water isn't just for humans.

As members of the Hope Springs mission team visit the villages of a community called Kimri, the local leader, Boytoy Moundou, talks about a well drilled by the nonprofit. Before, villagers had to walk to a polluted river more than a mile away.

"Before, when there was dirty water, we had children with diarrhea and other sicknesses," Moundou says as Pierre Rimorbe interprets. "This time around, it is history."

The villagers also use the well to provide water for their livestock. Before, Moundou says, the trek to the river put them in danger from cattle rustlers.

The community of nearly 18,000



A boy draws dirty water from an old village well, baldly in need of replacement.

souls has four good wells, Moundou says, and could use about 50 more.

People here know the transforming power of clean water — better health, more economic prosperity, more time for education — says Prudence Rimorbe. They have come to see clean water as a divine gift.

"The people of Dono-Manga believe that God must really be working among these people," she says of her American guests, "because they come, and they take care of our primary need, which is water."

"But it doesn't stop there," she adds. "The education of both the orphans and the other children in this community sent another clear signal that God was truly at work."

"And finally, with the clinic, those that are coming to receive medicines have stopped going to the traditional healers, to the witchdoctors and to the shamans for their medicine



The mission team passed traders riding horse-drawn wagons during its journey.

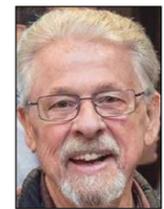
because it was unreliable."

In addition to pulling teeth and extracting spiders, the mission team visits the village of Maloun, part of the Kimri community.

Hodges tells the villagers to expect a new water well soon — one to replace the 50-year-old dry, dirty well they use now. It will help the villagers and the countless farmers who come to the nearby fields during the rainy season to plant rice.

In response, the villagers cheer, clap and sing a song in their native language, Gabri. Translation: "God is bringing water today."

"They are so overjoyed," Prudence Rimorbe says, "that God saw fit to choose them as a vessel to pour out his blessing on this community."



Hodges



Rambli



Nurses Laura Gilbert and her sister, Emily, treat a child's wound. "We woke each day with a line of people just hoping to get the chance for us to see them," Laura Gilbert said. "Each night we packed up, having to tell just as many, 'We will try again tomorrow.' My heart broke seeing all the needs and knowing we were lacking a lot of the resources to truly help." Despite the hardships they endure, the Chadians "were some of the most joyous, kindhearted souls I have met. They were so thankful to us for just doing what we could."

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