

The Transformation of Algodao de Jandaira

A Sentinel Group Report

The story began in the Valentina Baptist church located in the coastal city of Joao Pessoa, Brazil. The congregation there was small and very poor, but this did not prevent them from being preoccupied with a broad range of religious activities. Most of the congregants were also quite conservative – neither believing in nor experiencing anything supernatural.

God, however, began to deal with this busy, self-absorbed congregation. A deep conviction set in and the people repented of their sin and small-mindedness. Many cried out for a fresh move of God – and as they did so, the Holy Spirit broke their hearts and inclined them to his purposes.

One nondescript member of the church choir, a woman, began to have dreams about a town or encampment called Algodao de Jandaira. Although she had never even heard of the place, the dreams were so vivid – revealing local terrain, troubled faces, and other considerable detail – that the entire congregation received them as a divine revelation. The problem was that no one had the slightest idea where this community might be. The place was not identified on any map.

One day, however, a church member mentioned this story in passing to an acquaintance. The man confirmed that indeed there was such a place, and that it was in fact not far away. The reason it did not show up on any map was because it was in a desert area with no proper roads.

Excited by this news, the poor Baptist congregants took up a collection that was just enough to purchase one tank of gas. This allowed a small team to head out on an investigatory trip to Algodao de Jandaira. The trip took nearly an entire day owing to the fact much of the driving was in dry river beds.

When the team arrived at the outskirts of the community, they were shocked by what they saw. Not only were the 2,200 inhabitants poorer than the Baptists themselves, they looked like they were starving. There were no visible crops, the animals looked emaciated, and the people were dressed in rags. Everything, including a young girl walking around in red shorts and a blue shirt, was exactly as had been described in the dream.

The people had attempted to put in a community well, but each time they drilled the hole was dry. It had not rained in the area for 24 years, and there was no water table. As a consequence, water had to be trucked in from the outside. The main dietary item was cactus, but the people had no money to buy salt for flavoring.

Faced with this trauma – which was likely precipitated by the people’s idolatry – the community had turned even more sharply to spiritism. All manner of rituals and sacrifices were linked to the spirits of nature.

As the team approached the town, they were viewed with great suspicion. The people of Algodao de Jandaira felt vulnerable, and they were not used to outsiders. Unfortunately, the day was waning and the team needed a place to stay. Not knowing what else to do, they approached a small home and knocked on the door.

A woman answered and the team explained the purpose of their visit and asked if she knew of a place where they could bed down for the night. Immediately the woman called the other family members to the door where they welcomed the team inside. Without realizing it, the team had approached the only evangelical home in the community! It was an answer to prayer for both parties.

When the investigation team returned to Joao Pessoa and reported what they had seen to their fellow congregants, the people made a vow. They would return to the troubled community once a month with whatever supplies they could muster. These follow-up trips continued through 2003, with each successive visit serving to further break down the initial suspicion and hostility.

At the end of each visit, after they had delivered their meager supplies of food, salt and clothing, the team would walk up to a rock outcropping above the village to pray. Overwhelmed by their inadequacy, they asked God why he didn’t give the mission to a larger church that, presumably, could do much more for these needy people. They also began to pray that God would speak to government leaders about helping the people of Algodao de Jandaira.

God responded by saying the Christians’ prayers were off target. It was not his intention to use either rich churches or the government. Rather, he wanted to work through weak vessels in order to demonstrate his power.

The Baptists’ prayers began to take on a real urgency in late 2003. Despite their efforts, the situation in Algodao de Jandaira was deteriorating rapidly. The little water on site was extremely brackish, and many animals were starting to die. After prayer, the congregation decided to forego their traditional Christmas feast and family gift-giving in order to help the people of Algodao de Jandaira. Through this sacrifice, the people were able to purchase 80 gift baskets containing food staples like rice, beans and pasta.

After delivering these Christmas baskets, the team returned home with heavy hearts. Even this gesture seemed futile in light of the enormous needs. Algodao de Jandaira's inhabitants needed so much more – especially a relationship with Christ.

As Valentina Baptist Church began to collect funds for their next visit, the spirit of intercession began to rise within the congregation. God was not one to play games, and they were not about to quit.

On January 24, 2004, the team headed out again on the day-long trek to Algodao de Jandaira. This time, however, something was different. About five miles from the community they approached a riverbed they had crossed dozens of times before. But not this day. For the first time in a quarter century, raging waters were coursing down the channel. Parking their vehicle, the ecstatic believers hoisted supply sacks onto their shoulders and waded across the river. As they walked the final stretch to town, a spirit of worship overcame them.

Reaching the edge of the village, the team stood in astonishment. From the rock outcropping that served as their prayer station, a waterfall was pouring forth life-giving water upon the community below. Children were running in the river, splashing and laughing all around. Men were watering their horses, while goats drank their fill. It was almost too good to be true.

Upon reaching their friends, the Joao Pessoa team heard more of the story. Shortly after their last visit, they were told, the heavens over Algodao de Jandaira had unleashed a deluge. Water had exploded out of previously dry wells with such force that huge boulders were tossed into the air like pebbles. Young people who had never before seen rain or running water were dumbfounded. Their long-suffering parents were delighted.

After the "Flood of Blessings" – the mayor's term for the recent miracle – 45 wells were drilled to tap what hydrologists now say is a substantial water table under Algodao de Jandaira. All now provide potable water.

The once arid and infertile land has been transformed, and is now producing fava beans, papaya, guava, and other crops. At the same time, bees are generating high quality honey, goats are yielding record amounts of milk, and the local river is filled with fish and shrimp. Not only does this bounty provide for the immediate dietary needs of the people, but for the first time ever they are able to sell their overflow to public schools and outside distributors.

Buoyed by these developments, Algodao de Jandaira has seen its population rise to 3,000. The Valentina congregation has planted a church and social center in the community, and holds joint services every other month with a local Assembly of God congregation. Today, a substantial majority of Algodao de

Jandaira's citizens follow Christ as their Lord and Savior. When glory is to be given, it is given to God rather than their former patron saint, Padre Cicero.

The town's 24-year-old mayor – recently selected to head a 29-town mayoral association – is happily serving the Lord along with his staff and a majority of the town councilors. Under his leadership, Algodao de Jandaira has landed multiple federal grants worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. During a recent trip to meet with federal officials, the mayor turned on the TV just in time to hear a preacher declare: "You are to go before government leaders and fight for your people." When he presented his case the following day, Algodao de Jandaira was the only community in the state of Paraiba to win a grant.

Although Algodao de Jandaira has a small police force, the constables have very little to do. It seems that crime has all but vanished in the aftermath of the 2004 "Flood of Blessings." To celebrate this victory – and their other manifold blessings – the town plans to erect a monument to the Lord in the spring of 2008.

In the meantime, local believers are watching The Sentinel Group's *Quickening* video to better understand the principles that animate transforming revival. For while there is no shortage of gratitude for their recent breakthrough, there is also a growing sense of responsibility toward neighboring communities still lost in their sin.