



A KING FOR GUATEMALA

Indigenous Chorti people of Guatemala watch the "Jesus" film against the wall of a Friends church in Comotan. It was the evening of the celebration for the new president's election night in Guatemala. Chorti people trace their ancestry back to the Mayan Indians.



CC Rancho Cucamonga's Deanna Torres, left, prays with a Chorti woman; continuing left to right is, Darlys Bird, Pastor Jimmy Orate, and his wife Janice Orate.

On a warm December evening, fireworks exploded—celebrating the election of the new president of Guatemala. Nearby a team of short-term missionaries from CC Rancho Cucamonga, CA, prepared to introduce the townspeople to the King of kings.

story and photos by Ed Compean

Through clouds of rancid smoke from the fireworks, locals from the town of Comotan were invited to see the *Jesus* film. Many were Chorti, descendants from the Mayan Indian tribe. A crowd began to gather around the makeshift theater on the side of the church. As if on cue, the distracting firecrackers died down when the movie began. Celebrants stopped to focus on the life of Jesus.

Some squatted for hours to watch the movie that has been shown around the world to share the Gospel message. Others stood, arms folded, as their cowboy hats framed the scene of Jesus crucified on the cross. Occasionally a boisterous group of revelers would wander down the street and stop. By the time the resurrection scene was depicted, 300 people were engrossed in the film.

When the movie ended, CC Rancho Cucamonga's Alex Saldana used a microphone and began sharing the love of Jesus Christ. Quoting from his small Bible, Alex explained that Jesus had come to save lost people from their sins. He asked in Spanish if anyone would like to respond to the invitation to receive Jesus Christ as Savior.

There was no response, just silence from the crowd as an occasional firecracker rang out in the distance. Again Alex explained



Comotan, Guatemala, sits in a fertile valley at the base of a mountain range.

that Jesus, God's Son, came to restore us to God the Father, but still the crowd sat quiet and motionless.

It was soon realized that the shy Chorti people would not be bold enough to respond. The Southern Californian missionaries went into the crowd and began to share their faith with individuals. Most of the crowd prayed to receive their Savior. "That

was incredible, I really didn't know what to do; they were just standing there. But God directed me to a man, and he was very open to hearing and receiving," said Lino Gomez from Rancho Cucamonga. During the celebration for a new president of Guatemala, many people instead chose to celebrate Jesus as their King.



A group of Chorti women curiously watch as short-term missionaries from CC Rancho Cucamonga approach their village.



A Chorti boy peeks through some of the balloon animals, swords, and hats made as part of an outreach in Comotan.



A Chorti boy runs towards his home after winning several prizes and completing different crafts.

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Pastor Jimmy Orate, CC Rancho Cucamonga

Relationship-oriented

Standing among the team on their first morning in Guatemala, CC Rancho Cucamonga’s Senior Pastor Jimmy Orate said, “We really do not know what we will be doing, except what Calvary Chapels are well known for—that is, building relationships with the people.”

Jimmy added that he knew they had plans to reach out to the native people, to offer ministry and various children’s outreaches, and to show the *Jesus* film again. He said that nothing was guaranteed except that the team needed to be led by God’s Spirit. “We have some rough plans, but let’s be open to how God leads,” he said.



CC Rancho Cucamonga’s Deanna Torres, left, and Brian Kusmitch, right, keep the rain off Chorti children during an outreach in the hills above Comotan. An afternoon thunderstorm almost interrupted the outreach. Children went from one station to the next for fun, games, and the Gospel message. Deanna is a dental hygienist, and at her station, she explained proper dental care and gave toothbrushes and floss to the kids.



Phil Castronovo directs Chorti children in some relay races.



After relays and other outreach activities, a group of Guatemalan and Chorti children return back to church with CC Rancho Cucamonga’s (left to right) Brian Kusmitch, Phil Castronovo, and Jimmy Orate.



CC Rancho Cucamonga's Senior Pastor Jimmy Orate uses a small stuffed bear as an evangelism tool to share Jesus with a group of Guatemalan children.

CC Rancho Cucamonga has been involved in Guatemala for several years. Jimmy has led pastors' conferences to help disciple national church leaders. Dave and Darlys Bird, with their two sons, spent one year in Guatemala as missionaries. They introduced CC Rancho Cucamonga to the work in Guatemala.

"I really want to keep our church's focus outward," added Jimmy, despite his congregation's recent move into a larger facility. "I really want the people to be active in the Great Commission and be part of missions." Guatemala is only a portion of the church's outreach efforts. CC Rancho Cucamonga has consistently worked in Mexico, and Jimmy has been part of several pastors' seminars in Chile and other countries.



CC Rancho Cucamonga's Fernando Cambren, left, shares the Gospel with a man who was worried about his sick baby and who needed work in Comotan.

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Pastor Jimmy Orate



During an outreach, Alex Saldana, left, sheds lights on Chorti Christian men as they begin an impromptu worship session before the movie.

Hard Work

Like the physical labor, the spiritual battle in Guatemala is arduous. Over three quarters of the nation live below the poverty line. Only slightly more than half of the country even speaks Spanish. According to several ministry sources, Guatemala has many distinct language groups, several of them without the Scriptures in their native tongue.

After a week of outreaches, a tired group of missionaries headed for their last endeavor before returning to California. Loaded with supplies and team members, the engines of their three pickups strained as they made their way higher into the mountains. The fields were covered in coffee and maize. Every turn presented them with another breathtaking view. Images of men and beasts of burden loaded down with pungent coffee

beans reminded them of the hard life of the Chorti people.

While Guatemala has been heavily evangelized, most professing Christians there do not trust solely in Jesus Christ. Many believe in ancient Mayan pagan beliefs that are incompatible with Christian doctrine. “The Gospel has gone out here,” said Dave Bird, former missionary to Guatemala, “but the

church leaders need discipleship and training to minister to their people.”

Even with the straining trucks, locals jumped onto the bumpers or threw a leg over the truck bed and bounced along for a ride up the mountain. Some came to learn about God; others just wanted an easier journey up the mountain. Guatemalans sometimes view their faith in the same manner.

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Dave Bird



Eva Morales, right, prays with a man and his family in the street in Comotan.



Phil Castronovo high fives some Chorti boys during an outreach.



Deanna Torres plays with a group of Chorti children in their village. The youngsters were fascinated with the Americans.

Pulling into the Chorti village, a game of soccer began between natives and Americans. Others from CC Rancho Cucamonga set up stations for games, face painting, and balloons. Using pictures and drawings, the Gospel was presented to 100 children, many of whom had come with their parents to the outreach.

CC Rancho Cucamonga hopes to build deeper relationships with the Chortis and help establish the area's church. Their desire is to assist a local pastor in planting a permanent work in the village, using the Calvary Chapel style of ministry. ☞



Short-term missionaries from CC Rancho Cucamonga look over land that the church was praying about. There is not a commitment to purchase the land for a ministry center, but they looked at it while they were in Guatemala.

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Diane Patterson, secretary to Pastor Jimmy Orate, enjoys buying placemats and other items for CC Rancho Cucamonga's coffee house.