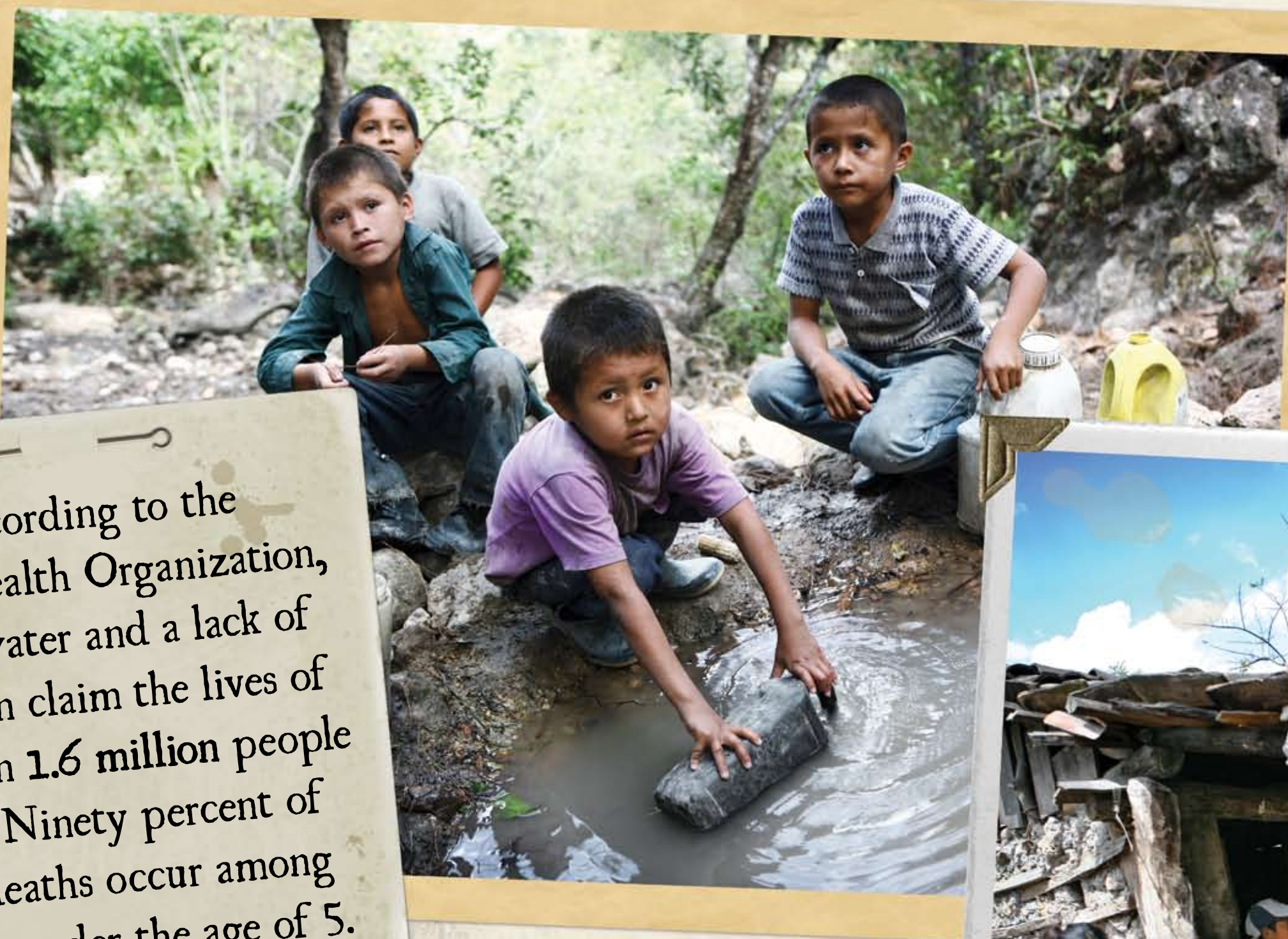


# Thirst for life



According to the World Health Organization, unsafe water and a lack of sanitation claim the lives of more than 1.6 million people a year. Ninety percent of these deaths occur among children under the age of 5.

The wooden cross above their home is a reminder of the Suate family's need for God's protection. Their daughter almost died last year from drinking contaminated water from their only water source... a murky pool.

In the backwoods of Gracias Lempira — one of the poorest areas of Honduras — more than 150 people walk to a nearby reservoir to gather water. Maria Suate's 3-year-old daughter Delmi is one of them.

Every day, Delmi and her brothers use plastic jugs to collect water from the murky pool. Sometimes they drink it. And Maria Suate prays that her daughter won't become seriously ill once again.

Delmi almost died a year ago from worm infestation — a condition caused by drinking contaminated water. The little girl started to salivate after her body became feverish and her joints became stiff. "If God didn't look after her, she would have died," Maria recounts.

Following Delmi's recovery, her father nailed a wooden cross above their hut to symbolize his family's need for protection. Maria

told us, "I ask God to watch over her [Delmi] because she's my only daughter." Every day, Maria frequently prays the Our Father and Hail Mary specifically for Delmi's health.

According to The World Bank, 88 percent of the world's diseases are caused by unsafe drinking water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene. But for those living in developing nations, there are few alternatives. With jugs overhead, poor women and children across Latin America and the Caribbean wake in the middle of the night to trek long distances in search of water to drink, wash and bathe. These grueling searches often lead to unclean water sources.

In addition to causing disease and claiming innocent lives, contaminated water results in skin rashes and parasites among innocent little ones like Delmi. When Maria lifted Delmi's shirt to show us her rashes, she also revealed the little girl's bloated belly filled with parasites. "Nothing gets her happy when she's sick," Maria lamented.

What would you do if your child was dying of thirst, but all you could offer was dirty water to drink? Poverty-stricken families in the countries we serve face this dilemma every day. With no other options, Maria is resigned to gathering the dirty water nearby. "At least we have that," she said.

"Lord, when did we see You... thirsty and give You drink?" (Matthew 25:37b)

No child should have to drink polluted water — not when we can do something to help. In response to the urgent need for safe drinking water and sanitation, Food For The Poor builds water wells, latrines and sanitation blocks throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. But we need your support to bring these precious resources to those in need.

During their church services, the entire community of Gracias Lempira prays for clean water. And back at his home, Delmi's father stands under the cross he built and tells us, "With faith in God, things will get better."

