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NEWS

GOSPEL MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

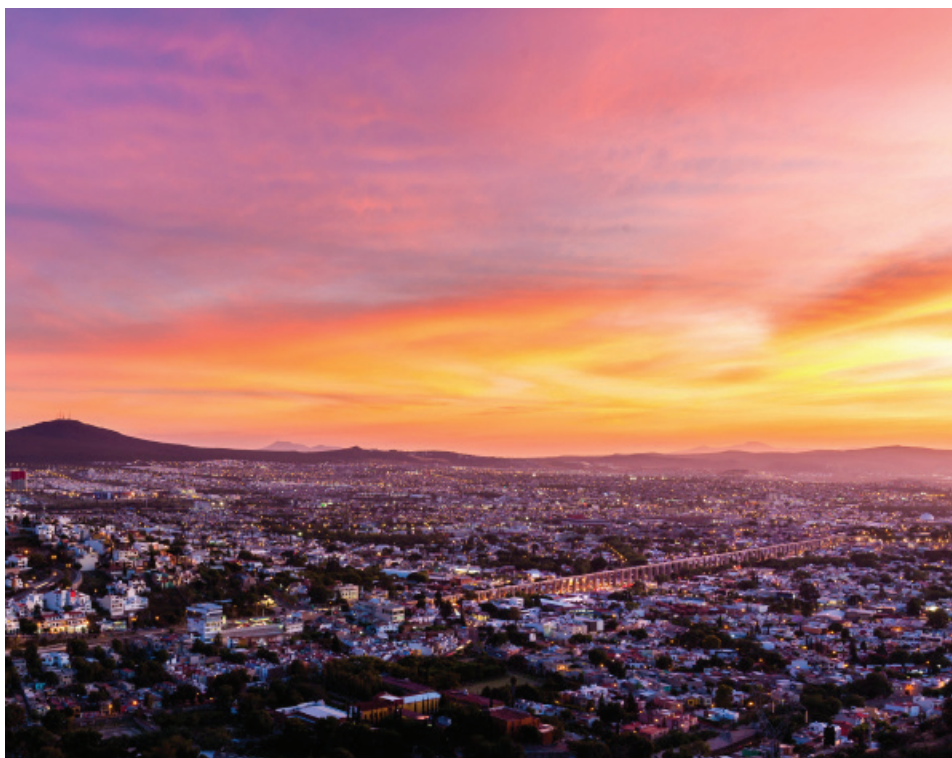
By Tommy Rose
BMA Missionary to Mexico
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We came to Queretaro, Mexico, five years ago to plant a church. We decided to move to the growing metropolis because BMA Mexico does not have a gospel presence in the state of Queretaro. Upon arriving, our family focused on meeting and sharing the gospel with the unchurched. Our first outreach event was planned with a church group visiting us from the United States. We spent the week passing out water bottles and tracts at one of the many parks downtown. We handed out hundreds of water bottles with our church logo and contact information.

These events are admittedly stressful because we weren't able to strike up a conversation with every person who received a water bottle. We began to ask ourselves a series of questions: Will anyone even read or look up the information? Will anyone contact the church? Will anyone visit the church? Is what we're doing making any difference at all?

It was five years after passing out those water bottles that God reminded us he has it all in control.

Isaac had received a water bottle that day in the park, and he took it home and placed it in his apartment. That water bottle became buried among the clutter of life and practically lost all visual contact with the known world. However, in God's perfect timing the information on the bottle resurfaced, and Isaac sent us a message through Facebook. He explained he had been facing some difficult situations when the water bottle appeared again after five years. It is difficult to put into words and to wrap our heads around the events that lead us to God's perfect plan. Recognizing the hand of God in our lives and his guidance is a blessing of immense proportions. The circumstances that Isaac was experiencing had led him to us and opened his eyes to a need only God could meet. Our church, El Arco, had the



privilege of directing him to God's Word and the good news of the gospel.

We met downtown at a coffee shop where he explained the despair he was feeling and the need for hope and a new purpose. I pray that more people would come to this realization. I know it may hurt to go through difficult situations, but when they take us to a point of crisis it can be a beautiful revelation. Sadly, the opposite is more likely true. People are more likely to find solutions waiting for them in empty words of comfort. The majority of people really do find bliss in their ignorance. That is why it is so beautiful to experience the moment someone realizes they can do nothing without Jesus.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Isaac came to our new believers Bible study and placed his trust in Christ as his Lord and Savior. He commented that he had sought the counsel of many professionals and pastors of churches, but he had never had the gospel explained as he had heard in our Bible study. I honestly don't know how the gospel may have been presented to him before we met, but we pray that God continues to use us to proclaim a clear and powerful gospel. We pray that the people God has placed in our lives would yearn for purpose and truth and find Jesus. Maybe it will be today or tomorrow or five years from now, but as we faithfully serve, we will undoubtedly experience marvelous testimonies like Isaac's. We can't wait to hear your stories

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DELIVERING CHRISTMAS SHOEBOXES, RECEIVING A LASTING BLESSING

By Lydia Dunlap
Freshman at
Central Baptist College

Ever since I was five years old I've been called to be a foreign missionary. In fact, before I was even saved, I was telling people that's what I wanted to be when I grew up. This past December, I went to El Salvador to pass out Everlasting Smiles shoeboxes. We left about two weeks before Christmas, and I left America thinking of all the things still left to be done: presents to buy, the family Christmas calendar, and all the other things for the busiest time of year. When I stepped off the plane in El Salvador, I had no idea how different I would be when I boarded the plane back to America.

I had often heard the stories that began with, "This mission trip changed my life..." or "I'll never view America the same way again..." but that wasn't my experience. Our group of twelve consisted of six ladies, a young married couple, a security consultant, and three teenagers. It was the most unlikely bunch you've ever seen. You see, before this trip

I had only done VSM trips, so I had only been on trips with kids my age.

It's an understatement to say I was worried about the dynamics of this team when we were first introduced. Along with that, I had never been out of the country. I was used to having Oreos right down the road at Walmart when I needed them, and for a picky eater like me, that was essential. This trip was looking like something I had never known before, and I'm the kind of person who loves to take adventures...once I've carefully scheduled them.

Every day our team hopped in a van and drove to our destination. We visited churches and villages across El Salvador, ranging from a thirty-minute drive to almost three hours. The first place we went was my favorite. I still close my eyes and dream of being there. We parked the van and walked up a little dirt road filled with large black rocks that I later found out were from the volcanoes that had erupted. As we walked along the road, we eventually came to a clearing, and all of the sudden there were hundreds of children. How unexpected! Just a moment before, I only saw the beautiful scenery of El Salvador, but suddenly my sight was flooded with children with large eyes, holding on to our every move.

As we moved closer into the clearing, our team gathered together, but I felt like I was on a stage. When I turned my head, people were taking pictures of us and little kids were inching closer. They came in their nicest clothes—dresses and fancy shirts—yet I could see how little they had. It didn't take long before I had moms asking me for a "pho-to" (the only English they knew) then passing their babies into my hands. How humbling to be trusted so blindly.

The gospel message was given, and we began passing out shoeboxes. These kids had come from everywhere by car and on foot. They had waited for us to arrive, all for shoeboxes that many American kids wouldn't even like as a gift. We stayed there long after most kids had left, and I couldn't help but be in awe of what I had just witnessed. God has never been louder in my calling to missions. I tear up just writing this and feeling the certainty of my future as a missionary.

The next village was where we passed out shoeboxes, and some people from our group came across a little girl with a jump rope. They told her to play with it, but it was evident she didn't know how. They called me over to show her, and she watched with amazement as we all took turns showing her how to jump rope. I remember her laugh as she first started jump roping then saw her mom walk up behind her. Her mom couldn't have been much older than me, but she didn't know how to jump rope either. So we taught her, too. Eventually Pastor Rigoberto got a long rope from his truck, and we started inviting everyone to join in.

I was on the end swinging one side of the jump rope, and the mother of the girl was on the other side. I looked over and it was like seeing myself in a mirror. But how different were we? Two young women, so different but so equally loved by Christ. Our arms eventually grew tired, but the joy of everyone jump roping was greater. This was the unity that I longed for in America.

These experiences changed me. Not in the way I had always heard it described but in the way that the Lord changes you through something you've prayed over. Something you've longed for. If the Lord has ever given you the desires of your heart, you know what I'm talking about. The peace of resting in God's plan for my life was peace like I've never felt. Joy that I've never known.

When I came back to America, it was just as busy as I had left it. People were rushing to do last minute Christmas shopping, and my family was wondering about my trip. But I sat there just thinking of the week, knowing I could never fully express what I experienced. Longing to be back with my new friends and dreaming only of when I could return. God had put in my heart from the beginning that this was his purpose for me, but getting to live it is a blessing I can never comprehend.



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THE LABORERS ARE FEW IN SOUTH AMERICA

By Holly Meriweather
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In Matthew 9:35, the Lord is talking to his disciples and saying basically, “Look at the harvest. The laborers are few.” Although most of us would not believe it, South America has few laborers and few healthy churches.

Here are the statistics for this region, country by country:

In Argentina, the only BMA presence is one church that was planted by BMA Bolivia; however, it is not a healthy one. According to ministry workers, with the exception of the one BMA Bolivia church plant, Argentinian churches are not true Baptists; they are charismatic.

In Chile there is a church planting movement taking place, but only in Santiago, the capital, and there is no presence outside the capital. Pastors involved with the good work going on there have a vision to plant a church in each of the municipalities of Santiago before they concentrate on another area. So, BMA presence is centered on one city of over five million people.

In Uruguay, there is one BMA church in the entire country with no leaders planting more churches.

In Peru, three states out of 24 have a BMA presence. But in the south part of the country, there is no evangelical presence, and when you travel from village to village in the area, there's not even a Catholic chapel. In the 1980s a terrorist group had control of the southern region, likely causing the complete lack of evangelical, biblical presence, including Catholicism.

In Colombia, BMA presence is in its infancy. A ChangeMaker from Mexico has just started his ministry in the jungle between Venezuela and Colombia. With 40 recent professions of faith, leaders have started a Bible institute there, but they have only begun to scratch the surface in Colombia.

In Ecuador there is a brand new church plant, and forward movement is happening.

Again there is a mindset that South America is reached with the gospel, but that's not true. If you look at pure demographics of the entire region, it is more likely that only two percent of the population has heard the truth, but those are in pockets. Entire sections of the country are unreached.

Our leaders in South America are working tirelessly to reach people and plant churches, but these few leaders can only do so much. They need help.

So what do we do?

Become involved in mobilization.

First, plead with the Lord of the Harvest that he will send leaders. Pray that he will send people and raise up workers from among those countries. Americans need to understand that their role is not just funding missionaries but also sending missionaries.

Next, give financially to help our ChangeMakers who work within their own people groups to build relationships, share the gospel, make disciples, and plant churches. In fact, a leader in Venezuela is asking for help with Bibles and other materials.

Finally, one very important way to be involved in mobilization is to take a short term trip through VSM or BMML. Johnmichael Poulin, regional coordinator for South America and Africa, has funds set aside for any pastor to go on a trip with him, but only two pastors have taken him up on that offer so far.

Many career missionaries have been called to full-time ministry because of short term trips. Just one of many examples is Gavin and Chase Roberts, who went on trips to Peru growing up. Their experience led them to plant a church in Utah. God used their short-term trips to draw them into full-time church planting ministry.

Johnmichael himself became involved in long-term missions because of short-term missions experience: “In 1994 I took my first trip to Bolivia when I was a senior in high school then returned in 1995. Missionary to Bolivia Jimmy Swindoll was sent out of Calvary Baptist Church at Horn Lake and invited me to come spend a year with him, so I

left on Christmas Day of 1996.

“God began working on my heart during those twelve months about full-time ministry, and my pastor, Dr. Kevin Clayton said, ‘If God's calling you into ministry, nothing else will make you happy.’ I ended up coming home after that year and worked a non-ministry job and had a successful career making good money, but I was unhappy. So I went to seminary, and a month into it, I was called to pastor a church for five years in Munford, Tennessee. But finally, my family and I became missionaries to Peru and spent ten years serving the people there.”

South America is ripe for harvest, but the laborers there are few. Who will go? Who will help?





GROWING THE GARIFUNA CHURCH

By Heather Harrison
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When God prepares a man for mission work and then reroutes that mission work, it might look like his plans have been compromised, but because we trust a sovereign God, we know his plans cannot be thwarted. David Dickson knows this well. As a missionary living in Honduras in 1980, after being forced out of Nicaragua, David and his family were spending a day on the beach when he heard two young boys playing and speaking a language he didn't recognize. After discovering what their language was and who this people group was, he began the journey of learning their language and sharing Jesus with them. And thus, the providential hand of God began the ministry to the Garifuna people, who descended from the Afro-indigenous people from the Caribbean and were exiled to Honduras in the 18th century. Because of God's superintending of the lives and details of Dickson and others, Lifeworld was privileged to be the first to produce gospel content in their language. Currently, Lifeworld and our partners are producing multiple types of programs and planting churches around the world.

Ricardo Herrera Ramirez produces several video programs for the Garifunas in Honduras and other areas. Among the programs are *Grandfather's Advice*, *Fisherman*, *Garifuna to Garifuna*, and *Round Table*. He and his team also manage several community radios and translate multiple videos and blog articles from the Spanish and English sites into Garifuna to post on the Garifuna website. The Garifuna women also lead programs for the community radios.

As several of the Garifuna people have migrated to the United States and other countries, they are now reaching their people in areas like New York, Houston, and Wilmington, NC. In April of this year, the Garifuna church in the Bronx is celebrating its second anniversary. Cherry Gamboa, who was a pastor in Honduras and Lifeworld speaker, immigrated with his family to the US and started this church in New York. Seeing several come to know Jesus Christ, God has grown their congregation. They have had struggles as well: between rising rental costs, the growing congregation, and simply being asked to leave, finding a place to gather with their growing congregation has not been easy. They are currently seeking their fourth building. Another challenge has been the unique struggle of serving a trilingual congregation as they seek to conduct the service in the three languages spoken by the members, English, Spanish, and Garifuna. In Wilmington, there are already several Garifuna people willing and ready to help with a church plant. Marvin Miguel, a Honduran pastor, is moving to North Carolina soon. In Houston, Henry Norales, who was trained in media by a Lifeworld team, is working on the preliminary work necessary in planting the Garifuna church there.

God's providential hand has been clearly seen throughout the years of the gospel work among the Garifuna people. As he has positioned Lifeworld to equip these believers to use media, they have shared Christ with their people around the world. Join us in praising God for his work!

