



MENNONITE *Air* MISSIONS

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History of the Mennonite Church in Oratorio

Oratorio is located on the road to El Salvador, 78 kilometers southeast of Guatemala City, the capital.

The need to begin a mission work there was seen after a family had returned there from El Chal, where the mother, Josefa, had been a church member. She desired spiritual fellowship, and several others also showed interest in the church.

When the work began in Oratorio, services were held in homes every two weeks. There was much interest in these early meetings, and attendance grew quickly. Rigoberto Portillo and Earl Barnhart were both quite involved as the work began, and both led out at different times.

A house was rented and used for a place of worship, and someone traveled in from another church to hold services. In November 1980, Brother Earl and Het-tie Barnhart came to live in El Molino (a village about five minutes away from Oratorio). They helped with

services in Oratorio on Sundays and in La Pastoria on Wednesdays.

In June of 1981, the Barnhart family left Guatemala, and Brother Douglas and Anna Hodgins came to help with the work. They stayed until all the missionary families left Guatemala in September of 1981 after John Troyer's death in Palamá.

As the years went on, so many left the church that the work was temporarily suspended. At the same time, the work in the nearby village of La Pastoria was experiencing a time of growth, and there were many members there.

In December of 1989, the mission sent Isaías Muñoz and his wife to be a leader in the work in La Pastoria, where they lived for five years. In 1994, they moved down to the village of Oratorio with the intent of holding services again and encouraging the church ladies

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The congregation of Rios de Agua Viva.



EDITORIAL

Urie Sharp

A Handful of Corn Upon the Mountains

By the providence and grace of God extended to me, I am the last charter member of the Menonite Air Mission Board, which began in 1972. Actually, I was a member of the first conservative mission board to begin work in Guatemala; the first outreach was in Chimaltenango in 1964, if I remember correctly.

I think about all the seed that has been sown through the years. Picture the poor native farmer on the steep mountain hillsides, working the soil with his large hoe, planting corn, working hard with sweat on his brow, hoping for rain, hoping for a good crop. But think about all the faithful Christians who have sown the seed of the Word of God in the various mission stations through the years.

Do you remember the Biblical promise that MAM has claimed as a theme? *"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"* (Psalm 126:5, 6). The sowing of seed throughout all these years has included pain, suffering, and tears for both the native Christians and the missionaries. Today, we need to see beyond the present distress, the seeming lack of response, and the falling of seed on seemingly hard ground.

Are we told anywhere in Scripture to count the sheaves, to tally our success by how many souls are in the church? No. All that is required is the faithful sowing of the seed. But how can we be assured of a successful harvest of souls? What is our responsibility as seed sowers?

Perhaps you know about the two farmers

who both sowed good seed on equally good soil, but one farmer's crops were far superior to the other's. The second farmer asked his neighbor his secret. The first farmer replied, "You must steep the seed." The neighbor wanted to know how to steep the seed. "You must steep the seed with prayer." And that, my friend, is how we must sow the seed of the Gospel. As we witness, as we sow the seed of the Word, we must do it with much prayer.

The story is also told of two equally faithful missionaries: one had an abundant harvest of souls, and the other had little. Another missionary home on furlough wondered about the difference. He knew the answer when he heard the testimony of a faithful home prayer warrior who said, "When I hear of a specific need or prayer request, I take it and make it a specific matter of prayer until I have a sense of peace or hear of the answer to that specific need." Thus, the home church has great responsibility.

How many times I have flown with Harold Kauffman in the mission plane! I cannot help but remember the many trails over the mountains and corn fields scattered over every steep mountain and hillside. And then the Scripture comes to mind: *"There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon . . ."* (Psalm 72:16).

Now imagine, if you can, all the Gospel seed that has been sown since 1972, much of it with tears. In due time there will be a rejoicing and a harvest. Let us be faithful in steeping the seed as it is sown. Surely, God will bring the increase.

History of the Mennonite Church in Oratorio . . . continued

with teaching and different activities.

The mission again rented a place to continue holding services. Several members from La Pastoría moved down to Oratorio due to the difficult situation there at the time.

In 1998, the first young single missionary moved to Oratorio. David Horst was one of those who got along well with the people from town, and he especially worked with youth and children. After him other young missionaries came to help with the work, including Matthew Barnhart, son of Earl and Hettie Barnhart.

For a time the church grew in number and had a fervent revival. The church school had a powerful influence in non-Christian homes. Soon the mission acquired land just outside the town, and the church decided to call itself "Rios de Agua Viva" (rivers of living water).

In the last ten years the church suffered many trials, and several complete families have left the church. The work still continues under Isaías' leadership and with the help of other missionaries who come to help in the work. There are currently thirteen active members, three youth in instruction class, and various families who attend regularly.

One discouragement has been the lack of spiritual interest of young people who are children of church members. Another discouragement has been the lack of interest of several regular attendants in becoming members.

The church feels greatly supported by each missionary who has come. They have been an encouragement for the young people, have worked with children in the villages, and are a great help for the brothers in the various activities of the church. They have left a good testimony for both the brotherhood and those outside the church.

Arlin Muñoz

Rosa Castillo Romero de Portillo

Rosa, the faithful wife of Rigoberto Portillo, went to be with the Lord on April 19. Rigoberto has been a faithful preacher of the Gospel for nearly forty years, and together they traveled all over Guatemala.

Rigoberto accepted Christ as his Saviour on the 15th of February 1976; his wife Rosa followed his example seven days later. They have worked together in many of the churches in Guatemala, and she has always faithfully and willingly followed the Lord's leading as He led them to move from place to place.

Rigoberto was ordained deacon in Rosa's hometown of La Sorpresa. After serving there, they lived a short time in Oratorio, then moved to Novillero,

in the Quiché region, for two years. In 1983 they moved to the south, living in Pasaco for nearly four years before returning again to the Quiché region to serve for the next eighteen years. In this area they both learned the native dialect of Quiché and could communicate quite well with it. The longest period that they lived in one place in this region was in Mixcolojá, where they lived nearly ten years before moving to Nahualá and then back to Novillero. In 2005 they moved back to La Sorpresa, where they served the Lord together until the day of Rosa's death. Though in the later years of her life she struggled with her health, she was always a very cheerful, friendly sister.

Personnel

Steve and Kara Miller arrived in mid-June to serve the Lord in southern Guatemala. They spent a few weeks in Spanish school and were glad for all of the words they had learned before they came! They come to us from Halsey, Oregon, and were part of the Harrisburg Mennonite Church.



Steve and Kara Miller

Personnel . . . continued



Aaron King

Another new VS fellow arrived the very first day of July. Aaron King, from Allensville, Pennsylvania, is planning to begin his two and a half years of service at mission headquarters in Guatemala City, working beside Larry Martin. His experience in small engine repair will come in handy as he works on various maintenance projects.

Wendell and Jenny

There was plenty of space in the soccer field for those invited to witness God's work of taking two and making one. A large tent was set up for the reception, and five hundred chairs were rented to seat the guests. With rainy season well begun, it was a blessing that there were no showers to make the happy day a soggy one as well.

Jenny is the daughter of the national bishop Isaías Muñoz.

Wendell served with MAM for nearly six years, living in Guatemala City, Santa Rosita, and finally in Oratorio, where Jenny's house was only about three minutes up the road.

They plan to live in La Pastoria, where Wendell can continue his work with the tiny church there.



Wendell Diem and Jenny Muñoz were married on June 3, 2016.

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