



NON-LOCATION

ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN



Haitian refugee finds construction work in Tijuana

Mexican Baptists Respond Compassionately to a Humanitarian Crisis

by Mark Staples

Imagine what it would be like if hundreds of displaced people appeared on the doorstep of your church *today*, desperately in need of food and shelter. What would you do?

Six Baptist congregations in Tijuana, Mexico, found themselves in the midst of just such a situation in October 2016. Despite their limited means, they have been responding to the crisis with generosity and compassion ever since.

“We began to see a large number of refugees, 95 percent of them Haitians, showing up near the border, hoping to cross into the U.S. because they have relatives there,” explains the Rev. Dr. Tim Long, International Ministries (IM) missionary in Mexico. “Our churches saw the refugees filling the streets and decided to offer food and shelter.”

Tim says that this would have been unimaginable 10 years ago. “Once,

these congregations were focused inward. Now they see themselves as a blessing to their community and to other nations. They don’t have much to give, but they give sacrificially.”

“We are all under one God,” a church leader says. “We need to not be selfish, but the opposite—to practice love—and now is the time to do it.”

An estimated 7,000 refugees had flooded into Tijuana by January 2017,

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A MESSAGE FROM
SHARON KOH

Dear Friends,

As 2017 unfolds, I can't help but linger on God's blessings of last year. God's hand upon our global servants, international partners, courageous volunteers and faithful home staff has been evident.

In this newsletter, you will read of how the groundbreaking work of International Ministries medical missionary Laura Parajón is transforming rural villages (pages 6–7). You will also read about Mexican Baptists living out their faith in the midst of a present-day refugee crisis (front cover and pages 4–5). We are thrilled that our family is growing, as passionate servant leaders like Valerie and Aaron Osterbrock prepare for life as missionaries (page 3). And we are so grateful for faithful friends like Ken and Irene Campbell, whose gift of stock will help to fortify the work of our global servants (back cover).

Last year, we were also blown away by your response to the first ever *I am IM* World Mission Offering gift match. When we asked for your help, you surprised us by giving \$212,000—more than twice what we had hoped for!

World Mission Offering funds are used to care for and support our current global servants and to recruit and train the next generation of missionaries. This is something that I am very passionate about. The future of our mission relies on the next generation—and at IM, we are focused on eternity!

Each time we witness the sacred event of a response to God's missionary call on a life, it challenges me to be found faithful to God's call on my own life. My experiences as a missionary kid and mission pastor taught me that participating in God's mission requires sacrifice and faithfulness in the thankless tasks. Oftentimes, like Moses, we find ourselves in front of a burning bush,

pleading with God to send someone more eloquent and better qualified than we are. To that, God simply replies, "I will be with you." (Exodus 3:12) Indeed, God has been with us!

If God's Spirit might be tugging at your heart about the possibility of career missionary work, please join us at Hear the Call in August 2017. (See the back cover for more information.) I will be the main speaker at the conference, which is designed to help those who are discerning the possibility that God might be calling them to cross-cultural mission work.

The growing support of our friends is the only way that IM can continue to undergird the work of our global servants and partners. Thank you for remaining responsive and for always listening to God's leading.

By God's grace,



Sharon Koh
Executive Director /
CEO



Meet the Osterbrocks, Future Global Servants in Malaysia

by Mark Staples



Even before Valerie Ting and Aaron Osterbrock met at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, they concluded that the Lord was calling them to serve as theological educators in a developing context.

The newly endorsed couple will soon set off to Malaysia to teach pastors at Sabah Theological Seminary, a multinational, multid denominational school whose over 400 students are citizens of countries where Christianity is growing rapidly, often in the face of government opposition or persecution.

Valerie was born in Boston but grew up in Singapore and Australia. “I’m a cultural mongrel,” she says. “I trained as a high school and middle school English and humanities teacher. I had also read biographies of missionaries, and I was eager to respond to God’s call wherever.”

The first “wherever” was Kyrgyzstan, a nation of the former Soviet Union, where Valerie served for two years as the head of the English department at a missionary school.

During this time, Valerie says, “I realized that God was calling me to long-term cross-cultural missionary

service”—despite a violent uprising in 2010. “I lived a couple of blocks from the heart of Bishkek [the capital of Kyrgyzstan], where protests and shooting went on, and I could hear everything from my apartment.”

Ironically, Valerie says, “my Kyrgyzstan experience made me *less* worried about the unknown! God is



sovereign over the world and life’s events. God will provide.”

Aaron grew up in Ohio. “The Lord stirred my heart to serve,” he recalls, “but I didn’t know what that would look like.” He participated in mission trips to Africa and Thailand, and by the time he arrived at seminary, he

knew that his long-term goal was to be a missionary.

It was also at seminary that Aaron met Valerie. “Guy meets girl in seminary lunch line; guy likes girl while girl firmly stiff-arms guy,” Aaron explains. But after six months, Valerie conceded the point. The couple was married in December 2012.

Shortly after that, Aaron and Valerie spent a semester teaching at Central Africa Bible College in Malawi. They each graduated with a Master of Divinity degree and went on to earn a Master of Theology degree as well.

Aaron and Valerie are now active members of First Baptist Church in Hamilton, where Aaron serves as an associate pastor. They live in Ohio with their 17-month-old son Theophilus, and there is another child on the way.

“Our experiences have helped us to see how big the Lord is and how vast is the kingdom that grew up to the size of a mountain and filled the whole earth in Daniel 2,” Aaron says. “It is a kingdom growing at the rate of 174,000 new believers each day. The need for more theological educators has never been greater.”



Mexican Baptists Respond Compassionately

(continued from page 1)

with more reported to be on the way. Six Baptist congregations had been able to shelter 510 men, women and children, and an additional 60 churches had created a network of support.

“One day, someone just showed up with eggs, rice and beans,” Tim says. “It is amazing to see the outreach, love and spirit. They are constantly engaged in acts of mercy.”

Sheltering arrangements are modest. The refugees cook on gas stoves and use limited bathroom facilities. They sleep on mattresses on the floor and eat and play in cramped areas, enjoying fellowship with church members.

This refugee crisis has its roots in the 2010 Haiti earthquake in Haiti, which displaced some 1.5 million people. Many moved to Brazil to get jobs as construction workers for last summer’s Olympic Games. But after the Olympics were over, the jobs dried up.

Traveling north in caravans, the newly unemployed workers and their families endured sickness and injuries, robberies and shootings. Those who survived the trip arrived at the Mexican border crossing at Chiapas, where they purchased transient visas and began to make their way to the U.S. border.

Prior to an immigration ban introduced in late January, 40 Haitians were allowed to enter the U.S. each day through the border at Tijuana for detention and vetting to determine whether they would be deported or allowed to stay for a set time.

Long reports that, since the ban, “No one seems to know how many are being allowed into the States. Many of our Haitian guests are now refusing to go to the border for their appoint-

ments. It is beginning to cause a dynamic, especially for the Mexican government, which is ill-prepared for thousands of asylum-seekers.”

Two leaders of the Haitian Alliance in the New Jersey Region (ABCNJ) of American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA), Minister Junia Nicolas and the Rev. Dieudonne Merinvil, recently spent six days in the Tijuana church shelters leading Bible studies, offering counseling and helping to meet refugees’ needs.

“Junia and Dieudonne spoke with hundreds of people, listening to their stories and trials,” says Dr. Lee Spitzer, executive minister of the ABCNJ. They not only shared the good news of Jesus, but they also distributed much needed aid to individuals, families and the Mexican Baptist churches serving them. We’re so grateful to the churches that helped to fund this partnership between IM, the Haitian Alliance,

Mexican Baptists and ABCNJ!”

IM has also sent \$12,400 in One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) funds to the Tijuana churches to improve their shelters and cover rising utility costs.

Pastor José Antonio Altamirano, vice president of the Tijuana-Tecate-San Diego Area, wrote a letter of appeal explaining the shelters’ urgent needs: “Knowing that migration will not stop in the coming weeks, we are requesting help to improve buildings and equipment as well as the continuous flow of supplies and ingredients for daily food preparation. The work we do for the Lord is not in vain, and in International Ministries we have found important support to fulfill our work, responsibilities and projects.”

The current humanitarian crisis in Mexico is but a snapshot of the world scene. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees reports that a record number of the

world’s citizens—65 million—are displaced. “That is one out of every 113 people in the world,” explains Lisa Rothenberger, IM’s World Relief Officer. “On average, as many as 24 people every minute are forced to flee due to natural disaster, the circumstances of war or other reasons. That is four times more than 10 years ago.”

“No one knows how long this ministry in Mexico will continue,” Tim says. “It is a very fluid situation. But one thing is certain: nations are being blessed, and Baptist churches no longer occupy the side streets, in the shade, where they are not seen or heard. They have become a light that cannot be overlooked.”

One Great Hour of Sharing is administered by the World Relief Committee of the Board of General Ministries of American Baptist Churches USA. The committee facilitates American Baptist emergency relief, disaster rehabilitation, refugee work and development assistance by establishing policy guidelines and overseeing distribution of the annual One Great Hour of Sharing offering received by churches. Learn more at www.abc-oghs.org.

Pastor Gamaliel López and Haitian guests do some recycling at Calvary Baptist in Tijuana



IM Medical Missionary Honored for Work with Impoverished Communities in Nicaragua

By Roger Amerman, contributing writer



Laura Parajón and Dr. Henry Perry, who nominated her for the award.

Dr. Laura Parajón, an American Baptist International Ministries (IM) medical missionary, was honored for her community-based primary health care ministry to remote villages in Nicaragua—her second prestigious award in two years.

This award, the Mid-Career Award in International Health, was bestowed November 1 by the American Public Health Association (APHA) in recognition of Laura Parajón's work in developing community-based health care services for some of the most vulnerable people in Nicaragua.

This honor comes a year after Laura was given a Rural Hero award by the American Academy of Family

Physicians (AAFP), honoring her as "a tremendous role model . . . and a true innovator in health care in rural communities."

Laura and her husband, Dr. David Parajón, have been IM medical missionaries since 2001, serving remote communities in Nicaragua. David is an internist and Laura is a family physician.

Together, building on the pioneering work of David's father, Gustavo Parajón, and others, in 2006 they started the ministry AMOS (A Ministry Of Sharing) Health and Hope. The acronym AMOS spells the name of the Old Testament prophet Amos, who spoke on behalf of the poor.

AMOS celebrates 10-year anniversary

AMOS provides community-based primary health care programs through the extensive training and support of local health promoters and health committees.

These promoters serve as primary care providers in their remote communities, giving basic health care, monitoring immunizations, helping with pregnancy care and identifying patients who need to be transported to a government health center.

“In addition to treating medical needs, our health promoters offer emotional, spiritual and social help,” Laura said, adding that 80 percent of health promoters’ efforts are devoted to services like preventive health care and education about nutrition and hygiene, plus community-oriented projects such as water filtration, deworming and support groups.

AMOS also helps local leaders conduct a health census of all households in a community to help improve the quality of its services and to make sure that no one’s needs are overlooked. A special focus is given to the most vulnerable people—the elderly, pregnant women and children under five years old.

“The AMOS ministry is definitely not just us—it’s a God thing,” Laura said. Church partnerships and mission teams that work with AMOS play a key role in helping extend the reach of AMOS’s programs and services. Teams work alongside AMOS staff and community leaders on short-term community projects that tie into the long-term community health work. These projects include water filter installation and maintenance, first aid training and the construction of community clinics.

“All these churches and universities who are supporting us—and people



Laura Parajón leads a workshop on caring for infants

in the communities—each person is bringing strengths to do this ministry that’s bigger than all of us, guided by Christ,” Laura continued. “That’s what we’re trying to do—to make this world a better place, like what God wants for all people.”

Laura also credits Gustavo, her father-in-law, for the ministry. “I always remember what he told me: ‘A doctor shouldn’t be a doctor in a place like Nicaragua. A doctor should be someone who serves and then empowers other people.’

“The other thing he taught us was to ‘always stop for the blind man,’” she said. “On his way to Jericho, Jesus stopped and he talked to the blind man. But he didn’t just talk to him. He listened to his needs and got him where he needed to be. (Luke 18:35-43) That’s how we do our ministry: we stop for the blind man.”

“We are grateful for Drs. David and Laura Parajón’s ministry in Nicaragua,” stated IM Area Director Dr. Adalia Gutiérrez-Lee. “They have followed Dr. Gustavo Parajón’s example of humility and service and have improved in many ways the ministry he started. What an honor to work alongside doctors who use their

knowledge to serve and empower the blind man on the road.”

The results of the AMOS ministry have been impressive.

This year alone AMOS has improved access to health care for 17,540 people living in six regions of Nicaragua through the work of 22 certified health promoters who manage a community health clinic with basic medicines.

On top of that, 8,424 home visits were made between July 2015 and June 2016 to provide follow-up care for the most vulnerable patients in 22 rural communities. In the past five years, there have been zero maternal deaths or prenatal deaths among the women they serve.

In addition to hosting short-term volunteer teams, AMOS offers training in community-based primary health care to students in U.S. partner universities, including Wake Forest, Duke, Ohio State University and others. “We offer a three-week course and six-week internship,” Laura said. “We teach public health principles to give students a framework and skills they can take wherever they go.”

American Baptist Foreign Mission Society
P.O. Box 851 • Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851

Are you a former IM missionary,
or do you know someone who is?
Please help us update our contact
information. Please email Bernice at
bernice.rogers@internationalministries.org
or call her at 800-222-3872, ext. 2188.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Biennial Mission Summit

June 30-July 2, 2017

Portland, Oregon

Meeting of the ABCUSA family

Sponsored by ABCUSA

www.americanbaptists2017.org

Hear the Call

August 18-24, 2017

Green Lake, Wisconsin

Weekend event for those exploring
a call to global mission service

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"We are very pleased
to support IM and
receive a benefit by
making a stock gift."

IRENE AND KEN CAMPBELL

IM GIVES THANKS FOR FAITHFUL DONORS

In December 2016, International Ministries donors Irene and Ken Campbell surprised two of IM's missionaries with a substantial gift of stock for their support. The missionaries, Chuck and Ruth Fox, serve with approximately 100,000 Akha hill tribe people in Northern Thailand, as well as with the Chiang Rai International Christian School. Their ministry focuses on evangelism, pastoral care, education, leadership development and women's ministries.

Chuck and Ruth give thanks to God for the outpouring of love and support from the Campbells. "It is amazing to me that this family cares so much to give such a generous gift," Chuck said. "It makes me want to work harder to spread the good news of Jesus. It is the grace of God."

By making a gift of appreciated stock to IM, you bypass capital gains tax so more can go to God's work around the world. It's just one of the many ways to give and help make possible the work of the Lord through IM. To learn more about stock gifts and other tax-saving ways of giving to IM, contact Zofia Dripps, associate executive director of Advancement, at 800-222-3872, ext. 2311, or zdripps@internationalministries.org.