

Believers in Central Mexico

SHINE FOR CHRIST

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Colonial Querétaro was founded in 1531.

Central Mexico

At the children's burn hospital in Querétaro, Mexico, a huddle of injured children and their parents watched somberly as young men and women dressed as clowns approached. The clowns were students of the nearby Calvary Chapel Horizon School of Evangelism. Covered with scars, some children hid behind their parents while others seemed almost catatonic. After joking gently with the children, the clowns began performing comical skits. God's love seemed to gently descend and permeate the air, bringing light and joy into a place of darkness and suffering.

Comfort in Christ

As the clowns performed, timid children became curious, some coming closer for a better look. One tiny girl who had cried with fright was soon mimicking and dancing along with the clowns. They shared stories about God's love, then invited the children and their parents to join them in games. Parents who had a heaviness about them before were laughing with their children as they tried to eat donuts hanging on strings. Then the clowns shared a humorous skit about the ways people try to get to heaven, and about the one true way—faith in Jesus Christ. After sharing the Gospel with colored paper, they led the children in a prayer to Jesus; all of the children prayed aloud with them, some pressing together bandaged hands with eyes tightly closed.

The final powerful demonstration of grace was brought out: gift boxes with toys and clothes packed especially for each child by age. The clowns explained that salvation is a free gift, which God extends to each of us individually, and we need only take it through faith—believing in Jesus Christ and the forgiveness God offers through His cross—and we will be His children. Clowns distributed the presents and comic-style



After two surgeries with eight more to go, a young burn victim's spirits were lifted.

Gospel tracts. Parents began opening up to the students, sharing with tears their stories and feelings of guilt, grief, and helplessness for their child's injuries. One after another around the room, men and women bowed their heads to accept Christ.

"Several fathers received Jesus as their Savior. Thanks be to God," said Pastor Martin Macedo, head of the School of Evangelism (SOE) and pastor of CC Horizon of Querétaro. After he talked to the teary-eyed staff, administrators invited the school to make regular visits—another door miraculously opened by God, Martin said.

Afterward, students related stories and prayed for the parents and children. One woman had shared with Rosie Lopez that she had left her toddler daughter sleeping on the bed while she went to the store, with a candle burning in the room. She returned



Burdened by guilt and fear for his injured children, a father accepted the Gospel and the forgiveness of Christ. Francisco Lopez, a School of Evangelism student, prays.



Laughter rang through the children's burn hospital in Querétaro as injured children, their siblings, and parents played games at a Gospel outreach.



Nearly a mile long, the city's famous aqueduct was completed in 1735.

to find the house on fire and her daughter with burns all over her body. The doctors told her the girl would die, but the woman said only God could decide that. She had two surgeries with eight more to go. The woman confessed her guilt and frustration, and Rosie shared God's love and forgiveness. Rosie shared her own story of losing her daughter in a fire and later finding comfort and forgiveness in Christ through an outreach at the same burn hospital. Comforted by her testimony, the woman prayed to accept Christ. "This is beautiful; God is so good," said Rosie, who accepted Christ through an SOE team outreach three years ago and now works at the school and travels with the teams. Citing

2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Rosie said smiling, "Now God is using me to comfort others with the same comfort He gave me."

Dozens have graduated from the school since it was started 10 years ago by Pastor Juan Domingo, who pioneered many missionary works in Mexico. Martin added, "It's our prayer that when they leave, students will be able to serve boldly at their local churches and be a strong witness for Jesus Christ." Past graduates have planted churches throughout Mexico. Like the school, many other early missionary works are bearing fruit under Mexican believers.

Teens Reaching Their Peers

Another such example farther southeast is Koinonia de Tehuacán in Puebla. Planted by Pastor Jim and Christa Foote 24 years ago, the fellowship was recently turned over to a national pastor, Carlos Torres. Tribal mountain dwellers live in extreme poverty and practice voodoo. City dwellers are pious and conservative but have no relationship with Christ.

Jim and Christa, now serving in Cuernavaca with their three teenage daughters, were among the first Calvary Chapel missionaries in Mexico. They remarked about the amazing work that



Barely able to press her hands together, a little girl was one of many who earnestly prayed to receive Christ at the burn center.

"Now God is using me to comfort others ..."

Rosie Lopez

the Lord has done amidst the tradition and superstition. "They understand the wrath of God more than most American Christians," Jim said, "but we have been able to share the Good News—that there is reconciliation to God through Christ, and that it is cause for celebration."

Visiting Tehuacán, the Footes joined several teens and adults for a music and dance outreach in the heart of the city. In the bustling pedestrian streets filled with shops and vendors, Christa played keyboard and sang while a man from the church shared the Gospel through chalk drawings. Then teens performed synchronized dances and breakdancing. Dozens of people lined the sidewalks. A shopkeeper named Doris said, "No one ever does skits here. The people here are very [pious] and holy; there are many Mormons here," she said. "I think

this is very good for the young people; there are so many on drugs." After the performance, two of the pastors invited her to church; teenagers passed out Gospel tracts and prayed with several to receive Christ. Many teens in Koinonia are the first—or only—people in their families to have a relationship with Christ.

That night back at the church, the youth chatted excitedly about the response to the outreach. Twin brothers, Israel and Caesar Ortega, 18, were the first in their family to get saved at a similar breakdancing outreach less than two years before. "So now when we dance, we are going to do it for God's purposes, not for ourselves anymore," Israel said. Koinonia often reaches out to the area and has planted two fellowships in the Sierra Negra mountain range, in Campo Chico and Yahualtzingo.



A food vendor pulls her cart through the streets of Tehuacán.



At a busy market in Tehuacán, a woman sells colorful skeins of yarn.



Several teenagers from Koinonia de Tehuacán breakdance at a Gospel outreach downtown. Many of them came to Christ through similar events.

Jim is now senior pastor at Semilla de Mostaza de Cuernavaca (Mustard Seed of Cuernavaca), a fellowship planted five years ago by Hector Hermosillo, who now pastors a Hispanic congregation in Illinois. In those short years, the Cuernavaca fellowship has grown from 13 people to more than 450, Jim said.

“I have seen a lot of miracles here, complete families restored,” said Paco Ramirez Ochoa. “There are only a few churches here where both God’s grace and the Bible are being taught. Most churches are either very legalistic with a dress code and a strict approach to worship, or they are very charismatic with little sound doctrine.”

Mexico City

The second largest city in the world by population, Mexico City is home to nearly 20 million people and covers roughly 3,100 square miles. In the heart of the diverse metropolis, former rap star Fermin IV Caballero pastors Semilla de Mostaza Companerismo Cristiano (Mustard Seed Christian Fellowship). Pastor Fermin was saved in 1999 through the witness of a Christian woman, who later became his wife, and was discipled by Hector. After being assistant pastor, he became pastor in 2005. “It has been amazing since Day 1. My wife and I are on the front row watching God do His work,” he said. “There is a lot of corruption in Mexico City; it’s hard to be a Christian here.” Fermin desires to equip the unique body full of talented actors, artists, and musicians—in-

cluding Maria Del Sol, renowned vocalist and actress in Mexico—eager to use their talents to bring others to Christ.

First, the church built up a strong music ministry, formed a band, and produced a record. “But then everything was focused on the band,” Fermin said. “So we dropped everything, took out the band, and started just going through the Scriptures.” They eagerly shared the Gospel, holding a Festival de Alegria (Festival of Joy) in Garibaldi. Though that area is full of drugs and prostitution, leaders felt God calling them to minister there. Many accepted Christ.

“It’s amazing how the Word touches people’s hearts to grow in the Lord, and how the same Word reaches the heart of the unbeliever,” he said. “For the hour and a half we’re in church, the people have to eat



After the dance, teens pray with those touched by the Gospel.



Lia Foote, left, uses colored nail polish to share the Gospel.



A former rap star with a passion for Christ, Fermin IV Caballero, center, pastors Mustard Seed Christian Fellowship in Mexico City.



Children share Scripture verses at the fellowship in Mexico City.

“The Word of God is for everyone, not just pastors.”

Pastor Fermin IV Caballero

well—very well—so that they can go out well-equipped. So I’m not doing anything more than teaching the Word.”

Believers take classes to learn to observe, interpret, and apply God’s Word. “We’re doing a lot of that, teaching others how to teach the Bible. We have 12 groups with eight of us teaching the inductive Bible study method,” he said. “The Word of God is for everyone, not just pastors. A mother, a housekeeper—God can talk to her through the Bible on an everyday basis.” That approach goes against centuries of religious tradition in the country. Fermin hopes many who are equipped will plant churches in Mexico City and beyond.

Their new online school of ministry teaches inductive Bible study. “We now have 17 students enrolled, most from other parts of Mexico, and a few from other Latin American countries like Argentina,” said Paul Cathey, full-time missionary in Mexico City. “It is refreshing to see an interest in the pure and simple teaching of the Word.” There is no charge for the

program, which is accessible through their website, www.2timoteo22.com.

New Life in Aguascalientes

Another musician-turned-minister, Mario Ceballos became pastor of Capilla Calvario de Aguascalientes in 2005. Once an international performer, he said, “Now we have another mission—to reach more souls for the Lord, to disciple and send them out as missionaries and pastors.” Though less than one percent of the city is born-again, entire families have responded to outreaches and come to Christ, even those once zealously devoted to regional icons like the Virgin of Juquila.

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Hebrews 2:14–15

God has also broken strongholds of death that are centuries old. Aguascalientes has the highest suicide rate in the nation. Whole families have committed suicide there, and residents fervently celebrate the “Day of the Dead” for a week. But Calvary outreaches like the Festival of Life encour-

age people to embrace true life and turn to Jesus. Mario said, “When they encounter Jesus Christ, they realize hope is in Him.”

The relatively small city also leads the nation in divorce and domestic violence, said Chevon Clarke, who seven years ago started a ministry to battered women and families called “Families Without Violence.” She and Mario’s wife, Emma, have worked with more than 200 families and 500 women. Chevon estimates 40 families and 100 women have given their lives to Christ. Many believed spousal abuse was a cross God required them to bear, Emma said, but the Lord has brought healing and hope to their painful, desperate situations.

Men and women are surprised to learn that a deep relationship with God doesn’t require penance, payment, or pilgrimage—that it is a free gift of God’s grace. Such freedom has not led to licentiousness, Emma said, but to “giving more of themselves to God” and laying aside sinful habits.

Sharing Gospel in Guadalajara

Pastor Alfonso Lopez Rodriguez didn’t let having only one leg stop him from traveling nearly 1,200 miles to bring the Gospel to his hometown of Guadalajara six years ago. After accepting Christ under Pastor Chris Martinez’s ministry in Tijuana, Alfonso grew in the Lord for 16 years, learning God’s Word. “After working with Chris for 10 years, I felt a call

to share Christ with my family.” When he did and 22 of them accepted Christ, it was clear God was calling him to plant a church. Though often criticized for worshipping Christ alone, the fellowship has seen hundreds come to Jesus.

Pastor Juan Domingo, who oversees Calvary Chapel and Horizon Christian Fellowship ministries in Mexico, said, “In the midst of a great evil here, we are on guard—in spiritual warfare mode at all times.” Believers cherish fellowship and praying together for their families and cities. He added, “So many people still desperately need Jesus.”

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Ministering in Mexico for 24 years, Jim Foote worships the Lord in Cuernavaca.



Pastor Alfonso Lopez Rodriguez prays with a visitor in Guadalajara.



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