



“The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.”
Lamentations 3:22

July 1, 2023

Dear Ministry Partner,

I am *invigorated* by what I’ve just experienced!

Of course, because our ministry together spans the globe, you might expect me to bring you a report from some far-flung corner of the world. But no, I’ve just come back from the foreign nation that lies closest to our ministry headquarters: Mexico.

What I saw—as we recorded video evidence of how God is using your generosity to transform lives—was nothing short of *thrilling*!

And, in some ways, it was deeply disturbing. . . .

The church planters at work in many regions of Mexico live under the constant surveillance of various drug cartels that essentially operate as the local government. And a brutal government it is.

Yet we know, as Jesus declared in Matthew 16:18, “the gates of hell shall not prevail”!

As we partnered with the Mexican Theological Seminary in Lomas Verdes, Mexico City, we planted a “first round” of 25 churches. In the pandemic and post-pandemic era, another group of 20 students has been planting some 25 more in communities all across the country.

→ But these are not “ordinary” church-planting stories. *These are churches being planted in the face of almost unimaginable dangers.*

We started our journey driving six hours to the State of Veracruz. The name means “by the side of the cross,” but that’s where the warm wishes stop. The town we visited, Zempoala, is only 15 minutes away from the state capital, the much larger city of Xalapa—yet there’s a very different culture here. . . .

Drugs and alcoholism are at the top of a long list of vices. Promiscuity is rampant. One growing trend is for girls as young as 15 becoming single mothers. Violence is tragically commonplace both in the streets and in homes.

Against such a backdrop of spiritual darkness, a church is being planted . . . but among both the workers and those to whom they’re ministering, the recurring theme is “emotional pain.” The people are suffering—and their leaders empathize.

Yet they take comfort in knowing that they are instruments in the hands of God to reach people like themselves!



- At the heart of the testimony of one worker was his conviction that he can see himself in the lives of those he reaches out to because *he was rescued* from very similar circumstances.
- A young woman on the team mentioned the same feelings. Their hearts overflow with gratitude that God reached them—and that now He is reaching others through them.

We interviewed half a dozen workers, including the two seminary students leading the church-planting effort. Pastor Max and his wife have felt deep pain in confronting so many broken lives and broken homes in this community . . . depths of agony they never experienced or even encountered before.

As I witnessed this work of compassion, my mind somersaulted back to my own days in seminary, 40 or more years ago, as a friend and I went door-to-door in Dallas inviting people to church. I saw cockroach-infested apartments. We were sometimes interrupted by the high-pitched screams of rats as they fought.

When I learned of a family in need of counsel in the Dallas area, I brought along a pastor, an Anglo who had served for 30 years as a missionary in Latin America. When he saw the sleeping conditions of this family, he was horrified. After our visit, he took me directly to his own home—barely ten minutes away—to collect a mattress and deliver it to the family.

He was coming face-to-face with another culture, another world . . . a shocking level of squalor and pain beyond anything he had known in Latin America—right at his doorstep.

In our ministry in Mexico, we’re seeing a similar phenomenon. Some seminary students are planting churches in places far from their own home region. They’re discovering that Mexico is a vast, diverse nation, with unique subcultures. “You can take the boy out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the boy.” Our students inevitably bring along their own acquired behaviors and tastes and find they must adapt.

Which means they need our prayer support every day. . . prayers for wisdom . . . for insight . . . and for grace to span the cultural chasms. They need grace to communicate lovingly and clearly and faithfully with the people they’ve been called to reach . . . prayers for stamina too!

And they need prayers for safety. **I am stunned to see the courage of these young, deeply dedicated workers in some of the most dangerous places in our hemisphere. . . .**

→ I met a warm, friendly, passionate young man I’ll call Mario. A born leader, he teaches at the seminary and serves as a pastor as well as a coach for church planters. He and his wife have two teenagers.

A few years ago, in a region in the heartlands of Mexico, Mario began working with a group of people who quickly received the teaching of the Word and established a thriving church. They rejoiced in their newly found strength in the Lord. They were thrilled to experience new life!

Their joy, however, was a threat to the local strongman. Mario had never done anything to challenge the leader’s power and influence, but the Gospel was the strongman’s weakness. He sensed that the Good News meant people wouldn’t need to fear him anymore.



So he paid two hitmen to murder Mario, as well as his wife and children.

But God had masterminded this scenario. *Mario had met and shared the Gospel with these two men. They couldn't refuse the strongman's order—but they couldn't possibly cut down their friend and his family.*

Their only option was to vanish—to leave town and never return!

But they urged Mario to do whatever it took to stay safe . . . because there was no question that others would be willing to do the job.

Mario consulted with the church's elders, and they urged him to take his family to safety in another town. End of story? No way! Mario quickly planted a church in his new hometown!

But the family had not fled far enough. The strongman still stalked him. Soon they were packing up for a third location . . . and soon there was a third church, thank you very much!

It was the Book of Acts all over again, Paul leaving behind an organized group of believers in one town, moving on to another town to start another church. ***Thanks to the motivation provided by a murderous strongman, Mario planted five churches in the region!***

In a ghastly but fitting twist, the strongman was the first to die, cut down by a rival cartel. His wife and their son were killed too. His right-hand man assumed power. With the grace of Jesus, Mario went straight to the new leader to make peace.

"I don't believe in skinning my knees before a God I do not know," the new strongman sneered. "What we need is the shedding of blood to make a strong statement so the population will be submissive and we can get things done!"

But before long, the new strongman was also slain, along with his family.

Finally, a relative calm has settled over the region. The churches Mario planted are thriving! People are joyously walking with God!

And God continues to make known His presence, provision, and protection. Mario coaches a pastor I'll call Antonio, who serves in another cartel-dominated region. Antonio, his wife, and their two teenage children live in a room in their rented church facility, which stands on a road commonly used for trucking drugs.

Just weeks ago, gangsters in pickup trucks suddenly blocked the family's vehicle, both in front and behind, and approached with guns leveled at their heads. But when they peered in and found only two children in the backseat, they left without saying a word.

"We had committed ourselves to hold onto the Lord's hand," Antonio's wife recalls, "and we decided to cling to Him and go forward."

"God gave us **John 15:16**," Antonio declares boldly: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit . . ." He is living in the power of the realization that *this plan did not start with people . . . it started with God Himself! He is the One who wants Antonio's family to be there—and not just to be there, but to be producing fruit!*



And not just any fruit . . . but “fruit that remains!” Antonio’s conviction is simple yet powerful: *They must remain in order to produce fruit that remains!*

→ **This is the astonishing work of the Lord to which you and I are privileged to be called . . . and this is the work which I pray you’ll support again today with a generous gift of love.**

For every church planter I met on this trip, there are many more I couldn’t meet. The workers in Mexico are spread out across the entire vast expanse of the country. Many are engaging in most or all of their studies via Zoom. (Antonio is working in an area so remote, they need an antenna to make the connection!)

But please understand this: having workers spread across Mexico doesn’t mean we are already reaching the entire country. We have 20 couples in ministry right now—but our prayer goal is to equip and send 320 . . . for at least 10 mission-strong churches in each of Mexico’s 32 states! *So we need your generous gift of Christ-like compassion today.*

Mexico is our neighbor. Jesus identifies, in His parable of the Good Samaritan, the neighbor to the needy: It’s “the one who showed mercy.” Then Jesus speaks to you and me: “Go and do the same.”

Let’s go. I believe we in America have unfinished business in Mexico, and our failure to show mercy to the hurting souls of our neighbor-nation is hurting the soul of the United States as well. *Whatever you give today will be a blessing . . . just as a child’s meager offering of loaves and fishes fed thousands.*

God is just asking us to do our part in faith. He will do the rest. He is demonstrating day by day what He can do as we answer the call and give according to His blessing in our lives. Please let me hear from you quickly. Thank you! God bless you!

Rejoicing in the Harvest,



Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. My mother-in-law at 98, is an inspiration. Empowered by the Word, full of the Spirit, she insists that she is still equipped to address three daily responsibilities: *Get up. Dress up. Show up.* And she does! What are you and I equipped to achieve at this moment in our lives? Each of us is called to do whatever we can, as the Lord has entrusted resources to us. Pray about it, my dear friend, and give as you are led!



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