



*A mission field  
called home*

*The sacrifices of those who go and stay*

*After a word  
of prayer, the top  
was put on the  
coffin and the nails  
hammered in. You  
can imagine the pain  
that shot through  
my heart at each  
pound of the  
hammer.*

BY KIRK NOONAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GAYLON WAMPLER

From *Obedient Unto Death*, an article appearing in the January 2, 1926, *Pentecostal Evangel* written by Lucille Booth-Clibborn, widow of Eric Booth-Clibborn, shortly after her husband's death in Burkina Faso.

The trail is flanked by golden, waist-high grass that could burn in seconds if introduced to a lighted match. The area seems an inhospitable place for a garden until the pathway bends and then suddenly descends into a small verdant valley brimming with tomato and onion plants that lend a fantastic aroma to the warm air.

Under the balmy glow of the setting sun, workers tend the delicate plants. Jules Zoungrana drops a pail into a shallow well. Seconds later, he hoists it out, then carefully makes his way to a row of onions.

“Several people have come to Christ because of the gardening project,” Zoungrana, pastor of nearby Mangorotou Assembly of God, says as he waters the plants.

Zoungrana’s pants are rolled up and baggy like his shirt. He has stubble on his chin, a quiet countenance and chiseled arms — no doubt from working the earth with his oxen-pulled plow.

“Our garden is a means of communication,” he adds, noting that villagers frequently stop to chat and seek his counsel. “Though our church has grown slowly, the community is beginning to understand that we’ve not only brought better food and health to the village, but we’ve also brought Christ.”

Zoungrana, of the Mossi people, says he was called by God eight years ago to minister in this village of mostly Bolon people. He is one of more than 150 missionaries sent to various locations and supported by the Burkina Faso AG.

Since coming to Mangorotou, Zoungrana has learned a new language and culture, built a church, planted gardens, evangelized the community, disciplined new believers and raised his family. He is emblematic of the Fellowship’s desire to spread the gospel throughout West Africa.

“Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world,” admits Jean Pawentaoré Ouédraogo, general superintendent of the Burkina Faso AG. “But we make do with what we have. Because of that, we have missionaries throughout our country and in other countries.”

#### Strong foundations

A pioneering spirit to do missions pervades the Burkina Faso church. Ouédraogo and others say the resolve can

continued on page 11

*Food from Zoungrana’s garden sustains his family and several other families in his village.*

*Missionary Jules Zoungrana fetches water for the garden he uses as a ministry tool.*

*Jules Zoungrana waters his crops on a warm Burkina Faso evening.*





*A Burkinabé woman prays at a church led by Burkinabé missionaries.*



*There are 4,000 Assemblies of God churches in Burkina Faso.*

be traced back to missionaries from the United States who came to Burkina Faso nearly a century ago.

“The heart of God is missions,” Moise Oubida, missions coordinator for the AG in the Bobo Dioulasso region, says. “When we think of the missionaries who came before us, we know we must go too.”

Several graves are silent testimonies of Assemblies of God missionaries and their children who died here. In 1924 Eric Booth-Clibborn was not quite 29 years old when he died of dysentery and malaria — only one month after arriving in Burkina Faso. Florence Chastagner, infant daughter of missionaries Emile and Minnie Chastagner, died in 1931. Billy Hall, 6-month-old son of missionaries John and Cuba Hall, died of dysentery in 1937. The following year, 6-year-old Paul Weidman Jr., son of missionaries Paul and Virginia Weidman, died of malaria. In 1941, 2-year-old Lita Ann Kitch, daughter of missionaries Paul and Bernadine Kitch, died of malaria, and less than a year later Bernadine died of typhus at age 31. An infant daughter to missionaries Raymond and Lucille Sanders died in 1946. Three decades later, missionary Paul Chastagner, Emile and Minnie’s son, died in a car accident in 1976 while traveling between Burkina Faso and Ghana.

“How can we forget the sacrifices?” Jean-Baptiste Sawadogo, missions director for the national church, asks. “We cannot. We will not.”

Ouédraogo says the first missionaries from the United States gave the Burkinabé [Burkina Faso-born residents] a passionate desire for missions.

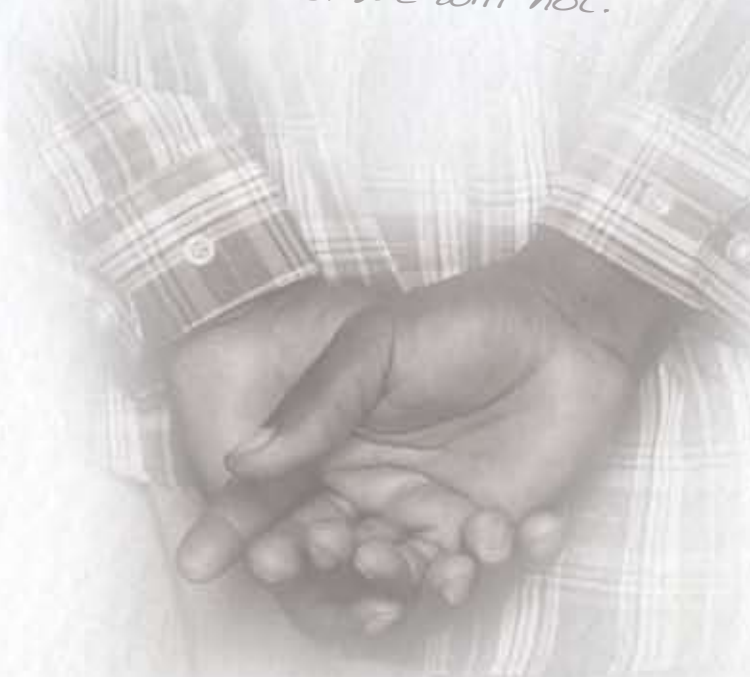
But believing in and doing missions are two different things. Decades would pass following the death of Booth-Clibborn before the national church was fully engaged in missions.

The main reason?

Poverty.

Burkina Faso has long been among the poorest countries in the world. If anyone needed help, many Burkinabé believers reasoned, they did.

*How can we forget the sacrifices? We cannot. We will not.*





*AGWM West Africa director Randy Tarr and Moise Oubida, a pastor from the Bobo Dioulasso region, pray for Zoungrana and his family.*

“When God put it in my heart to organize a missions program, I was skeptical. I didn’t think there was any way an African church could be a sending church,” Sawadogo admits. “But God convinced me otherwise. As I taught the value of missions and giving, every church that gave saw its income increase.”

Today, nearly a quarter of Burkina Faso’s 4,000 AG churches participate in missions — an amazing statistic considering many churches are located in remote villages where most residents are subsistence farmers.

In 1985 the annual missions budget was only 10,000 francs (\$24 U.S.). Today, the budget has ballooned to nearly 50 million francs (\$120,000). Each year the goal is to send 50 national missionaries to remote areas of Burkina Faso as well as other countries such as Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali, Senegal, Chad, Togo and Benin.

“We send only our best people to the field,” Sawadogo says.

To ensure that happens, each missionary in training must attend one of the seven AG Bible colleges to become thoroughly knowledgeable in the Bible and well-versed in Pentecostal doctrine. They must also learn the language and culture of the people they are trying to evangelize. Like many American missionaries, they must uproot their families, move to an unfamiliar place and embrace peoples not their own. The primary key to doing so with grace, compassion and steadfastness — according to leaders — is by becoming lifelong learners, servants and friends dedicated to sharing the hope of Christ with the unreached in Africa.

“When our missionaries are taught the language and culture by the local people,” Sawadogo says, “there is no way they will be rejected.”

continued on page 14



*Zoungrana takes a break from his garden to pose for a picture with his wife and children.*

*Many missionaries work the land for sustenance.*



*Those who train for missions in Burkina Faso are close knit.*

#### Overcoming poverty

Though Christians are free to share their faith in Burkina Faso and large segments of the population are open to the gospel, national missionaries have other issues with which to contend when they are on the field. Besides mastering a new language and culture, the missionaries must find a way to make money to supplement the \$18 a month the national church provides. Some missionaries plant gardens or raise chickens. Others work as public school teachers. Despite the challenges, a focused passion to share the gospel continues to drive many believers to the field.

This is how most of the unreached will be reached in Africa — through the missionary efforts of national churches that were established to be truly indigenous. Not only are they self-sustaining, they multiply as they mature, strengthen and replicate among cultures other than their own.

“Young people in Burkina Faso have a desire to be missionaries,” says Bazie Fulbert, a pastor from Bobo Dioulasso who is studying to be a missionary. “Some wonder how they will feed themselves and their families. But many still decide to go and struggle.”

The reason they go is clear. “Many people haven’t heard the good news,” Gilbert Ouédraogo, a missionary-to-be, says. “It’s our desire to share it out of simple obedience to the Great Commission. I want to start new churches, build up Christians and then move on to other villages and do it again.”

Francois Bakiémé has similar goals. But as he talks he cannot help but weep. He knows what is required of African missionaries. While he and his family were serving as missionaries in Mali, his wife had a heart attack. On her deathbed she said something that has spurred Bakiémé back to the mission field after his two years of mourning.

“Your mission is not done,” she told him. “You must continue in the work today, for tomorrow we’ll see each other in heaven.”

continued on page 17

*Field workers play in piles of freshly picked cotton on the outskirts of Mangorotou.*



*Missionaries in training: (l. to r.) Francois Bakiémé, Gilbert Ouédraogo and Bazie Fulbert.*

*Discipleship, prayer and reading the Word are promoted by the AG.*



*Dozens of Assemblies of God adherents gather for service in a tiny church in the village of Kamti.*

*Burkinabé believers are expressive in their worship, raising hands, dancing and singing.*

#### **Churches**

It's a dry, dusty day in Kamti, a village about four hours' driving time from Ouagadougou, the nation's capital. Randy Tarr, AGWM West Africa area director, stoops low to enter the small, straw-thatched church where local worshippers have gathered with missionaries from surrounding villages. Though more than 40 worshippers are crammed inside, the tiny church provides a pleasant respite from the blazing sun.

At the front of the church a boy and a man sit on *djembes* — small wooden drums — while tapping them rhythmically with their hands. The beat cues the people to begin singing and playing tambourines. Soon their voices flood the church.

On the benches are well-used Bibles. According to Tarr, discipleship, prayer and reading the Word are promoted heavily among the 45 distinct ethnic groups among which the AG now has a presence.

"God is bringing salvation to many people," says Daniel Kiemde, pastor of a church in Zepo, after the service. "Many people were idol worshippers, but as they've come to know Jesus they've left their idols."

Animism and other religions have a stranglehold in many villages. It's not uncommon to encounter altars where sacrifices are performed or meet people who will resort to using scare tactics to get others to convert to their beliefs.

"Many people believe there is great power associated with fetishes," Tarr says. "It's a demonic power that keeps people in fear and bondage."

Pascal Dibloni, a village pastor, says for nearly a decade he and his wife could not have children.



*Most AG churches are easily identified by the AG logo.*

“In the Lobi culture, not having children is shameful,” he explains. “But after accepting Christ as our Savior, my wife became pregnant. We now have four children.”

Seeing Christ’s healing power firsthand, Dibloni now eagerly tells others about the hope Jesus offers. Because of that hope, he says, his church has grown to more than 50 people.

Dibloni’s excitement over 50 new believers sticks with me for several hours. Fifty is a small number by some people’s standards when considering a person’s lifetime of ministry. But where some might see just a few people, Dibloni and others like him see 50 people who can multiply a missionary’s efforts by serving as missionaries themselves in their own villages or to other people groups, either within the country or even beyond its borders.

For Burkinabé believers, that’s one of the many exciting things about leading people to a relationship with the Lord — each person has the potential to be a missionary in the field to where God calls him or her. Because of this, the Burkina Faso AG is growing, thriving and increasingly multiplying.

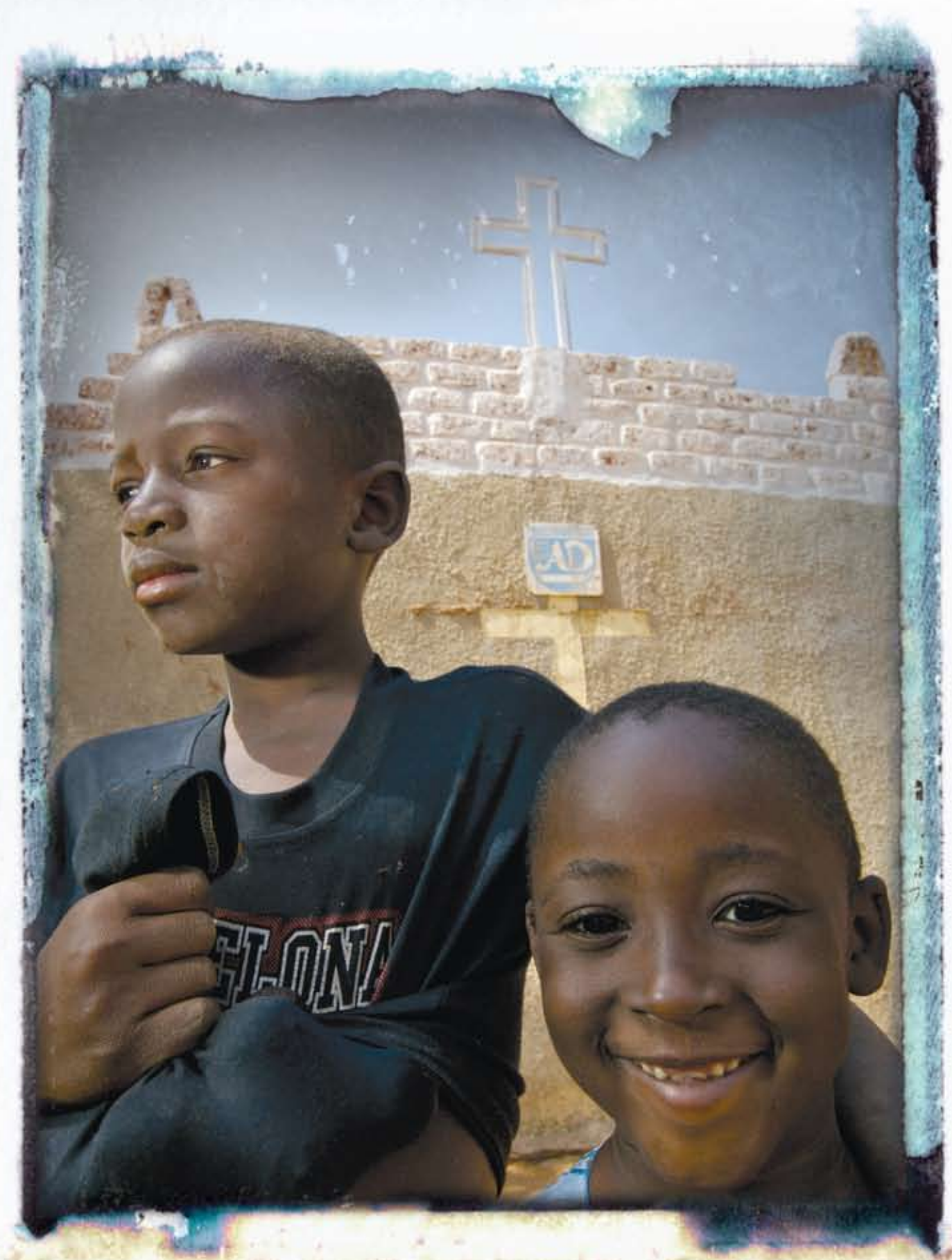
#### **New missions**

During the two-hour drive from Bobo Dioulasso to the village of Toussiana, Randy and I get a glimpse of life on the savanna. A woman sells watermelons from her cart on the dusty roadside. To escape the heat of the day, a couple of men in their work clothes sit in the shade of a sprawling tree, while children laze in a courtyard. Women huddle together and grind millet.

Several believers filter into the AG church for an afternoon service. Inside, chalkboards filled with alphabet letters and phonetic sounds cover the walls. In villages throughout the country, churches have become literacy centers where Burkinabé are learning to read and write.

Offering an education is helping missionaries gain a foothold, build relationships and also improve the quality of life of the residents.

*continued on page 21*



*Hundreds of children are learning about God at Assemblies of God churches in Burkina Faso.*

*Missionary Alphonse Troare visits a village where animal sacrifices are regularly performed on an idol (pictured center).*



*Burkinabé women have played a vital role in the growth of the AG church in Burkina Faso.*

*Relationships have proven crucial to ministry efforts in Burkina Faso.*



“By God’s grace and the missionary movement, we’ve seen progress here,” says missionary Paul Yampa, pastor of the church. “More than a thousand Toussuins have come to Christ in this region.” Church growth does not always happen as quickly or in the quantity that it has in Toussiana. This is especially true among people who are severely persecuted for accepting Christ.

#### **The Fulani**

Five hours in the opposite direction of Toussiana are camps of Fulani. Missionaries have worked diligently to share the gospel with this resistant group. When a Fulani accepts Christ, he or she is stripped of all his or her possessions and disowned by family and friends. As a result, evangelizing the Fulani has proven to be very difficult.

Michael Sonde is a missionary who oversees a farm that he hopes will become a refuge for Fulani believers. Here, he says, ostracized Fulani can find a place to live and work as they transition into their new faith and life. On this hot, windy afternoon, a quick inspection of the farm reveals that none of the huts are occupied. In fact, none have yet to be used by Fulani.

“Even if I don’t see many Fulani come to Christ during my lifetime,” Sonde says, “I know my children will carry on this ministry and reach them for Christ.”

Such determination and dedication would bring joy to Lucille Booth-Clibborn. In her *Evangel* article in 1926, she wrote:

*What we need is a host of Christian young men and women who will come as never before to lift up the standard of salvation and Pentecost, who will be reckless of their own interests in following the Lord’s bidding.*

Little did Lucille know that her vision would be fulfilled in the 21st century, in part, through young Burkinabés who have followed the sacrificial example of American AG missionaries and are now preaching the gospel to unreached peoples of their nation and beyond. **tpe**

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*Photographer Gaylon Wampler (left) and Managing Editor Kirk Noonan ride in the back of a pickup en route to a Fulani village.*

