

**UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES MIGRANT MIXTEC BELIEVERS OF  
BAJA CALIFORNIA FACE AS THEY PREPARE TO RETURN AS CHRIST'S'  
AMBASSADORS TO THEIR OWN VILLAGES IN OAXACA AND SUGGESTED  
STRATEGIES TO ASSIST IN OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES**

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By  
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# CHAPTER ONE

## *Introduction/ Proposal Development*

### **Target group**

The focus of this study targets the native or indigenous Mixteca people who migrate from the state of Oaxaca, Mexico to find work as agricultural workers in the San Quintin valley of Baja California Norte, Mexico. More specifically, this study will deal with a peasant society who speaks the Mixteca Alta language.

Their migration two thousand miles north from southern Mexico has brought them to work and in some cases to hear and respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This study will also focus on special challenges these new believers face as they return to their villages as home missionaries and with strategies to aid them in combating these challenges.

### **Light and darkness**

Because of the influence of the increasing presence of evangelical churches aided by short-term mission teams to the Baja, and the outpouring of God's Spirit, many of the indigenous peoples have responded to the Gospel and have become active in local evangelical churches. As these new Christians grow in Christ and become disciples they have become aware of the darkness of their home state. By testimony they share of the light in the Baja and the darkness in their state of Oaxaca. They have realized that they

have become new persons in Christ, “the old life is gone; the new life has begun”<sup>1</sup> and that their families to the south live in darkness.

Missionaries have come and committed their lives to Mexico’s indigenous who work in the agricultural fields of the Baja. It is in the Baja that they have heard the cry of the field workers, as it says in James 5:4, “For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The wages you held back cry out against you. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.”<sup>2</sup>

These cries of the indigenous believers are not only for the injustices, which are many, but for the knowledge and resources to reach their spirituality lost families many miles away in the southern part of Mexico. Although referring to his homeland in India, Y. P. Yohannan says, “The only weapon that will ever effectively win the war against disease, hunger, injustice and poverty in Asia is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> This most certainly is true among the indigenous peoples of Mexico. They see Christ as a light and hope for their families.

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<sup>1</sup>2 Cor. 5:17b NLT

<sup>2</sup>Ja. 5:4 NLT

<sup>3</sup>K.P. Yohannan, *Revolution in World Missions* (Carrollton, Texas: gfa Books, a division of Gospel for Asia, 2004), 29.

## **Mission**

There are over twenty missionary organizations ministering in the San Quintin Valley. In 1998 my wife Ilene and I started Northern Light Ministries (NLM) joining other mission organizations in ministering in the valley. The original purpose of this non-profit organization was to facilitate short-term ministry teams in North America. Over nine years the ministry has evolved into facilitating teams specifically to Baja California, Mexico. We studied the Spanish language and moved to Papalote, Mexico to enhance this purpose.

Northern Light Ministries' mission statement was expanded to include purposefully listening to the needs of Mexican pastors and believers as they struggle with their vision to reach their people groups. Strengthening these pastors and believers with basic resources, facilities, knowledge, and technology through visiting mission ministries teams has continued with purpose. That purpose is seen also in Steve Saint's book, The Great Omission, as he states missions need to develop nationals to be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.<sup>4</sup> These principles mirror the thinking of NLM in Baja California, Mexico.

Through the encouragement of NLM, continued Bible training, development of leadership and organizational skills, and needed training facilities, indigenous believers have begun to embrace the principles of self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating mentioned by Steve Saint. The goal is to develop a living organization and

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<sup>4</sup> Steve Saint, *The Great Omission*, (Seattle, Washington: YWAM Publishing, 2001), 135.

not just an institution. As mentioned in Saint's book, "Missions is the scaffolding that helps build the local church. It is temporary and should never be cemented in place".<sup>5</sup>

### **The call**

In September 2006, through the partnership of Northern Light Ministries and leadership of the Free Methodist Conference of Baja Norte, Instituto Bíblico Baja (Baja Bible Institute) was established. Indigenous believers recognized this as an opportunity to prepare to fulfill their desire to reach their lost families. This was only the beginning.

Advancing the cause of Christ's kingdom in Mexico and throughout the world is the goal of NLM and the Mexican leadership with whom we work. This partnership is built around Great Commission minded people. Matthew 28:19-20 commands all believers to "Go and make disciples..." This command includes all people and all people groups. "The twentieth-century model of missions leaves the vast majority of Christians out of the church's spiritual battle."<sup>6</sup> This command "to go" was new to the believers with whom we were working, but with passion the indigenous believers and Mexican leadership in the Baja have embraced the call. This study hopes to enhance a growing army of indigenous ambassadors for Christ in Mexico and throughout the world.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 19.

## Challenges

In Baja California, Mexico the Lord has heard the cries of the field workers. Some of the cries come because of seemingly insurmountable challenges to return home that involve native worldviews and cultural norms, poverty and oppression, lack of education, lack of skills, lack of confidence, and lack of spiritual knowledge. These are the challenges that confront believers who desire to tackle the task of returning to their home villages as effective witnesses for Christ.

There also seems to be a general lack of support from the middle class evangelical church of Mexico and abroad. Their lack of support is due to prejudice, comfort in their churches, viewing missions as the work of outsiders, and a vanishing vision for the lost. The Apostle Peter through the exhortation of the Holy Spirit made it clear that God had a plan for Gentiles, “I see very clearly that God doesn’t show partiality. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.”<sup>7</sup>

These indigenous brothers in Christ have a great desire to evangelize their tribal groups no matter what the challenges or sacrifices that lie ahead. Although there are many difficulties facing them, they are the best people to reach their own for Christ. Ted Jones, a translator for thirty-seven years working with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (S.I.L.) in Oaxaca says, “When the brothers return to their homeland they have an advantage over anyone from the U. S. They understand the customs, the language, what tequio (community work) is like, what their village is like. For us it is like going to the

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<sup>7</sup>Acts 10:34-35 NLT

moon, we don't know these things.”<sup>8</sup> They also are willing to be bi-vocational to sustain their families, they can live in subsistence settings at an economically low level, and they do not have to wait years and years for the people to develop trust in them before accepting them into the community. Some outsider missionaries never achieve acceptance.

Missionaries Dan and Cindy Klein have been in Oaxaca for twenty-five years. They told us that they will never be trusted enough by the indigenous people they have worked with to lead anyone to the Lord. Their ministry has changed to that of mentoring encouraging and teaching Mexican pastors who have gained trust. Dan and Cindy are much loved and valued by the indigenous pastors and mission community.

The above criteria are the reasons for studying the Mixtec migrant believers of the San Quintin Valley in Baja California, Mexico. Identifying, understanding, and suggesting strategies to assist in effectively overcoming the challenges they face in preparation to return as native ambassadors to their own home villages in Oaxaca are essential.

Valuable resources from past study of other indigenous peoples, missionary research and observations in the Baja, interviews with missionaries working in Mixtec areas of Oaxaca and interviews with the indigenous brothers themselves have added in the research of defining the trials they will face. Interaction, experience, and observation contribute to possible strategies to meet these challenges.

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<sup>8</sup>Ted Jones, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 20 September 2007, audio tape. Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico.

Mixtec is one language group of many that are spoken in the San Quintin valley, and they share common cultural norms and have common challenges which would benefit many indigenous believers of different languages through this study. Some of the students that attend Instituto Bíblico Baja are Mixtec. As a team it was these brothers' villages that were visited on a short-term mission trip to Oaxaca.

Strategizing to resolve some of these challenges starts with a biblical foundation to help them prepare as native missionaries for survival and evangelism in their original cultural worldview environment, but there is much more. Understanding Mixtec culture in relation to biblical principles and historical development adds to their preparation. Skill development and Bible training in ministry also aids in the process of facing these barriers and preparing for evangelism of the own home villages. Practical ministry experience and short-term mission opportunities back to the Mixtec villages contribute to this ongoing strategy as well.

### **Empowering**

Part of the task of NLM is to communicate the needs of indigenous peoples and their vision for ministry to American supporters and aid them in the process to reach their own peoples. If the world is to be evangelized, missions need to empower the masses. As Steve Saint says about the Huaorani people of Ecuador seeking to reach their own for Christ, "Outsiders will never get the job done. Nor should they, for we have no business doing what the Huaorani are capable of doing themselves. We must limit our

involvement to helping them in the areas they are not yet able to oversee, making every effort to assist them to become self-sufficient in those areas as quickly as possible”<sup>9</sup>.

It is time for the Christian to lift up his eyes and sharpen his ears having compassion for international brothers; hearing their cries, seeing the fields white with harvest. Jesus said we must pray to the Lord of the harvest to send more workers into His fields. Many indigenous brothers and sisters of the Baja are willing.

“Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the good news about the kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is great but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more into his fields’ ”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Steve Saint, “The Unfinished Mission to the Aucas,” *Christianity Today* 42 (1998) : 3.

<sup>10</sup> Mat. 9:35-36 NLT

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Review of Literature*

#### **History of migrant indigenous groups in Baja**

The State of Baja California, which includes the San Quintin valley, employs nearly 200,000 field workers.<sup>11</sup> Since the late nineteen seventies agricultural production has exploded in Baja, California. Mexicali, in the Colorado delta and the San Quintin Valley on the Pacific peninsula have benefited with the help of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). Now many of the agricultural products are sent to the United States.

The San Quintin valley is a coastal region that extends approximately one hundred miles long by forty miles wide located two hundred miles south of San Diego, California, on the Pacific Ocean side of the Baja peninsula. The population in this expanse is about one hundred twenty thousand people. Some of the communities consist of several thousand people to smaller neighborhoods of several hundred. Workers also live in a dozen or so migrant camps owned by the *rancheros* who own much of the agricultural land.

The main economic activity is the production of fresh market vegetables by agribusinesses for export to the United States. This business in the region is historically very young. In the late nineteen seventies, after the highway was paved, agriculture

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<sup>11</sup>California Environmental Protection Agency – State Water Resources Control Board, “*Agriculture in Baja California*” Chapter VIII Agriculture, (accessed 26 November 2007); available from <http://www.swcb.ca.gov/border/docs/etschapter8.pdf>; Internet.

production boomed.<sup>12</sup> Tomatoes and strawberries were the principle crops then, but now a variety of different crops are exported as well as the influx of new shade house technology which extends production time.

More recently, in the last two decades, former migrant workers have settled in the valley. New communities have emerged composed of indigenous migrant workers. Some have purchased a lot and built a home. Others continue to rent, squat, or remain in the migrant camp provided by the rancheros.

### **People groups**

Even though some settle, thousand of migrant workers and their families move in and out of the valley each year. These workers are largely peasant farmers who for decades have lived an itinerant life harvesting crops from state to state in Mexico as well as planting and harvesting corn, beans and squashes for their own subsistence use. Their ancestral lands can no longer produce sufficiently to support the population and sufficient alternative employment opportunities are not available near their homelands. The introduction of modern medicine caused a population spike rendering farmland unsustainable under current ecological conditions.<sup>13</sup> Most of the workers migrate into the Baja for the months April through November and then return to their homeland mostly from the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero, and Veracruz, or to other migrant areas with a complimentary agricultural cycle.

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<sup>12</sup>Allan Lee, "Background report on the San Quintin Region of Baja California, Mexico", 2000, p. 1, Mexican Medical Ministries: San Quintin, Baja California.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 1.

People groups in Mexico are defined culturally into two groups: mestizo and indigenous or Indian. Groups are defined culturally so that the term *mestizo* means someone who is culturally Mexican in language, dress, and perspective. Someone who does not speak Spanish but speaks an Indian dialect and dresses in traditional Indian garb would be considered Indian, even if that individual were Caucasian. Accordingly, during the course of one's life, it is possible for someone to change their ethnic grouping by simply adopting the language and habits of another ethnic group. Indeed, in Mexico an increasing number of Indians are becoming mestizos by adopting the Spanish language and de-emphasizing their Indian customs.

As of July 2000 the population of Indian/Spanish heritage (*mestizo*), dating from Spanish colonization five hundred years ago, was estimated to account for 50 to 60 percent of the population of Mexico. Indians are from 25 to 30 percent, Caucasians from 9 to 15 percent, and Africans are a very small part of the population. The total population was estimated at 100.5 million. These estimates of racial groupings are tenuous at best because Mexicans do not characterize themselves in racial terms.<sup>14</sup>

Indigenous is defined by Luis Bush, International Director of *A. D. 2000 and Beyond*, as a word that is not always that affirming. "In Spanish, indigenous, the word used for native

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<sup>14</sup> Encyclopedia of the Nations, "Estados Unidos Mexicanos - Country Overview" (accessed 26 November 2007); available from <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Americas/Mexico.html>; Internet.

Indian, brings with it some strong connotations like barbarian, primeval, primitive, primordial, pristine and savage.”<sup>15</sup>

According to studies by Allan Lee of Mexican Medical Ministries and surveys with Gospel Recordings, currently eighty different indigenous language groups have been identified as part of the migrant culture of the San Quintin valley.<sup>16</sup> These groups are mainly from the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero, especially from the Mixtec, Trique, and Zapotec language families. There are more language groups in Oaxaca than any other state. There are at least two hundred ninety-eight different languages documented spoken by indigenous peoples of Mexico so far.<sup>17</sup>

In Mexico and especially with the indigenous peoples there, two worlds are mixed, the spirit world and Christian tradition. As Allan Lee summarizes some of the characteristics of the indigenous peoples he says this about their relationship to the Catholic Church. “They are considered Catholic, but their Catholicism is very syncretistic. That is, they have some Catholic beliefs mixed in their traditional, animistic religious beliefs. Though most Indian groups are nominally Catholic, in reality the core of their belief system is animistic, with a veneer of Catholicism. For example, some of the Indians still offer

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<sup>15</sup>Luis Bush, “Greater Glory Yet to Come: Trends Regarding Indigenous Ministries” in *Supporting Indigenous Ministries*, ed. Daniel Rickett and Dotsey Welliver (Wheaton, Illinois: Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, 1997), 6.

<sup>16</sup>Allan Lee, “Background report on the San Quintin Region of Baja California, Mexico”, 2000, p. 2, Mexican Medical Ministries: San Quintin, Baja California, Mexico.

<sup>17</sup>*Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Fifteenth edition*, Raymond G. Gordon Jr. ed. (Dallas, Texas: S.I.L. International, 2005) (accessed 14 November 2007), available from <http://www.ethnologue.com/>; Internet.

animal sacrifices to their traditional gods, live in fear of the spirits of their dead ancestors, and seek out witch doctors for healing.”<sup>18</sup>

This reality is evident in villages of Baja California with the presence of many shamans to deal with spiritual and physical needs of the indigenous peoples. There is a darkness and sense of fear that the Mixteco brothers speak about when discussing local shamans, even though they have a power much greater, the Holy Spirit, (I John 4:4). These traditions are difficult hurdles for young Christians as they begin their new life in Christ.

### **Mission or culture destruction**

Not all researchers view the indigenous cultures as dark. In fact some theologians feel that the culture of the indigenous peoples that Columbus encountered were rich.

Christopher Duraisingh describes the early colonist this way, “In the hands of the colonizers evangelization became ‘a weapon of hell’ that has systematically destroyed the identity and culture.”<sup>19</sup> In other words the destruction of culture was the result of early evangelism efforts.

Bartolomeu Melia, a Catholic priest, uses the words from Columbus’ journal from October 11, 1492 to explain the richness of the indigenous people Columbus encountered, “...everyone would take and give, with good will, what they had, but they seemed to be

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<sup>18</sup>Allan Lee, “Q & A Regarding the Indian Groups in the San Quintin Region”, 2004, p. 2, Mexican Medical Ministries: San Quintin, Baja California, Mexico.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Duraisingh, “Indigenous People and Evangelism,” *International Review of Mission* (October 1992) : 523.

very poor people...”<sup>20</sup> Melia goes on to say that “they love their neighbors as they love themselves ... They had no envy or malice... They refrained from converting themselves to Christianity in order to be Christian.”<sup>21</sup> Was Media saying, who really was poor and who was really Christian?

We have to think of the early church when confronted with these thoughts. The early church shared and loved each other with compassion motivated by their savior’s example. (Matthew 9:35, I John 3:15-16) “And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need.”<sup>22</sup>

Others have reacted to the 1992 celebration by Americans and Europeans of the quincentenary, the five hundred year anniversary celebration of the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas, as an invasion and genocide in God’s name. According to Bruce Corrie an anthropologist teaching at Oxford University, the total population could have been much larger than before thought, “ The new estimates (of the total population) are usually in the order of 90 to 110 million, with 80 to 100 million of these living in what is now Latin America.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Bartolomeu Melia, “Indigenous Cultures and Evangelism: Challenge for a Liberating Mission.” *International Review of Mission* 81 Vol. LXXXI No. 324 (1989) : 557.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 576.

<sup>22</sup> Acts 2:44-45, NLT

<sup>23</sup> M. Bruce Corrie, “The Indigenous Peoples of South America.” *International Review of Mission* 81 No. 324 (O 1992) : 551.

Wayne Ellwood writes in his review of Bartolome de Las Casas in 1552, “Las Casas estimated that a million Indians perished in Latin America and the Caribbean within fifty years of Columbus’ landing. Scholars now reckon that ninety per cent of the indigenous population of the Americas was wiped out in a century and a half, the greatest demographic collapse in the history of the planet and the proportional equivalent of nearly half a billion people today.”<sup>24</sup>

History records that the motivating reason for exploration was not evangelism. Explorers brought with them their superior ethno-Eurocentric view that demanded barbarians become civilized and Christianized like them. Ethnocentrism is defined by Paul Hiebert as “our human tendency to respond to others people’s ways by using our own affective assumptions, and to reinforce these responses with deep feelings of approval or disapproval.”<sup>25</sup> Ethnocentrism is based on the attitude that one’s own group is superior.

Kenith A. David and John C. Bootra, coordinators and leaders in the World Council of Churches affirm these thoughts when they use the word invaders to describe the Spaniards. “The invaders in 1492 were Spaniards from the mainland of Europe who held firmly to a Eurocentric view of the world. The invaders in 1492 were also Christians, who came believing in an almighty, all-powerful and invincible God who had

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<sup>24</sup>Wayne Ellwood, “Hidden History: Columbus and the Colonial Legacy,” *The New Internationalist* (December 1991) : 6.

<sup>25</sup>Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985) : 97.

commissioned them to civilize and Christianize barbarians in distant lands”<sup>26</sup>. Of course, the search for gold and riches motivated these Catholic explorers as well.

The results of exploration and colonization have truly been devastating to the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Man’s greed and lust for riches have destroyed the true message of the Gospel. Boonstra and David go on to say “that public confession and repentance cannot be confined to a mere liturgical act; repentance - a turning away from self and evil towards God – must always be accompanied by reparation for the dehumanization of God’s people and for destruction of God’s earth and its resources over the past five centuries.”<sup>27</sup> They use a classic illustration from Luke 19:1-10 when Jesus confronts Zacchaeus with his deceit. “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have overcharged people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much! Jesus responded, Salvation has come to this house today...”<sup>28</sup>

From history we know that the Catholic Church sent missionaries to the colonies. There were missions started from San Francisco to the tip of South America. Early evangelism of the Americas was influenced the Roman Catholic Church. The evangelical mission movement did not develop until the 1800’s. The Spanish and Portuguese colonies became known as Roman Catholic missions. In fact most of the population in Mexico and all Central and South America are considered Roman Catholic today because of these efforts.

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<sup>26</sup> Kenith A. David and John C Boonstra, ed., “Themes to challenge the mission of the church,” *International Review of Mission* 81 Vol. 71 No. 324 (1992) : 583.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 584.

<sup>28</sup> Luke 19: 8-9, NLT

The definition of Mexican Catholic is considered by some to be “folk Catholicism”<sup>29</sup>, a unique combination of Roman Catholic and indigenous religious beliefs. Claims are made that folk Catholicism is vulnerable to internal contradiction because it contains pre-Christian beliefs that are in conflict with Catholic beliefs. A good example is given by Barbara Hollenbach, a linguist with Summer Institute of Linguistics (S.I.L.), Oaxaca, Mexico, as she writes of the Trique people. “Saint Mark has been equated with the traditional thunder (rain) god. Every year on April 25th, which is the festival of Saint Mark, the Trique (peoples) go to caves, the traditional home of the thunder god, to perform special ceremonies... If the community fails to perform proper rituals in their honor, they will be angry and send calamities.”<sup>30</sup> Some of the leaders of the Catholic Church and those from the WCC suggest that a re-evangelization of the indigenous peoples is necessary through a liberating mission.<sup>31</sup>

According to JoJo Fung, a Jesuit priest who works with indigenous people in Malaysia, we need to rethink missiology in relation to indigenous people. One year after the quincentenary, the United Nations designated 1993 as the International Year of Indigenous Peoples. This 1993 designation inspired Dr. Fung’s research into Malaysia indigenous shamanism as a point of rethinking missiology. He examines indigenous

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<sup>29</sup>Paul R Turner, “Religious conversion and folk Catholicism.” *Missiology* 12 (1984), 111-121.

<sup>30</sup> Barbara Hollenbach, “A Cultural Sketch of the Copala Trique” (written 1992 revised 1998), (accessed 15 August 2007) available from [http://www.S.I.L.org/mexico/mixteca/triqui-copala/Aool-CulturalSketch-TRC.htm\[Jan1999\]](http://www.S.I.L.org/mexico/mixteca/triqui-copala/Aool-CulturalSketch-TRC.htm[Jan1999]); Internet

<sup>31</sup> Christopher Duraisingh, ed. “Indigenous peoples and Evangelization,” *International Review of Mission* 81 (1992) : 524.

Shamanism “based on the presupposition that the primal religions are revelatory of God’s salvific presence.”<sup>32</sup>

His research involves personal shamanic experience. In this process he was encouraged to leave behind his “ethnocentric bias and religious prejudices about their cultures and belief-systems.” “As I sat there and participated in their rituals, I gradually was able to *take off* my curiosity and *put on* the shamanic perspective.”<sup>33</sup>

Dr. Fung re-examines the total philosophy of mission realizing the mystery of God is beyond the church and that God’s Spirit works through shamanism as well. He feels that religion of indigenous people should be evaluated and embraced when good is found. He states his support for this concept from the traditions established in Vatican II, acknowledging the positive values in the other religious traditions.

### **Value systems**

Are evangelical missionaries incorporating culture change and destroying the identity and culture of the indigenous peoples and especially with the Mixtecs of which this study targets? Carol Zylstra, a S.I.L leader in southern Mexico writes about *the Mixtec way* in contrast to *Jesus’ way*. She says she wants to “formulate better strategies for encouraging

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<sup>32</sup> JoJo M. Fung, “Rethinking missiology in relation to indigenous peoples’ life-struggle.” *Mission Studies* 20 No. 1 (2003) : 29.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

the kinds of worldview changes necessary for Mixtecs who switch their allegiance to Christ, or, as they put it, ‘enter and follow in Jesus way.’”<sup>34</sup>

She has recognized that in their culture there are some cultural traditions that need to change to follow God’s plan for His creation, or enter and follow in Jesus way.

Ultimately God changes an individual’s worldview to God’s point of view. The Holy Spirit will do the changing in hearts and minds when the individuals enter and follow Jesus’ way and begin to follow biblical values. Duane Elmer says that “God reveals His multifaceted nature through the variety and diversity he has placed in His world... But, cultural diversity must be measured by biblical standards...”<sup>35</sup>

The teachings of Christ and His biblical values for living the Christian life, and the materialistic society we live in are two opposing cultures. The two distinct value systems contrast each other and help us to understand the necessity to change. Our materialistic society tells us one thing while the Bible teaches us that the greatest person “is the servant of all”, that “the last will actually end up first,” and that “the rich can end up the most miserable.”<sup>36</sup> We can realize that each culture, including the Mixtec culture, needs change in light of God’s inspired Word. Whether it is the American way or the Mixtec way change is inevitable in comparison to Christ way.

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<sup>34</sup>Carol Zystra, “Guerrero Mixtec Worldview” 1995, Carol Zystra is an S.I.L. translator in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, article in archives of Allan Lee, Mexican Medical Mission: San Quintin, Baja California Norte, Mexico

<sup>35</sup>Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Connections* (Dowers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2002), 24&30.

<sup>36</sup>Steve Saint, *The Great Omission* (Seattle, Washington: YWAM Publishing, 2001) , 176.

“Then Jesus said to be His disciples, ‘If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me.’”<sup>37</sup>

### **Defining worldview**

Worldview is defined by James Sires as “a set of presuppositions which we hold about the basic makeup of our world,”<sup>38</sup> Sires goes on to say that assumptions may be true, partially true or entirely false as well as held consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently. This definition helps us understand that culture and worldviews all have need for the reality. It also allows room for a supreme being and a pursuit of truth.

Anthropologists have studied the southern Mexico cultures and people groups to establish familiar norms that encompass these indigenous people. The world view and social structure of these cultures of many people groups seem to hold common ground. The following excerpts deal with the major aspects of southern Mexico indigenous cultures.

The best known and most referred to study on worldviews of indigenous people of southern Mexico is Michael Kearney’s’ The Winds of Ixtepeji.<sup>39</sup> In this book Kearney outlines the dominant set of beliefs of a Zapotec village. Common basic beliefs are

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<sup>37</sup> Mat. 16:24, NLT

<sup>38</sup>James W Sire, *Naming the Elephant* (Dowers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2004), 19.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Kearney, *The Winds of Ixtepeji: Worldview and Society in a Zapotec Town* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc. 1986)

echoed in most of the literature review about Oaxacan people group worldview and show a relationship with Kearney's dominant set of beliefs.

Here are the five basic propositions mentioned by Kearney:

1. The world (local, social and geographical environment) is filled with omnipresent, unknown, and unknowable dangerous beings and entities (natural and supernatural) that constantly threaten the individual.
2. Human and supernatural aggression is performed through deceit and deception.
3. Human beings are very susceptible to frustration and are envious of others; both frustration and envy make one wish to harm others.
4. Any change in the status quo will most likely be for the worse; in general, things are changing for the worse.
5. Hard work and suffering are inevitable consequences of life.<sup>40</sup>

A short review of literature about limited good, *aire* and envy are essential to understand Kearney's five basic propositions and how they form the foundation to understand better the picture of Mixtec society.

### ***Limited Good***

Limited good is not mentioned in The Winds of Ixtepeji , or directly referred to in Kearney's five basic prepositions, but is paramount in understanding them. In 1965, George M. Foster wrote about "limited good" in an article entitled, "Peasant Society and

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

the Image of Limited Good.”<sup>41</sup> Eunice Pike<sup>42</sup> as well as Carol Zylstra refers to Foster’s study as relevant to their indigenous cultures. Both of these writers are S.I.L. linguists who have worked in southern Mexico.

Defined by George Foster, limited good is the idea that “all the good things in a society are seen as a closed system, finite in quantity as far as the group is concerned, and incapable of expansion or growth. Hence, any advantage achieved by one individual or family is seen as a loss to other.”<sup>43</sup>

The concept of limited good generates much distrust and fear in Mixtec society. If one is perceived to come out better than others, he becomes vulnerable to attacks by people in the community because he has gotten ahead at other’s expense. Limited good impacts every area of Mixtec society, wealth, health, prestige, work, crops, love toward others, and education. Education in the village is informal, indirect, almost by osmosis, since people are afraid of losing good when they instruct someone...”<sup>44</sup>

### ***Envy***

Envy is a second cultural distinctive that typifies Mixtec people. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the infinitive ‘to envy,’ as to feel displeasure and ill-will at the

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<sup>41</sup>George M. Foster, “Peasant Society and the Image of limited Good,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 67 no. 2 (Apr. 1965) : 293-315.

<sup>42</sup>Eunice V. Pike, “The concept of limited good and the spread of the gospel,” *Missiology* 8 (1990) : 449-454.

<sup>43</sup>George Foster, 296.

<sup>44</sup>Eunice V. Pike, 453.

superiority of (another person) in happiness, success, reputation, or the possession of anything desirable; to regard with discontent another's possession of (some superior advantage which one would like to have for himself).

Difference between envy and jealousy is: Envy stems from the desire to acquire something possessed by another person, while jealousy is rooted in the fear of losing something already possessed.<sup>45</sup>

If one is seen as getting ahead, balance is maintained through several means: strong hierarchical ordering of relationships within Mixtec society may be used; sometimes false accusation are used that require fines; and other times more subtle methods are imposed like nominating a man to a community position that involves financial responsibility which is called cargo. According to Beverly Chinas other more forceful means may include, "...the arousal of envy in a neighbor can bring misfortune and disaster to a household in various forms. The envious individual can injure through actual physical aggression or he may work through supernatural means such as witchcraft and spell-casting."<sup>46</sup>

Others outside this society are not seen as a threat in the same way as fellow Mixtec would be in this closed society. Within the society envy is expected one toward other.

"Envy and hatred are directed toward who are believed to have acquired more than their

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<sup>45</sup>George M. Foster, "The Anatomy of Envy: A study in Symbolic Behavior," *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 13, No. 2. (Apr., 1972) : 167.

<sup>46</sup>Beverly Newbold Chinas, *The Isthmus Zapotecs: A Matrifocal Culture of Mexico* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002) , 73.

neighbors, because by definition of limited good, their having more good means that their neighbors have less. Thus, as described above people will ‘do envy,’ which in their judgment is any hostile action necessary to bring the offender down to the ‘poor’ level of everyone else in their society.”<sup>47</sup> In this type of close community doing envy against people maintains equality in the Mixtec Way, but also produces fear and mistrust with little hope for prosperity.

### *Aire*

Aire is another important concept to understand in the Mixtec culture. *Aire* or *Aigre* is air in English. In Spanish the meaning is quite different in relationship to the indigenous peoples, although it is not easily deciphered. *Aigre* is used by Michael Kearney in his book, but both references of the term have negative connotations. Most commonly experienced in Baja California, Mexico, is the reference to *aire*. An example is during the indigenous church service in Papalote it may be quite warm outside, but the windows are closed and babies are wrapped in blanket with their heads covered. When asked about opening the windows the reply is “the *aire* will get on the babies.” Here the reference is to ‘bad air’ affecting the health of the baby.

Missionaries John and Judy Williams said this about *aire*, “Bad air seems to be one of the ways Mixtecs talk about evil spirits. The bad air is especially present near dead bodies. People put a special herb (*yuku lota*) behind their ears, sticking out in front, when near a dead body. People are especially careful about bad air when pregnant. Another herb

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<sup>47</sup>Carol Zylstra, 11.

(yuku ndikani) is an herb that pregnant women can bathe in to help protect their children from bad air. In Mixtec, there is a special word for being afraid, that implies being afraid of bad air, or evil spirits. People avoid walking at night for fear of this. The river also seems to be a place where people think bad air is more likely to be.<sup>48</sup>

Other relationships to aire or aigre were discussed to include: spirit of the death, ugly animals that were evil spirits and the temperature of food and drink in relationship to cold and hot, good and evil.

Linguist and missionary Carol Zylstra said this about the Mixtec worldview, “If it seems as if I have painted a pretty bleak picture of Mixtec society, it is because in many ways it is bleak. People live in a lot of fear, both of the spirit world and of their neighbors who might do envy against them. They are not happy with the way things are, but feel like victims, powerless to change anything, and fearful of the reactions of the spirits as well as fellow villagers if they do change.”<sup>49</sup>

These propositions and descriptive terms seem discouraging. Their worldview is based on fatalism with no thought of change. As Christian Mixtec brothers return to their homeland they will encounter challenges from their own culture that may be difficult. To face these challenges it was crucial that the brothers again visit their villages. We planned the first mission trip of the Papalote Church back to Oaxaca in September 2007.

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<sup>48</sup>John and Judy Williams, “Anthropological Write-up of San Andres Yutatio,” (information gathered between 1986-1989, written 1990, edited by Allan Lee 2007) , p. 5, an article in the archives of Allan Lee, Mexico Medical Missions: San Quintin, Baja California Norte, Mexico

<sup>49</sup>Carol Zylstra, 11-12.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Mission team trip to Oaxaca*

#### **Geographical Overview**

Papalote, Baja California is two thousand miles from the state of Oaxaca. By bus, traveling from Oaxaca City to Tijuana it is three days and three nights. (See appendix for maps of Baja California and Oaxaca) The state of Oaxaca is located in the southern part of Mexico. Oaxaca City is its capital. The size of the state is equal to that of the state of Oregon in the United States. The population is about three and one half million people made up of mostly indigenous peoples with the most diversified language groups in Mexico.<sup>50</sup>

This mountainous state averages over five thousand feet in elevation. Because of the rugged terrain, the people in villages or ranchos inhabit the mountains throughout Oaxaca. Oaxaca is divided into districts with a larger town as the district seat. Tlaxiaco is the county seat that governs the municipalities of Chalcatongo and satellite ranchos including Plan de Ayala, San Miguel el Grande, La Paz and Chapultepec. There are over 500 municipalities in Oaxaca. When Oaxaquenans are asked where they from, they will name the nearest large town as a reference. (See appendix for photos of Chalcatongo region.)

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<sup>50</sup>Wikipedia-the free encyclopedia, "Oaxaca, Oaxaca", (accessed 27 November 2007); available from [http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oaxaca\\_Oaxaca](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oaxaca_Oaxaca). Internet

The population of Chalcatongo is about fifteen thousand people with the ranchos numbering from one hundred to one thousand people. The elevation in the Chalcatongo area ranges from seven thousand to nine thousand feet above sea level. The people are subsistence farmers. They plant crops in the wet season (starting in April) and harvest in the dry season (starting November).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this trip was to specifically enhance our understanding of the challenges that Mixteco Christian brothers would face returning as ambassadors for Christ to their villages in Oaxaca. Senen and Beni wanted specifically to share their faith and testimonies with their families and prepare the way to return.

The leadership (Ramon, Ilene and I) had goals to begin developing relationships with their families; to increase our knowledge of their culture, worldview and felt needs; to network with missionaries that are living and working in the area so that if in the future (as soon as even next year) when these two families return, they will have some spiritual support. We feel strongly that two families need to go together to support one another, be accountable to one another and hold fast to one another in the face of adversity

We wanted to visit missionaries, linguists, and national Christians on this trip, interviewing them with specific questions and audio tape their responses. We hoped this trip would be a vital teaching tool for Pastor Ramon and the brothers. Because of our past repertoire of experiences we could help guide them through the hurdles of planning,

preparation, and goal setting. Future trips could be hopefully modeled from what we would learn.

Most of the responses from the interviews were taped in Spanish with some responses from American and Canadian missionaries in English. In this report all taped responses are translated to English. The questions can be found in the appendix.

The trip was scheduled for September 18 through September 29, 2007.

### **Team Members**

Team members are Superintendent and Director of Instituto Bíblico Baja, Ramon Ross Rubio, Senen Ruiz, Benigno Ruiz, and Luz Elena Ruiz Tello. Senen and Beni are cousins, and Luz Elena is Senen's daughter. My wife Ilene and I completed the team.

Ramon is thirty nine years old and has been an ordained minister of the Gospel in the Free Methodist Conference for twenty years. Currently he is the superintendent overseeing eighteen churches in Baja Norte and is the founder and Director of the Bible Institute in Papalote. He is married to Esther and they have three children. God has greatly gifted Ramon in music, artistic abilities, strong life skills (carpentry, welding, plumbing, electrical work, architecture), shepherding, teaching, developing leaders and wisdom.

Ramon believes in the vision the Lord has given him and others to reach Mexico for Christ and his dogged persistence regardless of persecution and rejection he has received from others because of his convictions has seen God's blessing being poured out among those who also have joined to take up the banner. The indigenous brother were first to respond.

(Abdon) Senen Ruiz accepted Christ six years ago. His wife Bernadita had prayed for his salvation for thirteen years. Many times because of his beatings and drunkenness she wanted to leave him, but decided to remain faithful to him and continued to pray for her husband. She suffered greatly under his abuse. Senen's heart was broken before God and remains broken. At his baptism he began to pour out his desire to share his faith with his family in Oaxaca. He has matured in his walk with the Lord and has completed one year of Bible school and entered the second. His children are all believers and are walking with the Lord.

Senen is forty-two, short and stocky with a tender heart and yet fiercely passionate to share his faith. He is very protective of those he loves and can be explosive....a Peter.

Benigno (Beni) Ruiz accepted Christ twelve years ago but did not walk a life with the Lord so that others would recognize him as a believer. Beni frequently left his family to work in the U.S., usually without notice. He lived his life for himself. Two years ago he left again to work in California. We began to pray that the Lord would cause him to return. Beni told his wife and two teenage sons and a young daughter one day that he

was returning to the states and left the next. Nati, his wife, began to fail physically because of his abandonment. We prayed fervently that God would send him home. One year after he left he returned. With righteous indignation he was chastised by the church leadership and us. He responded and repented. Beni started immediately into classes at the Bible Institute. His life and focus changed.

Beni is a man of few words but those words are powerful. He is a man who can listen to a thousand words, and synthesize it into six. He is quiet and gentle, industrious and trustworthy. He is now working to strengthen his relationship with his wife Natividad (Nati) who also has a strong desire to share Christ with her family in Oaxaca. His young daughter will move with them to Oaxaca.

But his older two sons will not be going. Because of his neglect as a father for so many years they have never given their hearts to God, are restless and unfocused. Neither has finished school and now spends their time with corner gangs. Beni feels all he can do now is pray for them. "They will come to God in God's time."

Luz Elena Ruiz was born in Baja California and never learned Mixteca because her mother Bernadita speaks a different language from her father...so they all speak Spanish. She as the older daughter has stood with her mother during the years of abuse and grown to be a young lady strong in her faith. She is currently in Ensenada in her third year of Bible school. She always dreamed of returning to Oaxaca to share her love of God with

her extended family. Luz Elena is a self-starter and has been gifted to be able to teach. She is twenty-one years old.

My wife and I conclude the team. We have lived many lives in ministry. Our experience is very diverse and our life in ministry has been fulfilling. Because of our experience we have been useful in mentoring, supporting, empowering and facilitating the work of God here in Mexico.

### **Planning meetings**

These meetings were highlighted by the feedback we received from the brothers as we interacted together. In August Beni Ruiz stated, “This is the right time to go... it is God’s time.”<sup>51</sup>

Studying the cultural norm of envy has been part of our missionary experience working among the indigenous tribal peoples. (Further discussion of envy will be covered in chapter four.) Envy was realized during our September 16, 2007 meeting. The meeting concluded with the discussion that revealed other students at IBB were expressing indignation that they had not been chosen to go on this vacation to Oaxaca. They were not included so that developed envy. The truth was that none of these other students had as close connections with family in Oaxaca nor had they expressed a desire to return as

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<sup>51</sup> Beni Ruiz, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 15 August 2007, interview taped, Papalote, Baja California, Mexico.

missionaries to their indigenous roots. For years Senen and Beni had expressed anguish over their families lost in the darkness of Oaxaca.

The following Thursday's evening during the mid-week church Superintendent Ramon spoke to the church about the trip and the selection process. He taught out of Acts 13 as Paul and Barnabas were chosen to be sent out as missionaries. He explained about prayer and fasting in the selection process. When Paul and Barnabas were chosen, the elders prayed over them and sent them out. "One day as these men were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Dedicate Barnabas and Paul for the special work to which I have called them.' So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid hands on them and sent them out on their way."<sup>52</sup>

There was notable repentance and humbling of students and believers who had experienced envy and wrong thinking regarding the mission team. Ramon challenged the congregation to pray for *their team* each time they sat down to eat while the team was gone. That night the team was prayed over by the congregation and leaders. We were sent out by them. We left the next day to Tijuana where we would fly to Oaxaca.

The following is a journal of this first missionary journey to Oaxaca.

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<sup>52</sup> Acts 13:2-3 NLT

## **Journal**

### **Day One**

#### ***Flying***

Our team consisted of Ilene and I, Director of Instituto Bíblico Baja Ramon Ross, and students: Senen Ruiz, Beni Ruiz and Senen's daughter Luz Elena, (all Mixtecs from Oaxaca).

We all had our birth certificates, ID and passports ready at the AVOLAR counter in Tijuana. No one asked us for them. Bag searches were interesting too. Only backpacks that open on the sides are searched. Ilene and I had become accustomed to the more rigorous searches in the states.

Ramon flew on a plane for the first time in September to Oregon, so he was old hat at flying, but none of our Oaxacan brothers had been on a plane. The first hurdle was getting to the plane. Here we are in the Tijuana airport having to change gates and had to go down an escalator. Senen was not about to go down a moving stairway. I held onto Senen and we finally made it down. He let out a little whoop of success when they made it down. Our first challenge was met.

Then onto the plane we went. Senen was sure he would have a heart attack and he was dripping in perspiration and shaking from nervousness. He put his arms forward to brace himself on the seat in front of him with his head tucked between his arms. Beni and Luz Elena were a little calmer on the outside but not on the inside. Senen could not look out the windows as we took off. But as we climbed higher and higher the clouds became a

fascination and he had to look out. The clouds were white puffy, soft pillows. Luz Elena said later with tears in her eyes, "I began to think of the day when Jesus would return and we will meet Him in clouds like these."

“After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ They Said. ‘Why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go,’ ”<sup>53</sup>

### ***Oaxaca City***

We landed first in Guadalajara and let off most of the passengers and then on we went to Oaxaca City. The airport was the size of the airport in Redmond, Oregon, not very big. There are about five hundred thousand people in Oaxaca City...a pretty modern city, but with the old colonial style buildings and narrow streets with no space between small rooms and businesses. Everything is green, green, green. We had arrived at the end of rainy season.

In our planning for this trip we had asked about housing from several sources and found that hospitality housing was not available but a hotel was recommended for us to use near the *zócalo* or main plaza of Oaxaca. If any of you have heard of the sit-ins and uprisings of teachers in Oaxaca in the spring of 2007 it happened there in the *zócalo* one block from our hotel. Now, all was quiet.

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<sup>53</sup> Acts 1:9-11 NLT

We wandered among the tiny shops and restaurants in the zócalo. It is a park-like setting with mariachi bands and Central American musical groups playing for the delight of all. Artisan vendors flocked to Ilene. I think Ilene has a face that invites vendors.

We tasted our first *chapulines*, (cha-poo-lean-ace) grasshoppers. Not bad. We brought a small bag of chapulines to bring home to the U.S. for anyone who wants to try them. They are really tiny grasshoppers, toasted, salty and have some kind of spice on them.

## **Day Two**

### ***Eleazar (Ellie) Quesada and family***

Years ago I taught and coached at Salem Academy High School in Salem, Oregon. There I had a junior high student named Ellie Quesada. His parents were precious Christians and his dad worked as the maintenance director at Salem Academy. Ellie had been one of my favorite players and students. We had learned recently that Ellie and his family are missionaries in Oaxaca. We planned to make contact with them.

So that first evening I called Ellie. I was so excited when Ellie said he wanted to come pick us up in his van and take us to Mitla, the small town where he and his family live. We had planned to go to Mitla to interview linguists from S.I.L. Ellie married a lovely lady from Canada and they have eight children. Lila has written a book we recommend to all, *Diving Off the Pedestal, Demystifying the Full-Time Ministry Mystique*.<sup>54</sup> Their two oldest sons are pursuing their higher education in the states and

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<sup>54</sup> Lila Joy Quezada, *Diving Off the Pedestal: Demystifying the Full-Time Ministry Mystique* (Long Wood, Florida: Xulon Press, 2006)

the youngest child is four years old. He would come in the morning and take us to a good breakfast restaurant.

The men crowded into our little room with two double beds and Luz and Ilene into their tiny room with one double bed. It was hot and stuffy. There were no windows, no ventilation in our room. We were glad for morning. Downstairs we all met Ellie, and then Ellie and I didn't stop talking for hours.

Then Ellie said, "You know, I have some down time when I won't be quite so busy in the studio. Can I go with you to Chalcatongo and we can use my van?" Little did we know the blessing this would be for our team. I cannot imagine what our trip would have been like if we had not had Ellie and his van to cart us from rancho to rancho. Then he said, "I didn't know you needed a place to stay or you could have stayed in our hospitality house, would you like to stay there?" We all were thrilled about that. This provision was special to the Mixtec brothers. They had seen God's direct hand in caring for us both with transportation and a hospitality house.

### ***Mitla***

Mitla is one hour east of Oaxaca City. S.I.L. translators have had a center located in Mitla for several decades. I arranged to go there and interview missionaries for my doctorate dissertation. We also hoped to network with missionaries who work in the area where Senen and Beni are from. Our desire was to introduce them to people who could help them in time of need if they were to return to their ranchos.

So for that entire day we interviewed and taped missionaries, some of whom have been working and living in Oaxaca for decades, translating the New Testament into the indigenous languages. (These interviews are covered in chapters four and five.)

Twelve years ago, Jim Loker, Ellie's friend and co-worker, saw the gap between the availability of the Scriptures in written form and the ability of the indigenous peoples to access them. Jim came to Oaxaca and pioneered a recording ministry here. Ellie joined Jim six years ago with Missionary Ventures International. Together they work hand in hand with S.I.L. making the written word available in audio format. (Cassettes, MP3, CDs, Mega Voice and dubbing the Jesus film into the languages of Oaxaca.) Of the nearly three hundred languages in Mexico, there are one hundred twenty or so New Testament translated in written form in Mexico. Uniquely, there are one hundred twenty different languages in the state of Oaxaca and only twenty have been translated and taped.

Ellie and Jim have the challenge of finding readers. Readers are people who can read their own language with at least a minimum degree of fluency and who then can dedicate time to be in Mitla to record the Word for their own people.

Ellie and Jim have taken written New Testaments from the storage rooms and transformed them into the spoken Word. Many are hearing the Word of God ten to twenty or more years after it was written for the first time.

We enjoyed the hospitality of the Quesada family for dinner in the evening and returned to the hospitality house to rest for the next day's journey to Tlaxiaco, the county seat.

## **Day Three**

### ***Tlaxiaco***

Government business is done at the county seat. Tlaxiaco has banks and the outlying villages do not have banks and must go to the county seat for any banking needs.

Tlaxiaco also has the largest of the weekly markets in the county. The outlying villages around the major towns of a county are called pueblos and satellite smaller villages around the larger villages are called ranchos. Once a week the people from the ranchos come down from the mountain, to sell their pigs, sheep and goats or products for money to buy their weekly food supply.

Oaxaca City sits in the mountains about five thousand feet altitude. As we left the more populated area the highway changed to a narrow poorly maintained road. The scenery is spectacular. Tiny ranchos are identified by a large crumbling antique Catholic church located in the center. Some date back to the 1700's.

The road winds upward through the center of the little ranchos one to three kilometers apart. Each rancho presented our driver with the challenge of identifying numerous topes (toe-pays) or speed bump before crashing into them. As navigator I was given the look-out-for-tope job.

We arrived on market day in Tlaxiaco. Tlaxiaco altitude is around six thousand feet. We had arranged to stay the night with Alejandro Rodriguez and his family, a missionary from Mexico City. Various churches send young Mexican men and women who desire to work as missionaries among the indigenous peoples to Alex and his wife. They put these candidates through a nine month course in preparing them for this ministry. Then

they place these men and women in villages to proclaim the Gospel. On market days Alex and Shyra sell diapers and toilet paper in the market. By being merchants they take on an acceptable role in society and it gives them a platform to contact people from villages that attend those markets.

Here in Tlaxiaco we also interviewed a number of missionaries who work in or out of Tlaxiaco. We had much to consider as we went to bed that night. Tomorrow we would be in Chalcatongo.

#### **Day Four**

##### ***Chalcatongo***

We had interviewed a number of missionaries for their insight on problems that indigenous believers might face when returning to their home villages to testify about their changed lives in Christ. All discussed the Mixteca social leveling devices and social responsibilities in the ranchos as being the main obstacles. (They will be discussed more extensively in Chapters Four and Five.)

Now we were headed to our destination...Chalcatongo. Senen, Beni and Luz Elena had graciously gone along with our side trips to Mitla and Tlaxiaco and we could feel their angst that we had not yet arrived in Chalcatongo. The paved road from Tlaxiaco is in poor condition with potholes here and there; a washed out bridge with a temporary creek crossing that doesn't look like anyone has worked on for a while; narrow curving road through a beautiful landscape of massive rocks formations to pine timbers and lush valley floors. The fifty kilometer trip took two hours.

The Chalcatongo welcome sign hanging above the road had weathered so you could barely read it. Chalcatongo proudly displays the population to be 15,000 residents. Now whether or not that includes the satellite ranchos we don't know.

Ellie brought along an Oaxacan districts (*distritos*) manual<sup>55</sup> that told us the population numbers in the ranchos we would visit: Plan de Ayala, 202; Chapultepec, 758; and La Paz, 82.

### ***Plan de Ayala***

We decided to visit Beni's village first since Senen's sister also lived there. The van began to climb a steep one lane rocky road toward Plan de Ayala. As we went up the mountain we saw a truck parked in the road and a number of people working on the road. (See photo in appendix)

Beni investigated and returned with the announcement that the people of Plan de Ayala were doing *tequio* (Take-ee-oh) and repairing some of the major holes in the road. He was asked if he would like to participate in the tequio (since we wanted to use the road). Tequio is physical work responsibilities that officials of the village require of each member of the community. (Tequio is covered in detail in Chapter Four.)

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<sup>55</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía y Informática, *Oaxaca Distritos, Red de Caminos y Datos Estadísticos de Población y Vivienda* (Oaxaca, Oaxaca 2000) , Mapa 25 p. 1.

Senen's sister and other relatives and Beni's father were working there that day. Many good comments were made to the men by the people. But the Americans...well ... skepticism...why are they here?

### ***Margarita's mountain***

We headed back up towards Plan de Ayala after about two hours. Senen met his sister and we followed them in the van as far as the road went. It stopped in a beautiful little valley. A little trail led us further upward through wildflowers and grasses, past grazing sheep and donkeys, an old log house...then straight up to Margarita's home. As we began the ascent the altitude hit us like a rock in the chest. As we ascended we would take a step and rest, take a step and rest. When we reached the home and the altitude was about eight thousand eight hundred feet. (See photo in appendix)

We greeted all of the Margarita's family. She wanted to know why Senen brought the Americans. Were they here to see *the cave*? No, Senen said, they are my friends. They want to know our rancho and our family. They come from Papalote. She wasn't convinced. Here is the story why:

Legend has it that two Americans came to Plan de Ayala years ago saying that they were linguists but that wasn't true. They came to find *the cave*. Someone took them to the cave and they took the gold (or artifacts of their indigenous ancestors). They also drove blue trucks. Americans are seen with great suspicion because of this past event.

Senen and Luz Elena decided to stay in the house with his sister and family. They slept on plywood bed frames and battled fleas each night. The dirt floor added to the problem of chickens and turkeys running in and out of the house. The act of humbling themselves to spend their nights at Margarita's house softened her heart more than anything else that was done during the stay to reach out to her. The sister's heart was touched because she knew they were suffering because they loved her and wanted to show their love. We gave them our sleeping bags so they could close them as tightly as possible to keep out the fleas. Ramon gave them some bug spray.

Luz Elena and Senen spent their evenings sharing their faith with his family. Margarita's husband and son were very open. The thirteen year old nephew listened intently and said he wanted to know more. Ilene gave Senen her Spanish Bible, *Biblia Para Todos, Lenguaje Actual* (an easy to read version) to give his nephew and brother-in-law. Margarita and one of her daughters were more cold and indifferent. But toward the end of Senen's stay she told him, "I am almost convinced. But I will wait until you return to make a decision."

### ***Beni's Family***

Down the mountain and into the valley and back up the next mountain again lives Beni's mom and dad. Beni is the eldest son and the apple of their eyes. Now they on the other hand thought that the Americans he brought were o.k. We gave Beni's parents vitamins and tea, and little soaps and shampoos. The house is nestled into the side of the mountain

with a corn field (*milpa*) on one side, with pigs rooting, the donkey tied up and turkeys and chickens running amuck. They have two bulls tended in another field.

Bulls are used to pull their handmade rustic oak plow. (See photo in appendix) When a couple grows too old to do their own plowing they hire it out at fifteen dollars a day.

Bulls and plows are only needed on the sides of the mountains because of the big rocks.

Tractors are used in the valley floor to till the earth.

We could only spend a few minutes with them because they had to leave for another village. There they sell backpacks and other school supplies on the weekends to make a bit of change for their personal needs. We took photos as we had done with Senen's family. Beni stayed behind. We would see him later.

After this very long day we needed rest. We (Ilene and I, Ramon and Ellie) went off to find a hotel in Chalcatongo. We found a bargain...eighteen dollars per night not bad either...except...no toilet bowl seats...never quite got used to it.

## **Day Five**

### ***The Cave***

Over the next week we would ascend Margarita's Mountain trail two more times. The third time was just about a breeze. Beni was like a mountain goat and Senen also didn't do too badly going up the mountains.

This day was Sunday and after a morning service together at Margarita's we hiked up the mountain behind her home to see Senen's *milpa* property for planting. We climbed even higher.... actually we went to the top of the mountain! Beni wanted to know if we wanted to see where *the cave* is located. Ilene and I decided we had better not even go near where it could be seen. Good thing. Margarita asked if we had gone to *the cave* when we returned. The others in our party went to a lookout point where they could see the cave from a distance. They took a telephoto picture with our digital camera from across a canyon. (See photo in appendix)

## **Day Six**

### ***Tio and Tia***

We were to meet Senen, Beni and Luz Elena at 9:00 am in Chapultepec. No one was there. 10 am...we are napping. 11 am. Here comes Senen and Luz. No Beni. Senen and Luz had gone to buy the sheep that was to be roasted for our big family fiesta. The sheep did not cooperate. He knew his days were over. They had to shove and pull and kick and haul him all the way up Margarita's mountain and then since they had decided to be all brave and strong...they walked down the mountain, up another mountain and down that mountain to meet us in the valley. Guess who was exhausted?

From there we decided to drive to the end of the paved road...about a half an hour away. The road gradually descended about two thousand five hundred feet. It was amazing. We entered the tropics! Banana trees, orange trees, lemon trees, tropical flowers...an absolutely beautiful little town called Yosondua. It is very old. There are many, many

old log houses and of course the ever present massive ancient Catholic church in the middle of town.

Then back up to Chapultepec to meet Senen's uncle and auntie. Senen's parents died many years ago. Tio Abundio and Tia Marta live in the Ruiz family home, where four generations have been born. Senen was born in that house.

Of course the road does not reach their house but a nice little trail up the mountain does. Now this is a delightful little couple. We loved with them right away. Tia has the cutest smile with no front teeth. Tio acts grumpy but you can tell he has a good heart. Their grandson lives with them. When we got there, Senen's youngest little sister was there. She had come to try and fix her birth certificate irregularities. She rarely comes to Chalcatongo as she lives on a dirt road some three hours northwest of Yosondua. Travelers come by taxi van.

There was a teary reunion. We were welcomed like old friends. Plastic chairs were brought out from the little one room house and set up on the porch. We sat awed by the view. Senen and family caught up on news and Tia brought out tamales, made fresh that morning to celebrate Senen's sister arriving. No one knew that Senen and Luz Elena were coming.

Tio and Tia don't get out much anymore. He is seventy three and she is seventy years old. They hire their *milpa* plowed. But they do have to go for firewood. All cooking is

done with firewood. They walk the mountains and pick up dried branches and sticks and pile them on their burro.

We heard from all the families how poor they were. How sad for them to think that.

Because here they are in the most beautiful of places, complete subsistence living, lacking for very little and yet they think they are poor. We never saw a hungry child or person while there. All have food. Everyone has his own land. Children receive their share of land from family. It is handed down generation after generation.

They were poor in the sense that they do not have a lot of purchasing power...yes, and then they would be considered poor. Many live with only a dirt floor, few have vehicles, few have indoor plumbing or bathrooms, and luxuries such as propane use for a stove or extra electricity for a refrigerator is not within the reach of many families.

But internet has arrived in Chalcatongo, television has arrived and young people think they are poor because of the riches they see in the outside world. They see the material goods of the United States and measure their standard of living from what they see on television. The young leave for the United States to work for more money. Senen and Luz stood and counted the empty abandoned houses near their home...twenty. Elderly parents are left behind. The old way of life is changing. But some have become disenchanted from the outside world and are returning home. New beginnings of brick houses are seen dotting the landscape. This is one generation beginning to return.

### ***Senen's House***

A stone's throw above Tio and Tia's home is Senen's house. He built it nearly twenty years ago and lived there several months before leaving with Bernadita to find work in the Baja. It was made of hand sawn timbers and quite handsome. It has a dirt floor, and light can be seen between the boards. Senen realized that this house was not a place he could bring his wife and family to when they return. There is much work to do.

We gathered and dedicated this house to the Lord and the work that the Lord would do through Senen and his family and Beni and his family in the coming years.

Tia and Tio were invited to come to the family fiesta which was the next day. They would climb up fifteen hundred feet more in altitude to Plan de Ayala. They decided to take advantage of the trip and bring the burro home packed with firewood.

### **Day Seven**

#### ***Family Fiesta***

It is expected of returning family to bring gifts. Senen and Beni agreed that the very best gift to bring home would be to pay for a meal of roasted goat or sheep for the families. Yesterday Senen and Luz Elena purchased the sheep. They were happy to go dig up the ornery sheep today that was nicely ready to eat. A hole is dug in the ground and hot rocks placed in the bottom. Magavi leaves (a large cacti frond) are placed over the hot rocks and a corn preparation placed on the leaves. The sheep is next, more corn, and urns

of *mole* to the side. All is covered again with magavi leaves, then plastic then dirt. This bakes for sixteen hours.

Beni's family, Tia and Tio, our group and Margarita's family joined together at Margarita's Mountain home for the fiesta. I have to say it was delicious and very filling too. We drank warm pop or water...your choice.

As we sat talking with Tio, he said out of the blue, "Ten years ago or so (actually it was many more) some Americans were living in the next village over, San Miguel el Grande, and made a book in the Mixteca Alta language. They were good people."

Ellie heard that and said, "Tio, do you know that I have that book, and it is the Holy Scripture. Today we have with us on audio tape one of the books of the Holy Scripture, the book of Mark. Would you like to listen and see if you can understand it?"<sup>56</sup> Yes, Tio wanted to hear it.

So a tape recorder was found and the audio cassette of the book of Mark began to play. Tio sat transfixed, not moving or talking. Then he said, quietly, "That is talking about the Jesus of old." Throughout the dinner he and anyone else who could understand, heard the Word of God in their own language.

### ***Historical Moment***

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<sup>56</sup>Ellie Quezada, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 24 September, audio tape. Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico.

That day, the Word of God was heard for the first time by the village next door to where the New Testament had been translated many years before. The wonderful part is that they could understand what was being said though the language is a little different. It was an historic moment for us. Ellie told us later that he would try to locate someone who could read or be taught to read that particular language written fifty-six years earlier by Ken Pike. The rest of the New Testament could be audio recorded for these people in Chalcatongo. As I pondered, I thought to myself wouldn't Ken Pike have enjoyed this today?

Copies of the audio book of Mark were given to the families in attendance in the San Miguel el Grande dialect. We also gave them audio copies of the Spanish New Testament.

We gave everyone a special gift packet of vitamins and teas and medicines soaps, toothbrushes etc. Everyone was pleased. Then we gave them all a few pictures we had taken in their homes the day before. This was a hit.

We kind of dragged ourselves down the hill and fell into bed. Ramon wasn't feeling so well. He had eaten one too many green pears. We were looking forward to our trip to see Beni's wife's parents in the morning.

## **Day Eight**

### ***La Paz***

We woke up to a chilly foggy morning in Chalcatongo. Beni would be meeting us at our hotel at 9 am. We planned to visit his parents-in-law in La Paz, another rancho up in the mountains above Chalcatongo. It was only 8 am and a good hot cup of *atole* (ah-toe-lee) sounded good. *Atole* is kind of a generic name for hot drinks. There is a really tasty hot rice water drink that has sugar and cinnamon in it and then there is one that is a lot like hot chocolate but with corn *masa* flour in it for a thickener. Chocolate sounded good for this morning. The street vendor has her little wood fire going in a stove and the hot drinks are boiling in a clay pot on the side. We paid our five pesos and continued our walk to 'our restaurant'. I think it may be the only restaurant open in downtown Chalcatongo in the morning. We came several times when they weren't open yet.

No menus...just a few choices...scrambled eggs and ham, scrambled eggs and chorizo, or scrambled eggs and hot dogs with black beans and tortillas on the side. The owners are nice, the food is warm and we can sit indoors at the little white plastic tables in our little white plastic chairs and have devotions together. Coffee is the best...Instant Nescafe! Usually the water was lukewarm but they are kind and will put it in the micro for us. If you order Nescafe you get sweet bread to go with it. It was kind of dry and tasteless, but a nice addition to the menu. We come here sometimes for dinner...same menu, but one time they offered a nice stew and one chicken leg with *mole* (moh-lay).

We tried to talk the owners into making hash browns. But they had never heard of them and I think a little hesitant to make something they had never seen. Variety isn't a common word in Chalcatongo I don't think.

At 9 a.m. we met up with Beni and hopped into the van and headed for La Paz. Just out of Chalcatongo we took a dirt road, two cars can pass on this road and fairly well maintained, straight up again. Ellie Quesada had brought along his map book of the municipalities of the state of Oaxaca<sup>57</sup>, chocked full of great information regarding the altitudes, the distances, the populations, maps and geographical information that thrilled my heart. I love this kind of stuff.

And then we realized we were really high in the air, when we were in the clouds. I was like a kid in a candy store figuring out the altitude in feet, (9,136 feet). It brought back the good memories as a geography teacher. We got out and snapped pictures of us in the clouds. La Paz as far as I could figure from the manual, is the second highest village in Oaxaca.

Beni told us that our visit would be a surprise for his *suegros* (sway-groz) or parents-in-law because the town phone hasn't worked for some time now (at least six months).

There is a town phone (when it works) but no homes have telephones. You call the town phone operator who relays your message to the family as to the time and the date you will call back. I think my mom said they had that kind of phone system when she was a young girl.

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<sup>57</sup>Oaxaca Distritos, Red de Caminos y Datos Estadísticos de Población y Vivienda, Mapa 25 p. 1

We were amazed at the scenery. The rainy season was at its end when we arrived so the countryside is lush with green and colorful with flowers and planted fields. *Milpas* are terraced on steep hillsides; cows look so strange standing at forty-five degree angle hillsides. It reminded us of photos that we have seen of the terraced rice fields of Japan and China.

We rounded a curve and saw Nati's birth home, and her mother walking up the trail to the house. Just before we left Papalote Nati had come and spent time talking with me. She is struggling because memories of abuse she received from both her father and brothers is now plaguing her conscious. For many years she has been able to suppress these memories, but now they are coming frequently and strongly. She is calling upon the power of the blood of Jesus Christ to free her from this torment.

Later, after we met with Nati's parents, Ilene had the opportunity to share with Beni how he could be a comfort and strength to Nati as she worked through this time in her life. He, with tears in his eyes said that he would do that. Both Nati and Beni desire for her parents to know the Lord.

### ***Nati's Parents***

You should have seen the shock and surprise on the faces of Antonio and Victoria. Then the delight of receiving visitors took over. They led us to their patio, a green grassy area in front of the sleeping quarters. I sat on a stump that was higher than the tiny handmade

wooden chairs brought out for us from the house. The chairs sit only two feet from the ground. Beni gave a report of his family and shared the gifts Nati sent to her mom.

We shared our gifts as well. Victoria told of how just this week she was bitten by a rattlesnake in the finger as she was tying up the oxen. She was very emotional as she recounted how she had to go to the hospital several days and that she was unable to reach any of the family in Papalote to tell them what happened. We believe that she had feared for her life.

She asked why no one had called for such a long time. Beni told her that the phone system in La Paz has not worked for a long time and that Nati has tried to call a number of times without success.

Victoria apologized that she was 'poor' and didn't have anything to offer us as guests. Then she brought out freshly cooked corn from her *milpa*. It was wonderful! No need for salt or butter...just pure corn.

Beni brought out the cassette tapes of the book of Mark in Mixteca Alta and they accepted them and said they would listen, although Victoria didn't think the cassette player worked.

Antonio wanted to talk about the *war*. We did not realize that the civil war that took place this summer had been between La Paz (population 82) and the town on the other

side of the hill from Antonio and Victoria, Santo Domingo (population 209). There has been a dispute over the boundary line between the two towns since the Spanish drew up the new lines two or three hundred years ago and these two villages go to war with guns periodically and someone ends up dead. That tends to calm things down for a while anyway.

This time it was the neighbor lady of Antonio and Victoria that died. No more than seven hundred meters from their home. According to Antonio “the men from Santo Domingo Huendio were hiding in the trees above our homes and started to shoot their guns. Epifania Ruiz and her mother-in-law, frightened, ran out of their house and up the road. Epifania was shot in the back and died later in the hospital.”<sup>58</sup> Antonio assured us that La Paz is a rancho of peace and the other village was the aggressors trying to get more land for their people.

We really don’t know the full story. Earlier this summer we heard through Allan Lee that there is a small church in Santo Domingo Huendio that asked for prayer for their village because of the village of La Paz was showing aggression toward their village.

There were about ten *Federales* (federal police) stationed in La Paz now to keep the peace. They looked terribly bored and were playing basketball in an outdoor court when we drove by. No arrests have been made. The government offered to mediate and bring

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<sup>58</sup> Antonio Jimenez Cortez, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 26 September 2007, audio tape. La Paz, Chalcatongo, Oaxaca, Mexico.

the two sides together in the town of Tlaxiaco, but neither party is willing to go to Tlaxiaco...so the conflict will go on.

Antonio and Victoria have one daughter that lives with them. We didn't meet her because she was shepherding the sheep that day. These folks need the Lord. The last time Nati visited her parents was four years ago. She said they were very open to hearing about God. She wants to return and visit them and has asked Ilene to go with her.

### **Day Nine**

#### ***Debriefing***

We left Chalcatongo for Oaxaca City the next morning. Senen, Luz Elena, and Beni shared their stories of how this trip had impacted them and their family contacts. Senen and Beni are certain that they have been called of the Lord to return to share the Gospel with their ranchos. We discussed what needs they would have in order to return.

On our way to Oaxaca we had the opportunity to stop at Monte Alban where there are ruins of pyramidal type altars constructed over centuries by the Mixteca and Zapoteco peoples who worked as slaves for the priests. None of our Oaxaquenians had heard of Monte Alban nor visited before. They were pretty excited to see it.

## **Day ten**

### ***A Day of Rest***

On the way back to Mitla in the guest house, we experienced a downpour. The rain just dumped from the sky. The streets were flooded to the middle of the tires in just a few minutes. It was great to see since it is so dry in the Baja. We had blessed times in devotions and debriefing before we left for Tijuana and Papalote. We had much to digest.

## **Day eleven**

### ***Home***

We flew home with veteran fliers. No more butterflies. Pure bravo! Now leadership must begin preparing these families for the coming move. Not only do these families need to prepare...but we and the church family will be seeing them leave. We love them deeply and it will be a different world without them. This year they will not only complete Bible school but need to go on deputation to churches in the conference of the Baja Norte.

We experienced the challenges they will face first hand. The following chapter will target these challenges.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Defining and understanding the challenges*

We have discussed, researched and determined that the following challenges will be the most predominant facing the Mixtec believers of Baja face as they prepare to return as Christ's ambassadors to their own villages in Oaxaca: 1) The Mixtec Way (cargo, tequio, coperación, ritual drinking of alcohol, spirit world; 2) Practical Challenges, (economics, housing, communication, church support).

#### **The Mixtec way**

The Mixtec way is a way of life completely without the presence of God. The Mixtec way is an indigenous culture evolved from the mixed influences of the spirit world; evangelism of the Spanish Catholic priests some five hundred years ago and their sustainable way of life in a harsh environment.

Our American constitution provides for separation of church and state but within the Mixtec culture there is no separation. Life is religion and religion is life. The indigenous refer to it as their way...their way to think, their way to act, and their way to live. In many ways the Mixtec way is secure, ordered and controlled in the sense that one always knows what is expected of him. But this security comes at a high price. Fear drives many actions or lack of action. Our friends Juan and Dominga invited their parents to come to their wedding in Baja California but the parents would not come. Dominga's mother said, "I have never left San Miguel Tilquiapin and I am afraid that if I do I will

die.”<sup>59</sup> Juan and Dominga are from the Zapotecan village of San Miguel Tilquiapan, but fear dominates all indigenous cultures.

A new fear is gripping the Mixtec way. The older generations (those in their 20’s and older) lived lives more secluded and powerless compared to this younger generation. The older generations are often uneducated beyond third grade if that. Parents were able to keep children home from school to be used as laborers.

The advent of television, internet, and cell phones has opened this closed world to influences beyond the control of the older generation. Their children are seeing and doing things they know nothing about, nor can even conceptualize. They don’t know how to respond, how to relate.

As our group visited Chalcatongo we observed and used several internet cafes. Television, CDs, and tape decks were seen everywhere. Youth were sitting in groups intently studying the internet; finishing school papers, and playing video games. Although Chalcatongo would not be considered a modern town, it was wired to the outside.

Another evidence of change was the conversation in the families about family members *alla*. Many of the young people have gone to the United States (illegal aliens) and returned from the outside with new customs and influences. Although all these changes may not be eternally for the good, it is opening the doors for change to happen spiritually.

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<sup>59</sup>Juan Santiago, interview by J. Ilene Nagle, June 2005, Candalaria, Baja California, Mexico.

This younger generation sees what they consider a world much wealthier than theirs. Young men and women leave home and head for the United States to work and make money. When they leave they promise to send back money to the parents. The parents we talked with in Chalcatongo were sad and distressed. Beni's parents have five children. Only one sister lives in the area. Two of Beni's brothers live in the United States (illegal aliens); one brother and Beni live in Baja California. Years pass before they see their sons.

Senen's aunt and uncle have a son that lives in the area, and several sons and daughters living in the United States (all illegal aliens). One son is in prison.

It is yet to be seen if in the ranchos of Plan de Ayala and Chapultepec the older generations are more open to influences from the outside or if they are going to fight to keep the Mixtec way intact. Influences from the outside include religious changes in the lives of the children who are returning. Influences from the outside include returning children not accepting primitive living conditions. Margarita told Senen that she was so grateful that he stayed in her home several days. Her daughter had returned from the United States and would only stay a few hours and then found a hotel room.

The daughter had become accustomed to mattresses rather than a piece of plywood or a mat on the floor. She also knew that she would have to battle the fleas, chickens and turkeys, bathe in cold water, use an outhouse, stand most of the time or sit on tiny short

chairs. More than not wanting to return to the old way of life, Margarita felt she was saying she no longer accepted them.

So what is this Mixtec way?

The phrase *the Mixtec way* is used by Carol Zylstra to explain the customs and religion of the Mixtec peoples. This Mixtec way is a challenge for Christians that return because of the contrasting view of their new biblical values. Group cooperation and loyalty is of utmost importance in holding to the Mixtec way. “The Mixtec way consists of all the prescribed actions within the group”<sup>60</sup>

The Mixtec way from my study and observation includes these eight major prescribed actions: the value of physical work; community led cooperation involving *cargo*, *cooperación* and *tequio* used as social and economic leveling devices; planting of crops, when, where, and what kind; a strong hierarchy of relationships; alcohol and drunkenness as part of fiesta rituals; doing envy as an accepted and expected defense strategy to keep the field level; religious fiestas; and the belief that the spirit world controls human lives.

The value of physical labor is of utmost importance in this Mixtec culture. Pastors who return must be workers in the community. Alejandro is a Mexican national who came to Oaxaca to plant churches. This is his insight on work.

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<sup>60</sup> Carol Zylstra, 5.

“Your testimony is foundational. Value in the village is physical work, with shovel, plow, wood and burros. My work is administrative with computers and teaching. My work to them has no value and I am considered lazy. In other words, to work in an office is not work. The people say to me, ‘Aye, Alejandro, *puro pasear*’...or ‘all you do Alejandro is drive around.’ I often leave here to drive to the villages at 5 am and return home at 5 pm. But they don’t see the work I do as having value so they call it pure vacation. The people want to know what kind of work you do. Any kind of activity that is done other than physical work is considered laziness.”<sup>61</sup>

There was a sense of excitement among Senen and Beni’s extended family in Chalcatongo that they would return the following year, but not because they would bring the Gospel. Since the Mixtec way classifies things according to values like good and bad, or valued and not valued, Senen and Beni’s return is seen as a benefit to the family and community. “An example of this is the Mixtec definition of a good person: one who is not stingy but generous and freely shares what he or she has with others. Generosity is the cardinal virtue.”<sup>62</sup>

This scenario also provides a dilemma. Since there is limited good, it is acceptable to do envy, therefore the Mixtec way says the things that Senen and Beni have gained when they were gone need to be shared. Mixtecs can better themselves by developing relationships with those outside the closed system. Those that have more power, prestige and wealth are sought out. Since Senen and Beni are coming from the outside they are

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<sup>61</sup>Alejandro Rodriguez, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 21 September 2007, interview taped, Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, Mexico.

<sup>62</sup>Carol Zylstra, 5.

seen as wealthy. Senen and Beni's generosity or leveling of their perceived wealth as good persons is inevitable.

### ***Cargo***

In all villages individuals have social responsibilities: *cargo*, *coperación*, and *tequio*. These are sometimes discussed collectively as *cargo* by the brothers and Mexican missionaries. As the terms were examined more closely there is a distinction between them. For the purpose of this study each one will be discussed.

In Chapter two Kearney mentioned five propositions that are basic to southern Mexican indigenous culture, the last being, "hard work and suffering are inevitable consequences of life."<sup>63</sup> This hard work and suffering is associated with responsibility in the community. *Cargo* is a position in the community of holding an office for one year or more. The office could be of a minor level or the mayordomo which is a leader of the village. Evon Z. Vogt states that in 1990 in the Chiapas village of Zinacantecos there were sixty-one *cargo* positions.<sup>64</sup> The number of positions can vary from village to village. These positions received no pay and are held only by men. "Anyone with a *cargo* is expected to put all of his time into the *cargo* before anything else (planting his

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<sup>63</sup>Kearney, 45.

<sup>64</sup> Evon Z Vogt, *The Zinacantecos of Mexico: A Modern Maya Way of Life* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003). (Note: this is a case study for Stanford University, General editors, George and Louise Spindler)

field, harvesting his crops, or spending time in the church). All of aspects of this way of life affect the (evangelical) church and the ability to evangelize.”<sup>65</sup>

This responsibility is accepted as “economic liabilities, literally and figuratively thought of as burdens diabolically inflicted on the individual by those who elect him.”<sup>66</sup> This concept would fit into the idea of doing envy which is a part of keeping limited good in check.

“*Cargo* is also a social leveling device. If a man remains in a village all of his life he will be chosen at some point to become the *mayordomo* of the village. This *cargo* can be financially huge and a family can be reduced to nothing.<sup>67</sup> A *mayordomo* can be (he may have other people on his committee to help with the sources for these events) financially responsible for civil fiestas, and administration of the town during his tenure...all fiestas and celebrations include a lot of drinking and drunkenness.”<sup>68</sup> With these burdens one can understand the elevated sense of leadership the *mayordomo* has in the village and the possibilities, but at the same time the impossible position this puts Christians as they return with different values.

One’s testimony is paramount and it can lead to persecution. But there are many feasible areas in the community in which you can participate, and in these, a Christian can be a witness.

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<sup>65</sup>Alejandro Rodriguez, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 21 September 2007, interview taped, Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, Mexico.

<sup>66</sup>Michael Kearney, 91.

<sup>67</sup>Beverly Chinas, 63.

<sup>68</sup>Allan Lee, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 25 May 2007, interview taped, San Quintin Baja, Mexico.

*Cargo* may require paying for any expenses that occur out of pocket. If the office conflicts with religious views this could bring on persecution or even prison. In an interview with Mexican missionary Alejandro Rodriguez working as a church planter in Tlaxiaco he shared an incident of living in a village and his cargo responsible. “In 2001, I was asked to hold the office of cleaner of the Catholic Church. I told them that I would do any other job but would not clean the Catholic Church.”<sup>69</sup> Later Alejandro was put in jail and plans were made to hang him in three days. Only through the intervention of the government was he released. He continued living in the village for two more years.

Alejandro further shares his concern about people who return and their necessity to reintegrate. “The greatest obstacle that I see is that when people leave here they become accustomed to another way of living and are not accustomed to *cargos*... You have gone north so they think you are rich. You will be expected to do things that you cannot do as a Christian.”<sup>70</sup>

### ***Tequio***

*Tequio* (Take-ee-oh) involves working for the community on projects and service related jobs on a voluntary bases. *Tequio* is a social responsibility involving mainly physical work. “The official in charge of *tequio* will come to your house and tell you that today you are to do a specific job. It doesn’t matter if you had other plans. You are expected to

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<sup>69</sup> Alejandro Rodriguez, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 21 September 2007, interview taped, Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, Mexico.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., taped.

do your *tequio* which can be as much as seventy days each year in some villages.”<sup>71</sup>

Records are kept of those completing their *tequio*. Those not cooperating may be put in the local jail to make an example of the lazy neighbor.

In preparation for the September 2007 mission trip the brothers shared about *tequio* not realizing that we would experience true *tequio*. As we travel out of Chalcatongo toward Plan de Ayala we began to gain elevation as the gravel road ascended up the mountain. After ten minutes of travel we noticed a number of people working on the road with picks and shovels.

The people of Plan de Ayala were doing *tequio* and repairing some of the major holes in the road. We were asked to participate in the *tequio* with them if we wanted to pass on the road since this was the communities’ road. Beni, Senen and Ramon all went to help. One official came to our van and asked for money to buy soda as our part, but we gave him a case of water instead and he was pleased.

This cooperation with the *tequio* of Plan de Ayala turned out to be a door opening for Beni and Senen in that village. The people were thrilled that they would help with the physical labor of *tequio* when the men had been gone for so many years.

Beni shares with us the outcome of the cooperation in *tequio*. “Those who knew me when I lived here invited me to participate in the work at that time, and they received us with much pleasure. There won’t be a problem in you (referring to Don, Ilene, and

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., taped.

Ramon) returning to Plan de Ayala because you have shown a spirit of cooperation and the people are satisfied and pleased. There will not be any problem with you returning.”<sup>72</sup>

The commitment to tequio in the community is a challenge for the brothers in several ways. First, they must readjust to the altitude again (8000 to 9000 ft above sea level); secondly they need to submit to the authorities and time commitment tequio demands; lastly they have to accept this task with a willing heart, even though they may be persecuted because they are evangelicals.

### ***Cooperación***

*Cooperación* – (co-pear-Ah-see-ohn) is a monetary contribution determined by the officials that each member of the community is required to give for school needs, building projects, bridge maintenance, etc.

In one preparatory meeting in May 2007 Senen shares about coperación. “Each man born into a village is responsible all his life for the costs of community development like bridges, schools, plazas for fiestas, fountains, etc. If a man leaves the village to live in another area, he is still responsible to cooperate and donate toward community projects that occurred during his absence.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Beni Ruiz, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 22 September 2007, interview taped, Plan de Ayala, Oaxaca, Mexico.

<sup>73</sup> Senen Ruiz, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 20 May 2007, interview taped, Papalote, Baja Norte, Mexico.

Senen tells us what the best scenario would be when he returns after twenty years absence. “Should a man return to his village he will immediately upon entering be responsible to give ‘his cooperative part for community development if he did not contribute during his absence.”<sup>74</sup>

Part of the cost of our trip was raised to pay *cooperación* for Beni and Senen. They felt it was better to go to the village with a determined amount of funds to be offered than to wait and have the officials come to you and tell you how much you owe.

Both Beni and Senen decided that one thousand *pesos* (about one hundred American dollars) would be a good *cooperación*. And they were right. The town officials were very pleased and welcomed the idea of them returning to live the next year.

Senen reported to the team the following when he returned from the *municipio*. “I have just returned from giving my co-operation to the municipal government to help with the needs that occurred during the 20 years when I was not here. I gave them \$700 pesos for the school needs and \$300 pesos for the bridge. The people were very pleased and happy and I was very pleased to be able to participate in our custom here.”<sup>75</sup>

We had some candy left over from gift giving and sent it with Beni when he paid his *Cooperación* at his village, to give to the school teacher. She was thrilled. Then she asked Beni if there was any way he could help give the children little gifts on Children’s

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., taped.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., taped.

Day in April. He said he would try to see what could be done. It may open one more door for our future missionaries.

This concept of community cooperation in itself seems reasonable, but the problem with returning Christians is that cargo, tequio, and financial cooperation may be contradictory to their new Biblical standards. A good example is the purchase of alcohol for a religious fiesta. Another problem may stem from the amount financial cooperation expected. It may be so great that it could place an undue economic burden on the contributor. Those who return to the village after absence for sometime, especially if they have been gone *alla*, are viewed as ones who have more and therefore should contribute more to the community to a limit good society.

### ***Drinking***

Much has been written about the drinking patterns of the southern Mexico indigenous peoples. Kearney calls the village of Ixtepeji an “‘alcohol culture’...institutionalized social patterns compelling reluctant individuals to drink.”<sup>76</sup> In most Oaxacan cultures drinking alcohol and drunkenness are part of the ritual of the fiesta.

The following is a testimony of a village musician and his induction to drink. “In San Andres there is a custom to have fiestas. All the saints are gods, they say. They choose the chief *mayordomo*, and his committee (who pays for it all). Then they have a fiesta. There are also musicians in the town and they get together and play at the fiesta. All the people start to drink. They drink *barrendi*, they drink beer, they smoke cigarettes, they

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<sup>76</sup> Michael Kearney, 96.

get drunk, and they dance...because I was a musician I went to the fiesta. They gave me *barrendi* to drink, and beer to drink. And I started to get drunk. The next day I went around drinking, because I was being killed by my hangover.”<sup>77</sup>

In folk beliefs about drinking there are levels an individual goes through in the process of changing ones personality. They described this way: stage one - monkey blood, opens his confidence; stage two – lion blood, swallows of valor, becoming more belligerent and argumentative; and then stage three – pig blood, staggers and loses control.<sup>78</sup> These drink patterns are normally associated with fiestas but of course many participants may be lured in to alcoholism since drunkenness is the desired end of drinking in these events.

There may be a great challenge in drinking for the returning Christian. In Oaxaca, as well as much of Latin America the term evangelical refers to the non-Catholic, protestant denominations (Pentecostal, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptist, Congregationalist, Adventists, etc.) that hold the Bible to be the main source of authority for the church. As a missionary and church planter, Senen and Beni will be defined as evangelicals. This information is important in understanding the relationship of evangelicals to drinking.

In 2000, seventy evangelical families from the state of Chiapas were expelled from their village with a Roman Catholic majority. The evangelicals were seen as not participating in the traditions of the village. “The evangelicals are being harassed and threatened ... children are not allowed to attend school and the adults cannot go to their jobs. It appears

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<sup>77</sup> John Williams and Judy Williams, 6.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Kearney, 96.

to be a last-ditch effort by traditionalists to try and control evangelicals to keep them out”<sup>79</sup> So what is the issue with these traditionalists?

Although the objections are described in religious terms (like they are enemies of God; they are agents of the Devil; they say the priest lies; they are against the church, etc.), the Catholic majority oppositions comes when “upon conversion, people stop drinking, and therefore stop participating in the various community and individually sponsored fiestas. A significant number of non-participants are thus viewed as a direct threat to the most anticipated events of the otherwise monotonous yearly cycle.”<sup>80</sup> Kearney goes on to say that the village now views the events as poor fiestas because they are divided by religion

In 2005, the expulsions continue in several states in Mexico although government intervention has reduced numbers. More indigenous people are becoming Christians and with the increasing number of converts, persecution has also come. But is the persecution because of religion? “Generally such violence in Mexico is prompted less by religion than by money. Persecutors often aim to protect the liquor-store profit of local caciques or political bosses. Because converts quit buying alcohol, mass conversion would bankrupt the caciques.”<sup>81</sup> Other than expulsion, persecution can also come in the forms of economic sanctions, gossip, and ostracism.

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<sup>79</sup> Kenneth D. MacHarg, “Healing the violence,” *Christianity Today* 44 (2000) : 30.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Kearney, 107.

<sup>81</sup> Deann Alford. “Mobs expel 80 Christians: growing number of evangelicals threatens liquor profits.” *Christianity Today* 49 (2005) : 22.

In the San Quintin Valley there are seven active rehab centers; one has over three hundred clients. Alcoholism and drug abuse are a major problem in the valley. Before Senen received Christ as his Savior and made Him Lord of his life he had problems with alcohol. When we visited his village, Chapultepec, he saw an old friend in passing. The concluding words of the conversation by his friend were, “come by and we will drink together.” Senen realizes the challenge of alcohol and the pressure to drinking when he returns.

The feedback from many of the missionaries was somewhat discouraging with regard to the success rate of returning new converts especially in the area of drinking. Most all of the returning Christians have fallen spiritually and their testimony had been destroyed because of the strong influence to conform in the village customs. “There was an instance when far into a fiesta, a drunken mob mentality developed, and drunken authorities physically held down a Christian, opened his mouth and forced him to drink beer until he was drunk. In this instance the Christian fell and didn’t return to Christ way”<sup>82</sup>

### ***Spirit World***

Another challenge the brothers will face is the spirit world of the Mixtec people. The apostle Paul speaks of this world in Ephesians 6:12, “For we are not fighting against

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<sup>82</sup> Danny Klein, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 20 September 2007, audio tape. Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, Mexico.

people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms.”<sup>83</sup> These rulers, authorities and wicked spirits are at work in the indigenous Mixtec culture as discussed by both the secular anthropologists and missionaries. Our personal observations in the Baja and in Oaxaca have confirmed these evidences.

In Oaxaca the spirit world has a controlling presence. It is real and powerful in society causing great fear and hopelessness. The whole realm of the spirit world is many times excluded by the Western views of reality, but not by the Mixtecs and most animistic groups. “For Mixtecs the spirits that have control over their lives include evil spirits, spirits, of the ancestors, and *Santos* and ancestral spirits (images worshiped as deities in their particular kind of folk Catholicism).”<sup>84</sup> Appeasement is the only recourse for the people, since spirits are inclined to do evil just because is their nature.

When people die they believe their spirits remain. This belief produces tremendous fear for those who remain because they must appease the spirits of the death. In October each year the people start preparing for the coming of the dead. On October 31 and November 1, special offering are presented on the graves of the dead to appease their spirits.

As we visited Senen’s house in Chapultepec his aunt and sister were present. Senen had not been to his home for twenty years. As we entered the house Senen was embarrassed

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<sup>83</sup>Eph. 6:12, NLT

<sup>84</sup> Carol Zylstra, 6.

because of a religious altar left for the spirits in his house. He wanted to remove them immediately, but was reassured by Pastor Ramon that there was no power in paper and objects and that it could be removed in due time. Senen's sister told him not to remove any of the things from their father's altar. Fear was obvious part of her countenance.

If one doesn't follow the Mixtec way the spirit could become angry. If respect is not given toward rituals and fiestas or there has been a change in the Mixtec way spirits can react in evil ways. These spirits have the power to cause sickness, send earthquakes, cause the crops to fail, or other calamities as punishment.

When sickness occurs it is believe that the spirits cause it. In Papalote, Baja, as well as in most of the indigenous world, people use the services of shamans when sick. One can understand the use of healing prayer as part of the church service as well as the use of oil to anoint a sick person during the request for the prayer of the elders, (James 5:14-15). Although these acts are biblical and are in line with biblical doctrine the use of them is necessary, but in very much contrast to past indigenous practice. Shamans may use plants, herbs, eggs, or whatever to perform a ritual.

The shaman performs other services for the Mixtecs as well. To appease the rain god Savi, also called St. Mark a shaman is required to perform certain sacrifices. Curses are greatly feared by the Mixtecs. Shamans perform rituals for placing curses on other people. This ritual may be asked for to do envy on a family or person.

Because the spirit world is so dominate an aspect of Mixtec culture it is easy to understand this being a challenge for the returning brothers. Believers are exhorted by the apostle Paul to, “be strong with the Lord’s mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the devil.”<sup>85</sup> Part of their challenges to combat the spirit world will be outfit themselves with the armor of God.

## **Practical challenges**

### *Economics*

Economics is a challenge most people face in Mexico. Indigenous field workers in the Valley of San Quintin earn the average wage of one hundred and twenty pesos or about eleven American dollars. This wage is earned from March to November. For three months, December through February the average week of three days maybe produce only ninety Pesos per day, or about eight American dollars. Food purchased in the grocery stores costs about the same as in the U.S. But many families buy food on credit at the local mom and pop store on the corner and pay their bill when they get paid on the weekend, thus driving up the cost of food for their families as these shops are more expensive. Gasoline is about a dollar cheaper than California prices. Housing is below substandard with two small rooms per family and an outhouse for plumbing. The houses have no heat in the cool winters on the Baja.

Few families raise their own chickens, goats, sheep and pigs for meat because they do not have the land. Most families own a lot or two of bare dirt. The grocery stores are

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<sup>85</sup>Eph. 6:10-11 NLT

jammed on Saturdays and Sundays, payday, the day when families go to buy their weekly food. An open market of sorts is also held one day a week. In the Baja the market is called the *globos*.

These markets have a larger percentage of second hand clothing dealers, used household goods, used shoes and toys. There are fruits and vegetables purchased by stand owners from warehouses or other dealers. Few fruits and vegetables are from the produce grown in the valley. There are few if any handcrafted items. Handcrafted items are brought in from somewhere else. Some Indian women hold weekend craft and blanket sales for tourists. These blankets and crafts are bought wholesale, some of it coming from Ecuador.

There are few local artisans or musicians. A few children and elderly women make bead bracelets and necklaces that sell for a few pesos to tourists. Children will also try to sell Chicklets (gum) to earn a few pesos. The most common way for children to earn money is to clean the dust off cars with a dry rag. The children receive tips. A few mothers will make food items (tamales, sweet breads etc.) and the children take them around the neighborhood to sell.

Children suffer nutritionally and are often hungry. When both parents work the children are left to their own devices to find food. The foods of choice are chips, soda, and suckers. These are cheap to buy, and cut hunger pangs. My wife visited the local indigenous school at lunchtime. Some children went home to eat but many purchased

food from the teachers or sometimes a parent manned the food stand. The foods offered were candy, soda, and on certain days a burrito made of a flour tortilla and beans.

In the ranchos of Oaxaca that we visited, families are subsistence farmers. Each family has a *milpa* or a cornfield. Between the rows of the *milpa* they grow squashes. Some farmers plant beans beside the cornstalks so the climbing vines will use the cornstalk. Others do not plant with the corn because they say that planting together causes their corn to be of poor quality. We noticed that Margarita's family planted beans with the cornstalks but Tio and Tia said they plant theirs separately.

Children take turns shepherding the sheep or goats. When children are gone to school or leave home the responsibility returns to adults living in the home.

Corn is planted before the rainy seasons which begins in the spring and is harvested in late fall, November or December when the corn is dry. Throughout the growing season corn is eaten fresh and husks and stalks are fed to livestock. The dry corn is harvested and stored until needed for use. Kernels are removed from the husk and taken to the *molino* or mill for grinding corn. Tortillas, tamales, and other *platos* or food dishes are made daily with the corn meal. Corn kernels are soaked in water and lye to make hominy.

Each family raises chicken for eggs and meat, turkeys, pigs, sheep and/or goats. Each family has their own oxen for plowing their *milpas*. If they are elderly and cannot work

the oxen themselves then they hire the work done. Each family has a least one burro for carrying heavy loads and firewood.

From what we could see, there were no families going hungry, no homeless people, and no beggars. But there was a sense that these families saw themselves as poor. Each family we visited apologized for being poor and not being able to provide proper food for guests... and possibly because they saw us as rich Americans. But we received incredible food to eat from each family...fresh corn, fresh tortillas from home grown corn, tamales made from home grown corn and meat. What we did recognize is that all of this healthy food provided to us was provided at a great cost of labor on their part.

There are various ways for families to realize spending cash to purchase items not produced on the land. But because of the advent of television and internet the people see themselves as poor and seem ashamed of their living standard.

Once a week each larger municipal center has a mercado or market day. The days vary from center to center so that people can visit each other's markets or sell in a different market. Most families set up a little stall and sell their produce; make and sell food of varying types (tacos, tamales, juices, chocolate drinks, and rotisserie chicken to name a few); sell home items and tools, school items; or they sell some of their livestock. No one misses market day.

We visited a town about one half hour northeast of Chalcatongo. This town is 2000 ft. lower in altitude than Chalcatongo and produced any tropical fruit or flower you can name because of the lower altitude and the increased humidity and warmth. The residents of this town come as merchants to Chalcatongo with fresh bananas, tomatoes, mangos, papayas, and garden vegetables of all types. They in turn purchase the corn, beans and squashes that they do not produce as easily.

More recently since the roads were built, some have small merchant businesses at local markets to supplement the family income. They travel by foot carrying their produce on burros or go by taxi. A taxi could be a car but generally it is a pickup with a high bar running down the center of the bed that riders can stand and hold onto for stability as they ascend or descend their mountains. A few families have pickups.

It is estimated that daily earnings are one third of that in the Baja. One can understand the challenge of bringing your family back to a village that maintains life through subsistence farming with little other opportunities for income. There was much discussion and some concern about alternative forms of income upon returning the next year.

### ***Housing***

Housing was the first concern the brothers mentioned when we talked about their return to the Chalcatongo area. They have been living in and are accustomed to homes that have bathrooms and cement floors, propane stoves, electricity, telephone, and indoor (salty) water. Water is a big problem in Papalote.

Rancheros are given first rights to the good water for their agricultural businesses and the people get the bad water. There is city water available but the water is so salty it is unusable. Water trucks come by homes with sweet water and fill as many fifty five gallon drums at your house as you want. Each barrel costs two dollars to fill. The water is not purified. Purified drinking water also must be purchased.

In Chapultepec Senen has a roughly constructed one room wood house with a dirt floor. He realized he would have to return before the family came. Senen would like to seal the walls, put in a bathroom and a floor and perhaps another room. Beni's parents would have to give him some land for a house, but Beni would have to build it. At present he has no inherited land. Electricity is available and water doesn't seem to be a problem. It looked as though families had access to water from a spring or water source near their homes.

These housing concerns were the first challenge they wanted to discuss in the team meeting when we returned to Mitla. We interacted about sending a small team of Mexicans from the Bible institute to help in the construction. How would this look to the village? Would too much instant construction be perceived as flaunting wealth? Would this type of activity give reason for envy?

### ***Communication***

Communication is a vital lifeline for all missionaries. In 1981, my family and I were serving in the Ivory Coast, West Africa in teaching and nursing. This one year commitment was before the internet and some letters took five weeks to receive from the United States. I was near death with dysentery and malaria, and needed prayer. The communication system to the prayer warriors at home was hampered, and so was my healing process.

In Mexico the mail system is worse. Mail may or may not be received even in larger cities. In the village the chances of receiving mail are less. Another source of communication has to be used. Five years ago Chalcatongo had only a telephone center. The callers would wait to receive calls from relatives living *alla*. They may have agreed on a specific time to send and receive calls prior to leaving the area. Today, as mentioned before, there are internet cafes. In Chalcatongo we observed three different cafes being used by the youth aggressively. This is an area of education that will be incorporated to tutor the brothers in using this newer form of communication.

### ***Church support***

Senen and Beni will need some financial support to transition from the Baja. They will need some funds to start construction and develop business ideas. They will have to go willing to cooperate in the community when asked, whether in cargo, cooperación, or tequio. Some demands by family as a leveling device would have to be anticipated. How could the church in Papalote and the Free Methodist Conference of Baja Norte help without producing envy?

Prayer is the greatest support need. According to most all the missionaries I interviewed in Oaxaca, “not many Christians that came back from the Baja or the United States were successful in starting a church.”<sup>86</sup> Dan Klein has been a missionary in the Chalcatongo area for twenty-five years working with indigenous pastors. His reason for the lack of success of these returning Christians was they were not prepared and didn’t have prayer support groups. Their testimonies were challenged in short order and they fell spiritually.

Two hours north from Chalcatongo in Tlaxiaco lives S.I.L. linguist Bruce Hollenbach. In an interview with his wife Barbara and him we discussed the challenges Senen and Beni would face. Bruce shared about his involvement with a local pastor in Tlaxiaco and his support through prayer and encouragement<sup>87</sup>. Even though his time was spent on translation he found time to support this local pastor. As we continued our discussion it became evident that the brothers would need a network of prayer supporters to share their hearts and visions for ministry; and contact persons in the Tlaxiaco/Chalcatongo area they could contact for spiritual and moral support, advice and counsel.

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<sup>86</sup> Dan Klein, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 20 September 2007, audio tape. Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, Mexico.

<sup>87</sup> Bruce Hollenbach, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 21 September 2007, audio tape. Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, Mexico.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Suggested strategies*

The major hindrances that we have outlined can be seen either as obstacles or opportunities.

As we talked and prayed through ideas and strategies to assist the brothers in overcoming the major hindrances discussed above we came to some conclusions that the brothers were in agreement with. We struggled with the realization that the greatest part we will play, as a sending church and mission, will be our prayers; struggle because coming from an American worldview we want to be so hands-on and helpful and raise support and send teams and finances for projects etc. But this approach will absolutely not work to bring new souls into the kingdom in Chalcatongo, a Mixtec society.

Prayer is our number one strategy. Oswald Chambers writes, “Prayer does not fit us for the greater works; prayer *is* the greater work.”<sup>88</sup> He writes in a daily devotion entitled *The Unrivalled Power of Prayer*:

“We know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Romans 8:26

We realize that we are energized by the Holy Spirit for prayer; we know what it is to pray in the Spirit; but we do not so often realize that the Holy Spirit Himself prays in us prayers which we cannot utter. When we are born again of God and are indwelt by the Spirit of God, He expresses for us the unutterable.”<sup>89</sup>

After listening to our final interviewees repeat the same warnings and with a somewhat negative forecast for the success rate that past indigenous brothers had in bring the

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<sup>88</sup> Oswald Chambers. *My Utmost for His Highest* (Dodd, Mead & Company, New York, 1938) : 291

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

Gospel to their families, I felt discouragement in my heart. Then Dr. Barbara Hollenbach said, “It could work through love.”<sup>90</sup> Several missionaries expressed the lack of love in the villages. There seemed to be a deficiency of love in the homes, community, or relationships between people. The brothers could be successful with Christ’s love. This felt like a ray of hope as I contemplated the possibilities.

### **The Mixtec way**

When indigenous people enter and follow in Jesus’ way or as described in the book End of the Spear by Steve Saint as God’s trail, they change. Change is a necessary ingredient to repent. Repentance is changing direction and going His way, according to the biblical truth. How much change seems to be the issue as they reenter the old culture?

### **Determining El Camino de Dios (God’s Way)**

As we have review some of the challenges the brothers will face upon returning, we continue to deliberate with how much of the old culture should be changed. Most certainly these are some of the concerns of a few of the writings in the related literature in chapter two. From the study of Paul G. Hiebert he asks “what should people do with their old cultural ways when they become Christians?”<sup>91</sup> This is a valuable question in respect to the Mixtec way and the return of the Christian brothers.

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<sup>90</sup> Barbara Hollenbach, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 21 September 2007, audio tape. Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, Mexico.

<sup>91</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), 171.

Carol Zylstra states doing things in the Mixtec way “means one is a part of the group, whereas any change in what is done, and how, sets one against the group, and may jeopardize membership in the group.”<sup>92</sup> An example is having specific rituals and actions that are required to practice the Mixtec way. Questioning the old culture could ostracize the brothers from those they are trying to reach with the Gospel.

Secular anthropologist Michael Kearney seems to struggle with the deceptive way of living and the spirit world in his writings and research. Kearney says, in reference to the Mixtec way, "internal logic of the community is self-perpetuating. The main argument here was that various defensive strategies such as deception, individualism, and drinking, along with other institutionalized modes of behavior such as envy, distrust, skepticism, fatalism and witchcraft tend to perpetuate the very qualities of interpersonal relations that are held to be undesirable and perception of which is also projected onto the nonhuman environment.”<sup>93</sup>

So what strategy can be implemented in dealing with the old culture?

I agree with Paul Hiebert that critical contextualization is the proper strategy of relating to existing cultural and practices. His analysis of past methods was enlightening. He reviewed three strategies of approaching the old culture. The following is a brief summary of his review:

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<sup>92</sup> Carol Zylstra, 5.

<sup>93</sup> Michael Kearney, 134.

1. Denial of the old: rejection of contextualization - Past missionaries have often made the decisions and tended to reject most of the old customs as “pagan”. In some cases the rejection of these customs were rooted in the ethnocentrism of the missionaries feeling his culture was superior.

2. Acceptance of the old: uncritical contextualization – This strategy accept traditional practices uncritically into the church minimizing the change in the life of the convert. This method is used by Dr. JoJo M. Fung is his approach of valuing the good in shamanism in the literature review.

In 1962 the Second Vatican Counsel popularly called, Vatican II, wanted to reform it methods of ministry to include the good of all cultures. Dr. Fung liberally interpreted this council as a license to experience what he called the good in shamanism. Today Roman Catholics are reconsidering and talking of re-evangelizing Latin America. Roman Catholicism embraces the Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition as truth.

3. Dealing with the old: *critical contextualization* - In this strategy old belief is neither rejected nor accepted without examination. The pursuit of truth in Scripture is the practice of listening to the Holy Spirit in prayer, examination of God’s and evaluation by church leadership.

These are practical steps Paul Heibert suggests for critical contextualization:

- a. Recognize the need to deal biblically with all areas of life, (ex: weddings, deaths, births, funerals, religious fiestas etc.). Church leaders should critique,

and discern these areas, being careful not to adopt customs that are not based on biblical principles.

- b. Local church leaders must lead the congregation in *uncritical* gatherings and analyze the traditional customs with the question at hand. The purpose is to understand these old ways, but not criticize them. The atmosphere should not be one where people are afraid to talk for fear of being condemned, shamed or criticized.
- c. The pastor should lead the church in Bible study about the questions under consideration. Ex: The day of the dead (see below). If the people do not clearly understand the traditions and origin of these traditions they will not be able to deal with the cultural past. This is also when the pastor has the most to offer...mainly the exegesis of biblical truth with interaction with the people. This assists the people to learn to grown and discern what the truth is.
- d. The congregation evaluates critically the old and the new, and makes a decision on what to use. The old custom or rite should be replaced with a new one that will express Christian meaning.<sup>94</sup>

The ritual of celebrating the Day of the death is a good example of the use of critical contextualization in the indigenous congregation in Papalote. The traditional practice is shrouded in fear. People appease the spirits by providing food, alcohol, flowers, etc. on graves of the dead. The transition between a traditional and new ritual come through teaching in the church and providing an alternative activity. Christians spend the evening

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<sup>94</sup>Paul Hiebert, 184-189.

before the Day of the Dead together as a church body eating and praying. This model will most certainly be used by the brothers as they return to Oaxaca.

The Christian body in Chalcatongo will begin with Senen and Beni and their families. The task of teaching these men these steps of evaluating the Mixtec tradition should begin with the Director of the Bible institute, us as missionaries and the pastor of Papalote church. (The pastor is not indigenous, is new to the church and has just begun the learning process to understand the customs and worldviews of the Indian peoples.)

Apostle Paul wrote to pastor Timothy instructing him to pursue what is right as he began his new ministry. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our live. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right.”<sup>95</sup>

### **Work**

Since work is so important in this culture the brothers must return with an attitude to participate in the work of the community. The Mixtec way values hard physical work and also seems to value being a merchant as a form to make a living. In addition to *cargo*, *tequio*, and subsistence living our brothers will have to find some kind of valued work to sustain their families.

In contrast, our western mindset is to support missionaries so that their time can be spent sharing the Gospel and building relationships without an outside job. This kind of

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<sup>95</sup> I Tim. 3:16 NLT

financial support is unacceptable in Mixtec culture. The home missionary would be suspect as to where he got his financial income and would be considered *lazy* because he had no form of work that is valued. His ability to share the Gospel would be minimized because he would not be accepted within his own culture as a worker.

Alejandro Rodriguez adds to this concept, “Those who to do the work of the ministry or evangelize as the only work they should be doing, commit a great error, instead of thinking I need to adapt, become accustomed to the life here and later preach the word.”<sup>96</sup>

In Senen and Beni’s situation they will have to re-accustom their lives to rural subsistence farming and re-establish relationships in Chalcatongo, evaluate and participate in tradition based upon the truth of God’s word and teaching of the Holy Spirit, and model a life devoted to loving God and loving people.

### *Cargo*

The community responsibility of *cargo* will most certainly be allocated to Senen and Beni. They will be seen as potential candidates for positions in the community because they have been outside for a time and be seen as having a good deal to contribute.

The key to the type of participation will be the prayers of the faithful and exercising critical contextualization. According to our debriefing sessions with them they felt that participation in *cargo* could be altered because they were evangelicals. They felt the

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<sup>96</sup>Alejandro Rodriguez, taped.

community is beginning to have an increasing tolerance of other positions. It is starting to understand the influence of other religions.

An example would be that instead of contributing alcohol for a fiesta the brothers may provide soda drinks. I gave S.I.L. translator Joel Matuszczak the same scenario and here is his response, “Yes giving food or soft drinks would be o.k. One (Christian) man was a referee at a basketball game at a fiesta. They should participate in ways that would not be confronting a theological issue. They can still be seen as being part of the community.”<sup>97</sup>

They would participate but using guiding prayer, critical analysis according to biblical principles to make their decisions. We must pray fervently for them that they can be strong their faith and not sacrifice their testimonies.

### ***Tequio***

*Tequio* (Take-ee-oh) will be a similar responsibility they will accept. Some interviewees thought the brothers may be targeted for testing through *tequio* because they were evangelical believers. Senen and Beni will probably be asked to participate in difficult projects involving more time and possibly more physically demanding labor. As always, intercessors and the prayers of the church must be before the throne of grace in their behalf.

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<sup>97</sup> Joel Matuszczak, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 26 September 2007, audio tape. Chalcatongo, Oaxaca, Mexico.

In these tasks their testimonies will once again have to be paramount. Their calling by the God may be to endure hardship for the name Lord. Their Godly responses could be the greatest witness they could bestow.

“The council accepted his advice. They called the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak the name of Jesus, and they let them go. The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus. And every day, in the Temple and in their homes, they continued to teach and preach this message: The messiah you are looking for is Jesus.”<sup>98</sup>

On the road to Plan de Ayala their testimonies excelled because they were willing to humble themselves and become one with their community. Those who were present indicated that they were pleased with Senen and Beni’s participation. In Beni’s words, “Those who knew me when I lived here invited me to participate in the work at that time, and they received us with much pleasure.”<sup>99</sup>

### ***Cooperación***

Money is a great measure of life’s motives. Jesus said, “...give to Caesar what belongs to him...”<sup>100</sup> Jesus goes on to say, “You cannot serve both God and money.”<sup>101</sup> Part of going back to Mixtec culture to participate in the community is paying *cooperación*.

The brothers must do this task with joy, knowing that their willing financial participation will open doors of opportunities for them to be heard.

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<sup>98</sup> Acts 5:40-42 NLT

<sup>99</sup> Beni Ruiz, taped.

<sup>100</sup> Mat. 21:21b NLT

<sup>101</sup> Mat. 6:24 NLT

When Senen paid his *cooperación* in Chapultepec he said that, “the town officials were very pleased and welcomed the idea of us returning to live.”<sup>102</sup>

### ***Drinking***

In Mixtec society drinking and drunkenness is part of the ritual and custom of fiestas. In the United States many religious groups tolerate social drinking as acceptable and within scriptural boundaries. But for some evangelical believers of Mexico drinking alcohol is cannot be done at any level. It is not a matter of conservatism or intolerance.

Alcohol consumption is for one purpose and one purpose alone...to get drunk to forget the daily grind of life. Fiestas are the only form of recreation in these villages. Fiestas are affordable for everyone (except the *mayordomo*) because the mayordomo pays for all the alcohol consumed over a one week period by the entire community. Hence alcoholism and drug abuse are rampant and broken lives and families scatter the landscape.

The Mixtec way is to get drunk. For evangelical Christians there is no option. They must not participate in this part of the fiesta. For the brothers the lines are distinct and may be one of the most difficult challenges for them to face. The continuous temptation from family and friends to participate in the rituals and customs of the Mixtec way will certainly be a challenge.

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<sup>102</sup>Senen Ruiz, taped.

The prayers of the Papalote church, and believers in Mexico and the states, their support of and accountability to each other and the network of believers of Oaxaca, and will most definitely be essential.

### *Spirit World*

Like drinking, the spirit world is a direct challenge in the Oaxacan culture. Darkness is so real and dominates the culture there. Senen and Beni's preparation in Bible school will help them gain knowledge of God's Word, but their entire preparation must be accomplished by putting on the full armor of God described by Paul in Ephesians 6:10-18. Using this armor will equip them for the battle they will face.

Paul exhorts us all to have truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and God's Word as well as the persistence of prayer. The brothers will have to be prepared, to be alert to withstand the fiery darts of Satan's realm. Their dependence on the work and power of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential. Beth Merrill S.I.L. stated, "Some people are well meaning and very excited to share their faith...but you need the guidance of the Holy Spirit with every word you say."<sup>103</sup>

Their prayers and our prayers for them must be direct and powerful because Satan's realm is strong. Profeta Chavez Vasquez a translator helper for S.I.L. shared her experience ministering in the villages.

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<sup>103</sup> Beth Merrill, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 20 September 2007, audio tape. Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico.

“It would be very difficult to arrive in the village and begin to speak directly about the Lord. One needs to ask God and the *Espritu Santo* (Holy Spirit), to guide them and to let them know in what moment to share. Because witchcraft is very strong, what do we need the most --- *prayer*. The prayer should go like this, ‘Tell us Lord the hour, the day, the people, what message that you want preached in this village? What we are praying for is some two or three families to meet together and begin hearing the Word of God.’”<sup>104</sup>

By God’s grace and help Senen and Beni will be His witnesses in a dark part of the world. They will have to put on the full armor of God to stand firm. Ephesians 6: 13-18

“Therefore, put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.”<sup>105</sup>

## **Practical Challenges**

Our desire for the first mission journey was to create a road map for the brothers since they would soon return alone. As we traveled, contacting missionaries, family, and friends our thoughts were continually focused on Senen and Beni’s return to the Chalcatongo area. We consider a broader base of contacts necessary. We know this from our experience as missionaries.

Senen and Beni were confused when we suggested they need a broader base of prayer warriors and supporters than the local Papalote church. The churches of the conference

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<sup>104</sup> Profeta Chaves Vasques, interviewed by Donald C. Nagle, 20 September 2007, audio tape. Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico.

<sup>105</sup> Eph. 6:13-18 NLT

will also be experiencing these missionary candidates coming to their churches to ask for prayer and support for the first time also. These two families are pioneers as first missionaries sent by the conference of Baja California. We will assist the families and the churches through this new experience.

Through our debriefing sessions, practical challenges were discussed. We interacted about travel, bus routes, roads, and villages, contacts in Oaxaca City, emergency contacts, prayer lines, and financial emergency funds. It was these concerns the brothers identified first.

### ***Economics***

Their first concern was how they would live. Through the Bible Institute in the Baja, part of the curriculum is to provide alternate opportunities for employment. This involves working part of the day in skill training in the San Quintin valley in addition to Bible education and ministry.

The purpose is to develop bi-vocational workers able to minister and be skilled laborers or in some cases know how to start a business. This provides income for the family while ministering and provides accountability to a culture that demands people to work. Both Senen and Beni have developed bi-vocational skills. Senen realized several years ago that his twenty years working in the fields was coming to an end. He was forty and needed to retire from the fields and develop another alternative. He decided to start his own mobile retail business to sell clothes and items needed by field workers in the

migrant farm workers camps. Beni has also worked in construction and now leads the student work-study team that does construction for the Bible Institute and church.

Both of them have also developed their leadership abilities and can transfer their work skills to the Chalcatongo area where they will live. We noticed several new houses being built in the region probably from the influx of dollars from *alla*. Because of the improvement of roads there seemed to be more accessibility to village for selling of goods. Possibilities exist for them to be tent makers and church planters.

### ***Housing***

Housing is a challenge. The brothers felt they need to go before their families to settle in Oaxaca. This time would give them opportunity to build necessary facilities for their families. Land is not a problem, but capital for materials would have to be saved or raised before they returned.

The debriefing team discussed teams coming from the United States. We came to the conclusion that the best team to help would be made up of students from the Bible institute (Mexican or indigenous). This team would have to be inconspicuous and small in number. Funds would have to be sent ahead of time for materials to be delivered.

## *Communication*

New contacts and avenues of communication will be essential to establish lifelines for Senen and Beni.

Our plan is to teach Senen, Bernadita, Beni and Nati how to communicate using a computer and the internet system. They will be able to travel from their ranchos, Beni and Nati from Plan de Ayala, and Senen and Bernadita from Chapultepec, to the town center in Chalcatongo where there are a number of internet cafés. There they can read news from Papalote on a regular basis and send emails to us regarding praises, needs and prayer requests. We will be able to send these requests to intercessors immediately upon receipt.

The ranchos do not have telephone service but cell service is available if you are located in an area without mountain interference. Cellular phones utilize pre-paid cards only. If you have the funds to buy the card you have service. Telephone cafes are available, but times must be arranged ahead to receive phone calls or for you to receive a phone call from them. So communication systems, times etc. will have to be arranged before they leave for Oaxaca.

We have begun to prepare the Papalote church family and will need to prepare them to be a prayer force for these families. In the coming months the goal is to visit all Free Methodist churches in the conference and advise them of their first missionaries being sent out. We will be asking for personal prayer commitments. There are a number of

church teams and individuals who have come to know and love Senen and Beni and their families and we will be contacting them as well to ask for their prayer support.

The lifeline of communication has to be developed so the brothers can send and receive information from supporting churches, conferences, and key leaders. Prayer requests to be sent to the church in Papalote and the churches of the conference so their missionaries can be held up before the Lord.

A network of Oaxacan missionaries and evangelicals has agreed with enthusiasm to give these families personal support and encouragement. For Senen and Beni it will be one of their lifelines.

### ***Church support***

Western missionaries think of support as financial. It does take money to live and function as a missionary abroad, but accepting regular financial support would be a detriment to indigenous believers returning home as missionaries. Dependency is an ongoing issue with many mission groups throughout the world. I am in agreement with Steve Saint's conclusions that the brothers must develop the church in the Chalcatongo to be self-propagating, self-governing and self-supporting.

The commission to the church is to evangelize the world. The purpose of missions is to plant the church where it does not exist so it can evangelize its world.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Steve Saint, *The Great Omission*, 25.

David Howard expresses a philosophy that we embrace on interdependency. American churches and mission organizations should see themselves as *partners* with their mission churches. Each partner is interdependent, reciprocal, intimate, on-going, practical and spiritual. Western mission organizations or churches have resources and knowledge that the mission church often does not. However the mission church can offer hospitality love, human resources, cultural heritage and knowledge. This relationship should be seen as long-range but not dependent.<sup>107</sup>

Rick Johnson of International Action Ministries discusses this issue of dependency, “We have seen too many national churches and their perceived successes totally dependent on outside groups for their ministry vision, their finances, and their programs...many groups even seem to enjoy the paternalism created by their financial ability to ‘make it happen.’”<sup>108</sup> We could make it happen in Oaxaca, but to help the brothers in full would be a mistake.

The church is not truly indigenous until it can function on its own to carry out Christ’s commission without outside input.”<sup>109</sup> For the Mixtec people integration and involvement are of utmost importance. If financial subsidy support were provided for the

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<sup>107</sup>David Howard. Edited by Daniel Rickett, and Dotsey Welliver, *Supporting Indigenous Ministries* (Wheaton, Illinois: Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, 1997) , 24.

<sup>108</sup>Rick Johnson, “North American Short-Term Evangelism and Dependency in Northern Mexico,” (San Diego, California, International Action Ministries, 1999) , 3.

<sup>109</sup> Steve Saint, *The Great Omission*. (Seattle, Washington: YWAM Publishing, 2001) , 67.

brothers to only minister and evangelize, they would be seen as not being a contributing part of the community.

The interdependent approach to missions is truly difficult for us westerners. We want to help. Great wisdom is necessary to partner with the brothers so as not to make them dependent and limit their ability to function in the community as a strong witness for Christ. Senen and Beni will have to endure hard work and tests of their faith in this process. It will not be easy.

It is God's intent for churches to help other churches. Paul writes to the church of Galatia encouraging them to not give up in doing good, "Whenever we have opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters."<sup>110</sup> This has to be the ultimate goal as churches are planted and indigenous missionaries reach out to their own.

So what are the specific ways the church can support and encourage a new work in Oaxaca?

1. To network these missionaries with a Free Methodist superintendent that is in theory overseeing the Oaxaca field. He is not based in Oaxaca but his field area includes Oaxaca. At present there are not FM churches in Oaxaca.

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<sup>110</sup> Gal. 6:10 NLT

Alejandro Rodriguez, missionary from Mexico City and living in Tlaxiaco, one hour south of Chalcatongo has given his promise to be of ready support for the two families when needed. Ellie Quesada, missionary living in Mitla, some 6 hours away, has offered his services, support and counsel whenever needed. He has already offered to assist with transport. Dan and Cindy Klein of Tlaxiaco are also available if they are needed for emergency needs or counseling. Joel and Becky Matuszczak are translators living in Chalcatongo and working in a village some 45 minutes away. They too are willing to network with Senen, Beni and families.

2. One of the concerns mentioned in our conversation with missionaries Danny and Cindy Klein of Tlaxiaco was the isolation that missionaries and Christians returning feel. Beni and Senen and their families are part of a community of believers in Papalote that meet no less than three times a week with one another. Life of the believers of Papalote is centered on church activities. Friends, activities, entertainment, potlucks, services, dramas and musicals are their life. There are few activities apart from the church in these families' lives. They have no money for vacations; there is little life other than work and church.

Church and all the activities of the church are the compliment to the 'fiesta' of the ranchos. Fiestas in the ranchos provide the only diversion and entertainment for the community. Fiestas will now become more of a battleground than a playground for the new families.

Spiritual support of the families within the church of Papalote has been strong with close relationships with pastors, us as missionaries and the superintendent of the conference. Both Beni and Senen have leadership roles on the elder board. Both have been in Bible school for one year and engross in their second year.

The spiritual support and encouragement that has been so prevalent in their lives will no longer be there. They will have to draw upon the Holy Spirit, each other, the Word and prayer to keep their testimonies strong. We can assist by providing books and study tools, and audio tapes of the Scripture and sermons and of course our faithful prayers.

As mentioned before, Ramon Ross Rubio, Director of Instituto Bíblico Baja is also the Free Methodist Conference Superintendent of 18 churches in Baja California. His and our goal is to make periodic trips of encouragement and continued mentoring of the missionaries sent out by the conference.

3. Our goal this year to teach and guide these families in contracting prayer partners that commit to keep these missionaries covered in intercessory prayer. They need to share their problems, illnesses, spiritual battles, their visions, and their needs with other believers. David Howard puts forward that the body of Christ is the interdependency that missions need.<sup>111</sup> We need to be interdependent on each other, working, praying, and functioning as parts of the body of Christ.

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<sup>111</sup>David Howard, 26.

4. After discussions with missionaries living in the area it seems prudent to provide a bank account for emergency needs for the families, but this account would have to be used in crisis only and concealed from the knowledge of the community. Since there are no banks in Chalcatongo this would not be much of a problem. The nearest bank is in Tlaxiaco the county seat.

Several interviewed missionaries commented to us that the process we (Ramon, and Northern Light Ministries) were using in researching the environment to which these families will return; dialoging with missionaries who have worked in and among the Mixtecs for years; connecting and embarking on developing relationships with Senen and Beni's family members; setting up a network system for spiritual support; creating a system of communication; and preparation in understanding the Word was a positive sign.

They had not seen this kind preparation to send missionaries before and they are hopeful that it could become a model for indigenous believers in successfully starting and maintaining indigenous churches among the Mixtec of the Oaxaca.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Summary*

We were struck by a number of things as we interviewed the missionaries in Oaxaca.

1. S.I.L. has labored diligently for years to translate the Word of God into the many indigenous languages of Mexico. However, many of the translated New Testaments of Mexico are not being read or heard by the people of that dialect because in many cases there is no one to take them the Word, or teach them to read it in their language.
2. Years ago it was assumed that the whole world would eventually become literate. This has not happened. International Literacy Day on September 7, 2001 stated according to UNESCO, in the world today there about one billion non-literate adults.<sup>112</sup> Many of the world's people groups still cannot read or write their own language, or any language. As in the case of Oaxaca, for many of them literacy is not of high value.
3. According to the translators it takes thousands (up to a million) of dollars and an average of twenty years to translate the New Testament into a previously unwritten language. After such a huge investment of time and money, it would be unfortunate for the translated New Testaments to remain unread or unheard.

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<sup>112</sup> S.I.L. 2006. International Literacy Day, September 7, 2001, Washington D.C., Facts about Literacy, p. 1 (accessed 15 October 2007) available from <http://www.S.I.L./literacy/LitFacts.htm>; Internet.

After the interviews were all complete these are some of the conclusions that most all interviewed missionaries had come to:

1. Foreign missionaries have not been successful in bringing the Gospel to the indigenous people tribes. Because they are not from “their culture” they have never been accepted nor completely trusted. Stories passed down through the generations (whether true or not) say that Americans came and robbed the indigenous people of their gold and antiquities.
2. Many men who went to the United States to work and received Christ there have returned home to share Christ with their families and have fallen into sin and ruined their testimony...destroying completely their ability to evangelize.
3. Men who returned to share the Gospel were not prepared in the Word, nor did they have the support of a church or other believers praying for them, assisting them in difficult situations, or providing accountability.
4. The successful and enduring men who have returned to begin a pastoral work among the indigenous people have had missionaries to mentor them personally. The numbers of those that are still faithful to the Lord in his Work in Oaxaca are very few but the needs for trained indigenous ministers continue to be great in the Chalcatongo region.

5. The key to softening the hearts of these hard indigenous people is demonstrating love, and living a life that is consistent with your words, your testimony.

We also discussed what needs the brothers would have to be met in order to return. In order of priority it was decided that:

1. A home for Beni and his family would need to be built before the family came. He would need to go in advance.
2. Senen would also need to go in advance and prepare his house for the family. He needs to add a bathroom, possibly another bedroom, seal the walls from the cold, and add windows, electricity and water.
3. They need to find a way to sustain their families (work). There was much discussion as to what they could do.
4. They both need to finish their year in the Bible Institute and be more prepared to teach and share the word.

### ***Conclusion***

In this study I have reviewed some of the major challenges the Mixtec brothers will face when they return to Oaxaca. I am sure the list is not complete. Allan Lee has suggested that another challenge will be to communicate the Gospel in clear biblical truths in their native language. Spanish is often not understood well by speakers of native language.

Although Senen and Beni speak a variant of Mixtec but their biblical education is in Spanish. The brothers must begin to transfer their education in Spanish to terms and phrases in Mixteco that are comprehended by their people. This will take wisdom. If Mixtec speakers of the Chalcatongo region are to come to Christ, the Mixteca Alta language must be spoken and heard.

In 1951, S.I.L. translator Ken Pike<sup>113</sup> graciously completed the translation of the New Testament in San Miguel el Grande Mixtec. San Miguel el Grande is about 3 kilometers from where Senen was born (42 years ago) and from where Beni was born (37 years ago). For fifty-six years the translation has laid dormant. Through the ministry of Missionaries Ventures International and the cooperation of S.I.L., Jim Loker and Ellie Quezada have recorded indigenous translations for the past eight years. This is a positive step in spanning the gap between completion of biblical translations and the indigenous peoples receiving the Gospel of truth.

Just as translating the Word is not enough, audio recordings are still not enough. To come full circle the indigenous people need to hear the Word and be taught by their own people. Someone must be prepared and sent.

“...anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how they can say they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without

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<sup>113</sup> Wikipedia-the free encyclopedia, *Kenneth Lee Pike* (accessed 20 November 2007) ; available from [http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth\\_Lee\\_Pike/](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_Lee_Pike/). Internet

being sent? That is what the Scriptures mean when they ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.’”<sup>114</sup>

The audio book of Mark in the San Miguel el Grande language was finally recorded 10 years ago. When we visited Ellie Quezada in September 2007 the book of Mark remained as the only oral book available in tapes or CDs in the Mixtec language of San Miguel el Grande.

We brought an audio cassette copy of St Mark with us on our journey to Plan of Ayala. As we sat and ate roasted mutton with the relatives of Senen and Beni we observed their reaction to the recording of St. Mark in their own language. The results were awe-inspiring. Senen’s uncle clearing understood what was translated in the dialect of the neighboring village. Then he said in Spanish with a huge smile on his face, “this is about Jesus of old.”

Ellie Quesada’s mission since coming to know Senen and Beni is to find speakers of the town language, teach them to read the Mixteca Alta of San Miguel el Grande, and complete the audio version of the New Testament. Perhaps these men will be assisting Ellie, we do not know.

### **Instituto Bíblico Baja**

The work of Instituto Bíblico Baja and Pastor Ramon Ross Rubio is vital to prepare indigenous Christians as pastors, lay leaders and missionaries. The development is on

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<sup>114</sup> Rom. 10:13-15 NLT

going and evolving. Senen and Beni form a small part of the growing student body of indigenous and national students, but they are the pioneers making up the first wave of students that will return to reach their own.

At Instituto Bíblico Baja classes have been added to incorporate and reintroduce an understanding of the indigenous cultures. In fact Allan Lee teaches a course on ‘Perspectives about the Work among Indigenous Peoples.’ His next course will be ‘Communication Bridges for Oral Cultures.’ Other efforts to enhance the student experience are continually being pursued; including practical experience in identifying indigenous language groups and giving them audio tapes of the Scriptures; doing work projects initiated by indigenous peoples and for indigenous peoples; and participating in evangelical events to reach the local Baja indigenous community.

It is with much reservation that I think of the brothers returning. I want to see them weekly and continue to be in contact with them. It is as if they are being sent to the battle front without us there to encourage and support their efforts, which is the way it has to be. After seeing what they will face, the challenges seemed to be humanly impossible to overcome.

As they go they must ask for supernatural power to live and demonstrate the genuine love of Christ. This principle is confirmed by Oaxacan assistant translator Profeta Chavez Vasquez as she works among her own indigenous people, the Zapotecs, “When a believer returns to a village it is not a question of how much he talks about God or the changes

made in his life, but how he treats the people, his family and how he lives out the changes that have been made in his life.”<sup>115</sup> Robert McQuilkin, president of the Evangelical Missiological Society expresses his concern for the shifting emphasis in missions when he says, “We may love others in many ways, but above all, we should love them into eternal life, away from eternal death.”<sup>116</sup>

The disciples asked Jesus, “What is the greatest commandment?” Jesus replied, “To love God and to love others.”<sup>117</sup> The lack of love and grace is nearly oppressive in the Chalcatongan villages we visited. Margarita felt the love that Senen and Luz Elena sent out to her by the mere act of staying in her home. That love caused a hard heart to say, “I am almost persuaded...”

Our team reached out and loved the families we met...not expecting anything from them, not coming with dishonest motives. As Americans our only way to model God is to love them. Love comes in many forms. Ilene and I will be visiting the son of Tia and Tio in prison in Oregon. We will also visit their daughter in Oregon. We plan to take them photos of their parents and the visit we had in Chalcatongo. This translates to love. They recognize it as extraordinary acts. We pray that these acts of love will soften their hearts to be open to the testimonies of Senen and Beni.

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<sup>115</sup> Profeta Chavez Vasquez, taped.

<sup>116</sup>Robertson McQuilkin, “Lost mission: whatever happened to the idea of rescuing people from hell?” *Christianity Today* 50 (2006) : 41.

<sup>117</sup>Mark 2:29-31 NLT

Y.P Yohannan shared this *general* rule: It is wiser to support native missionaries in their homelands than to send western missionaries for these reasons:

- Wiser stewardship
- The presence of western missionaries perpetuates the myth that Christianity is the religion of the west
- Western missionaries and the money they bring, compromise the natural growth and independence of the national church
- Western missionaries cannot easily go to the countries where the so-called hidden people live
- Western missionaries seldom are effective in reaching the indigenous and establish local churches in villages...<sup>118</sup>

“At the same time native evangelists have seen thousands turn to Christ in every continent. Hundreds of new churches are being formed every week by native missionaries in the two-thirds world.”<sup>119</sup>

God has heard their cries as field workers. Truly their life verse is Philippians 4:13, “I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.”<sup>120</sup> All things can be done in Christ. All these challenges will be difficult hurdles, but nothing is impossible with Christ’s power through the power of prayer.

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<sup>118</sup>Y.P. Yohannan, 158-164.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>120</sup>Phil.4:13 NLT

## GLOSSARY

**Alla** – refers to the United States. Alla means “over there” in Spanish. Many people do not understand what The United States means but they understand ‘*alla*’. The term ‘*otro lado*’ or other side is also used to describe the location of the United States.

**Atole** – a traditional hot drink.

**Barrend** - home made alcohol drink

**Cargo** – a position in the community of holding an office for one to three years. The office could be of a minor level or major. These are non paid positions.

**Chapulines** – (cha-poo-lean-ace) toasted and spiced grasshoppers, a delicacy for Oaxacas.

**Coperacion** – financial responsibility each person has toward the support of their village.

**Federales** – federal police

**Globos** – the local term for the flea market in the Baja.

**Indigenous** - native, original inhabitant-synonym: native

**Masa** – corn flour

**Mayordomo** - a person who is selected to pay for the fiesta.

**Mercado** – market day.

**Mestizo** - means someone who is culturally Mexican in language, dress, and perspective, or the main stream culture.

**Milpa** – the small corn fields.

**Missionary** - a person sent by a church into a territory to carry on evangelism or other activities.

**Mole** – (moh-lay) Oaxacan sauce eaten with rice and meat.

**Molino** – milling place for grinding corn.

***Municipio*** – county seat

***Pesos*** – Mexican currency, approximately ten pesos to one American dollar.

***Puro pasear*** – means one is on vacation.

***Rancheros*** – ranchers or farmers

***Rancho*** – in Oaxaca, the small villages around the larger villages are called ranchos.

***Santos*** – the Catholics saints

***Suegros*** – (sway-gros) parents-in-laws

***Tequio*** – mandatory unpaid physical labor involving working for the community on projects and service related jobs.

***Topes (toe-pays)*** – speed bump.

***Tribe*** - any aggregate of people united by ties of descent from a common ancestor, community of customs and traditions, adherence to the same leaders, etc.

***Tio and Tia*** – uncle and aunt

***Tribal*** - Of, relating to, or characteristic of a tribe

***Worldview*** - a set of presuppositions which we hold about the basic makeup of our world.

***Zócalo*** – park center of area of Oaxaca City.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### ***Questions to the missionaries of the Oaxaca and Baja regions:***

- From your perspective, what are the challenges Baja Mixteco brothers face when returning as ambassadors for Christ to their home villagers in Oaxaca?
- What are some ways to combat these challenges?

### ***Questions to the Mixteco brothers:***

These interviews took place during the mission trip to Oaxaca September 19-29, 2007.

- What challenges did you face or will you face returning as ambassadors for Christ to your home villages?
- What would hold you back from becoming ambassadors for Christ to your village?

## APPENDIX B

### *Our itinerary for the mission trip to Oaxaca:*

19-29 September 2007

Day	Date	Agenda	Contacts
Tuesday	9/18/07	<p><b>To TIJUANA</b></p> <p>Traveled to Ensenada to pickup Luz Elena from Seminary.</p> <p>Pick up Visas</p>	<p>Ramon's cellular: 616-111-0292</p> <p><u>Tijuana church:</u> Pastor Ricardo Flores</p>
Wednesday	9/19/07	<p><b>To OAXACA</b></p> <p>Avolar Airlines 143, left at 10:00 a.m. and arrived in Oaxaca 5:05 p.m.</p>	<p>To the Tijuana Airport:</p> <p>Stayed in hotel in Oaxaca City, Hotel Real de Antequera.</p>
Thursday	9/20/07	<p><b>TRAVELED TO MITLA, OAXACA</b></p> <p>We visited the Mitla Linguistic Center (one hour south of Oaxaca City) with Ellie Quesada. This is the main S.I.L. translation center in Oaxaca. Ted Jones being the elder linguist, 37 years.</p> <p>We were fortunate to be there when several of the linguists were present for a conference. We recorded interviews with several during the conference time.</p> <p>We interviewed the two together.</p> <p>Ellie Quesada works with Missionary Adventures producing audio CDs and Cassettes in indigenous languages as</p>	<p><b>Ted Jones (Linguist)</b> Mitla headquarters works with the Zapotec language, 951-568-0046.</p> <p><b>Joel &amp; Becky Matuszczak (Linguists)</b> San Pablo Tlaltepēc Mixteco language, live in Chalcotongo.</p> <p><b>Elizabeth Merrill (Linguist)</b> Zapoteco language with her assistant <b>Ptofeta Chavez Vasquez.</b></p> <p><b>Ellie Quesada</b> Missionary</p>

		<p>well as Spanish. He offered to assist us on the trip and use of his 15 passenger van. We also stayed in his hospitality house when in Mitla. This was a God given blessing.</p> <p>Team meeting in the evening</p>	<p>Ventures, 951-568-0766</p>
Friday	9/21/07	<p><b>TO TLAXIACO</b></p> <p>From Mitla to Tlaxiaco, the trip took about three hours. We stayed with the Rodriguez family over night. They are Mexican missionaries from Celaya, Guanajuato.</p> <p>The Kleins live close to the Rodriguez family. We interviewed them as well. 953-537-8666.</p> <p>The Hollenbachs, SIL translators working on their second indigenous language program. We also interviewed them.</p>	<p><b>Alex y Shayra Rodriguez</b> (support ministries) Serving the Mixtecos, 953-552-0721</p> <p><b>Danny and Cindy Klein</b>, 25 years with a small mission working with the Mixteco peoples. Lived six years in Chalcatongo</p> <p><b>Bruce and Barbara Hollenbach (Linguist)</b>, Mixteco, 953-552-1655.</p>
Saturday	9/22/07	<p><b>TRAVEL TO CHALCATONGO</b></p> <p>We first visit the rancho of Beni, Plan de Ayala, at 7500 feet in elevation. We walk up hill the last 500 meters.</p> <p>Ramon, Ellie, Ilene and I stay in Chalcatongo at a hotel</p>	<p>Hotel Lazro in Chalcatongo</p> <p>Senen and Luz stay with Senen's sister and Beni with his parents in the same village.</p>

Sunday	9/23/07	We returned to Plan de Ayala for a team church service. None of the relatives were present. Later we visited Senen's family property 500 ft higher in elevation.	Meet with Beni's parents the other side of the canyon.  We traveled back to Hotel Lazo for rest.
Monday	9/24/07	The Chalcatongo group meets up with Senen and Luz as they travel over the mountain by foot. Our meetings point was in Chapultepec.	Here Senen and Luz visited his aunt and uncle. Near them was Senen's house.
Tuesday	9/25/07	This day was a time of fiesta with Beni and Senen's families in Plan de Ayala.  Ellie presented the Mixtec tape of the Gospel of Mark.	We met other family members as we ate mutton and corn meal with Mixteco mole.
Wednesday	9/26/07	Beni traveled with us to La Paz (9000 feet + in elevation). There we met Beni's in-laws and gave them gifts from the family.  Joel & Becky Matuszczak (Linguists), spent the evening with them in Chalcatongo. Continued our interview.	This area two months before was involved in a conflict over boundary between two villages. One woman was killed 700 meters from the home we visited.
Thursday	9/27/07	Travel back to Oaxaca City, visited the Mixteco/ Zapoteco ruins.	Stayed with Ellie Quezada
Friday	9/28/07	Visited Milta and the Zapoteco ruins.	Team meeting with brothers, more interviews
Saturday	9/29/07	<b>FLY TO TIJUANA</b>  Leave Oaxaca: 5:50 p.m Arrive in Tijuana 9:00 p.m. <b>TO PAPALOTE!</b> Luz Elena to Ensenada!	Rest
Thursday	10/4/07	Presentation by brothers in Papalote church	Evaluation

## APPENDIX C

### *Ministry contacts in Mexico*

#### **Mexican Medical Ministries**

251 Landis Ave.  
Chula Vista, CA 91910  
[info@mexicanmedical.com](mailto:info@mexicanmedical.com)

#### **Missionary Ventures International**

5528 Commerce Dr. Orlando, FL 32899  
[www.missionaryventures.org](http://www.missionaryventures.org)

#### **Northern Light Ministries**

5983 Walina Ct. SE Salem, OR 97317  
[www.northernlightministries.com](http://www.northernlightministries.com)

#### **S.I.L. International**

Summer Institute of Linguistics  
7500 W. Camp Wisdom Road  
Dallas TX 75236  
[www@sil.org](http://www@sil.org)

#### **Bruce and Barbara Hollenbach - S.I.L.**

[bruce\\_hollenbach@sil.org](mailto:bruce_hollenbach@sil.org)  
[barbara\\_hollenbach@sil.org](mailto:barbara_hollenbach@sil.org)  
Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, Mexico

#### **Ted Jones – S.I.L.**

[ted\\_jones@sil.org](mailto:ted_jones@sil.org)  
Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico

#### **Danny and Cindy Klein**

[ercaklein@hotmail.com](mailto:ercaklein@hotmail.com)  
Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, Mexico

#### **Allan Lee - MMM**

[alleemm@gmail.com](mailto:alleemm@gmail.com)  
San Quintin, Baja California

**Joel & Becky Matuszczak – S.I.L.**

[joel-becky\\_matuszczak@sil.org](mailto:joel-becky_matuszczak@sil.org)

Chalcatongo, Oaxaca, Mexico

**Elizabeth Merrill – S.I.L.**

[beth\\_merrill@Sil.org](mailto:beth_merrill@Sil.org)

Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico

**Don and Ilene Nagle - NLM**

[nlightm@hotmail.com](mailto:nlightm@hotmail.com)

Papalote, Baja California, Mexico

**Allie Quezada – MVI**

[quezaa@aol.com](mailto:quezaa@aol.com)

Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico

**Alejandro and Shayra Rodriguez**

[alexys Shayra@hotmail.com](mailto:alexys Shayra@hotmail.com)

Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, Mexico

**Ramon Ross Rubio – IBB**

Superintendent of FMC of Baja California and Director of IBB

[ross@hotmail.com](mailto:ross@hotmail.com)

Papalote, Baja California, Mexico

**Beni Ruiz**

Student and Missionary

Papalote, Baja California, Mexico

**Senen Ruiz**

Student and Missionary

Papalote, Baja California, Mexico

**Ptofeta Chavez Vasquez - S.I.L.**

Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico

## APPENDIX D

### Maps

Encarta

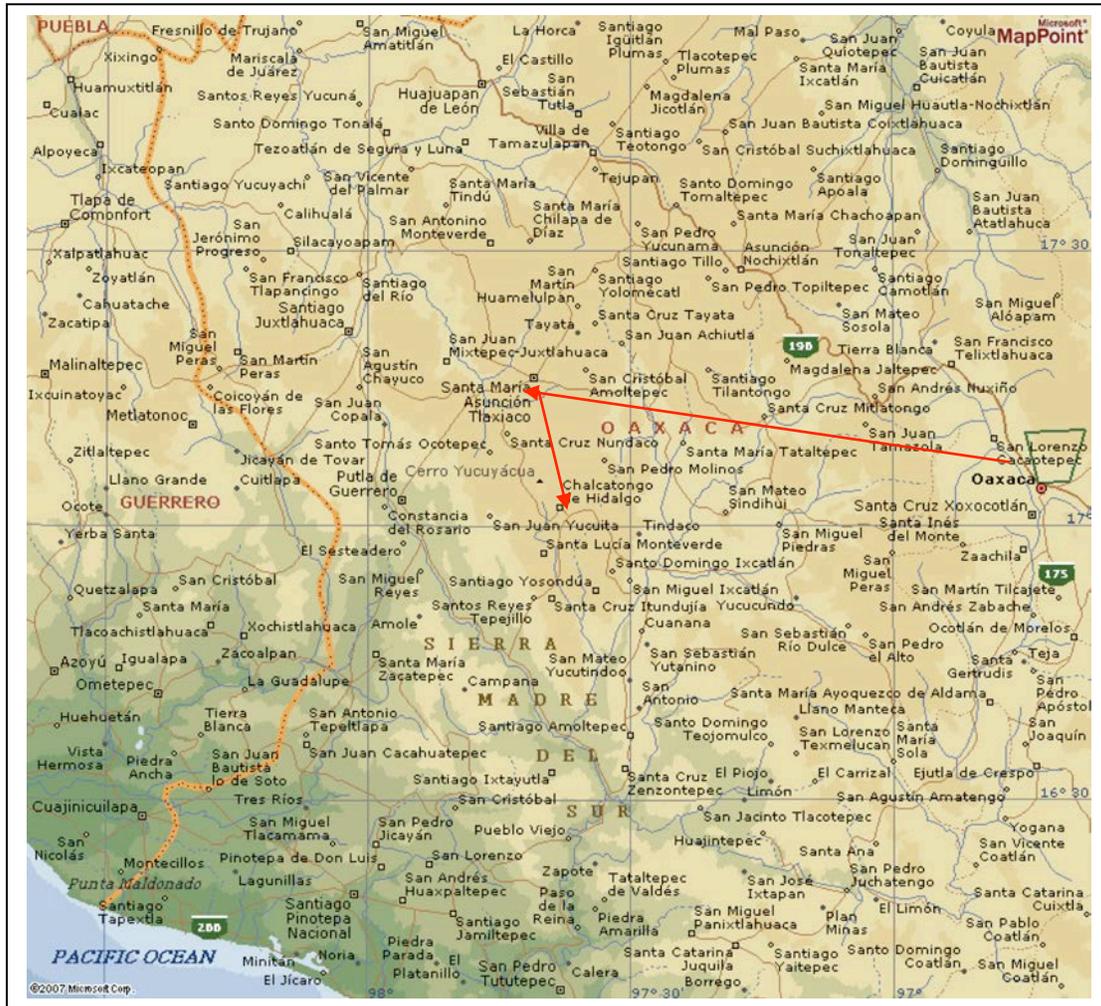
The United States of *Mexico* in relationship to the *United States of America*  
Baja Peninsula south of San Diego, CA



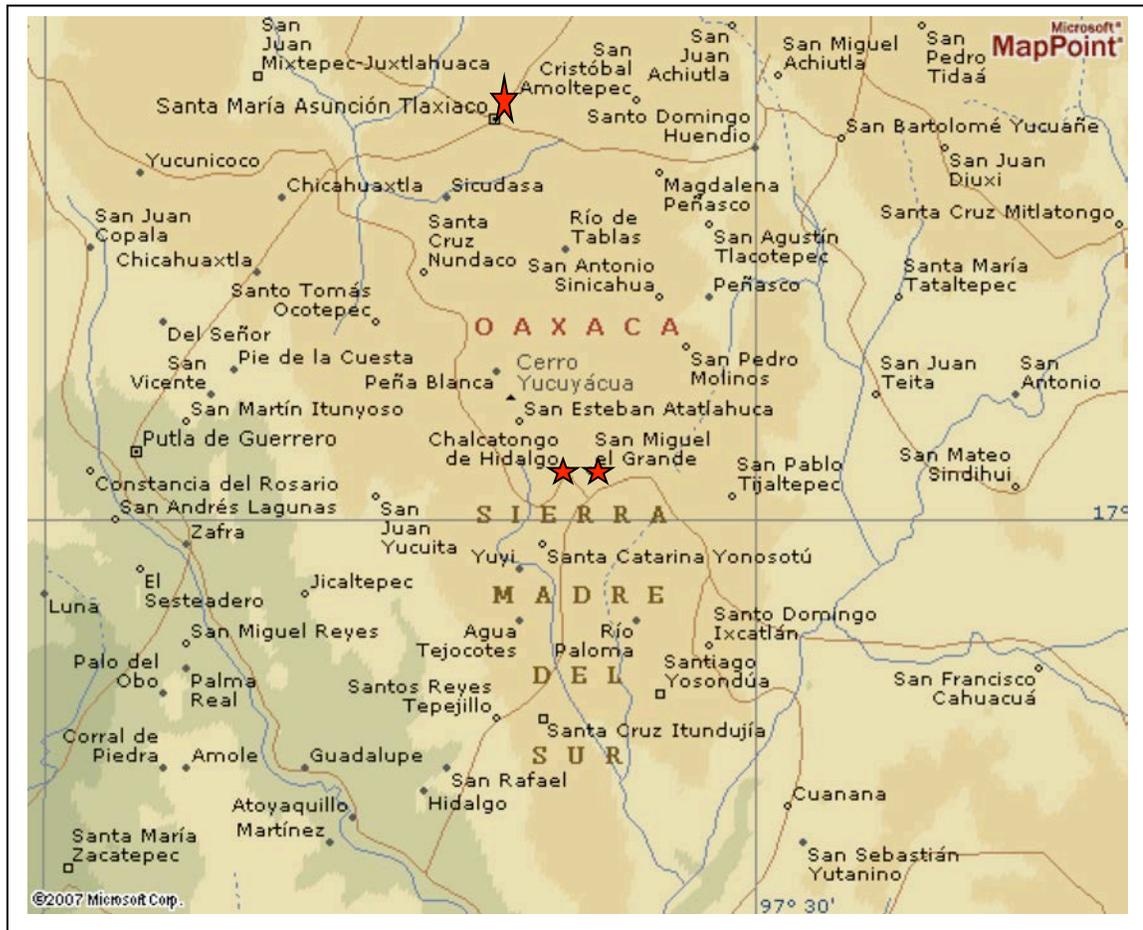
*Mexico City* in relationship with *Oaxaca City*



Oaxaca City in relationship to Santa Maria Asunción Tlaxiaco and Chalcatongo de Hidalgo



*Tlaxiaco in relationship to Chalcatongo and San Miguel el Grande*



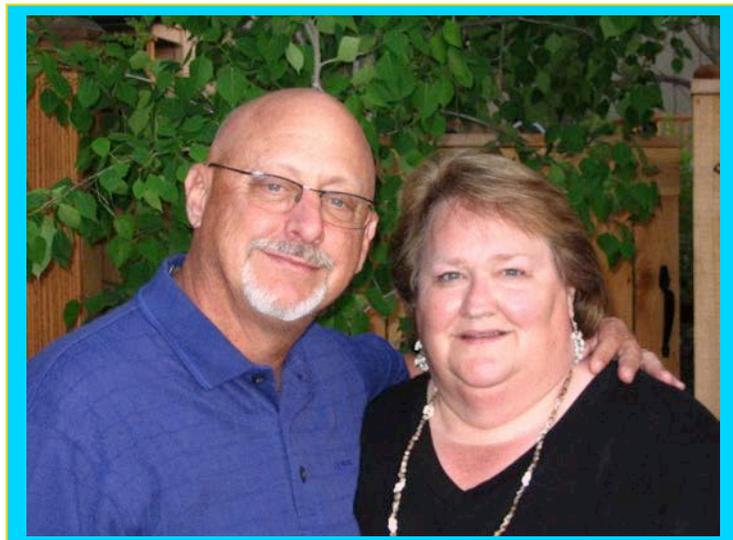
## APPENDIX E

### Photos

*Ramon Ross Rubio and Family*  
*Director of the Instituto Bíblico Baja, Superintendent of the Free Methodist*  
*Conference of Baja California*  
*El Papalote, Baja California Norte, Mexico*



*Dr. Donald C. Nagle and Ilene Nagle*  
*Missionaries with Northern Light Ministries*  
*El Papalote*



***(Abdon) Senen Ruiz and his wife Bernadita, son Manuel, Sara and Salmi***  
Pioneer co-missionaries to Chalcatongo, Oaxaca, Mexico 2007



***Benigo (Beni) Ruiz and wife Natividad (Nati) and daughter Carolina (Caro)***  
Pioneer co-missionaries to Chalcatongo, Oaxaca 2007



## Missionary Journey Photos September 2007

Photo 1 – Tequio in Plan de Ayala



Photo 2 Beni doing tequio



Photo 3 Chalcatongo taken from road to Plan de Ayala



Photo 4 – Margarita, Senen, Pedro at Margarita's mountain home



Photo 5 Beni and his parents, Fidel and Maria of Plan de Ayala



Photos 6 - Tia Marta



Tio Abundio of Chapultepec



Photos 7 Beni's suegro - Antonio



Suegra - Victoria of La Paz



Photo 8 - Oxen plowing milpa



Photo 9 Translated New Testaments by Wycliff (Summer Institute of Linguistics)

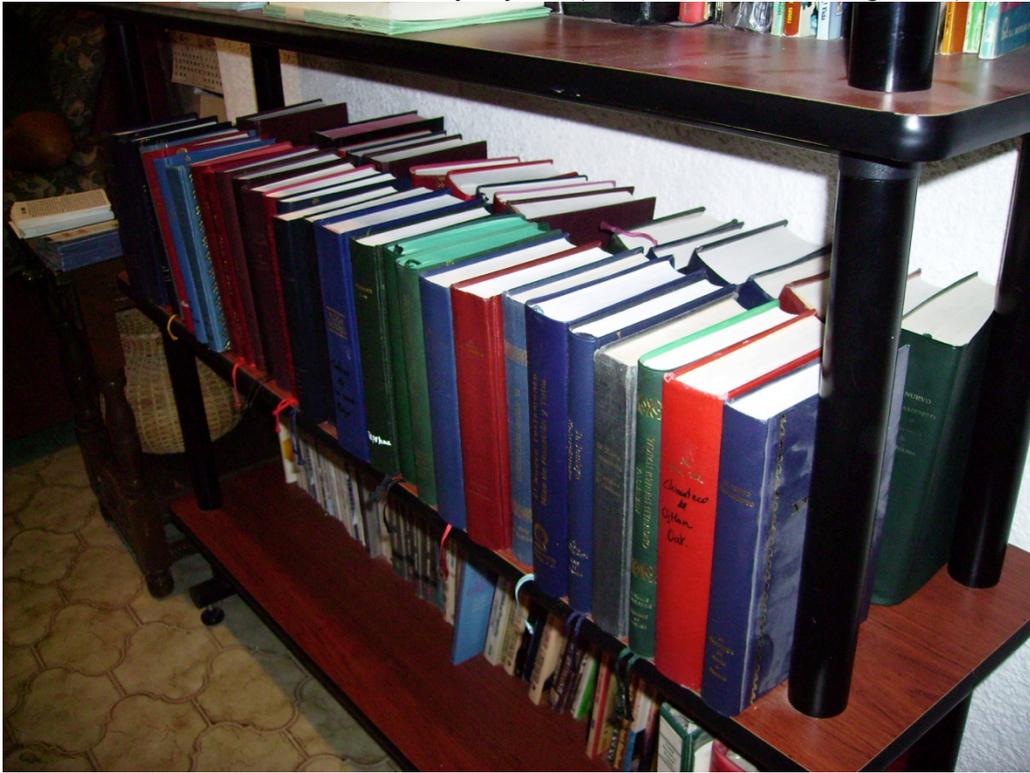
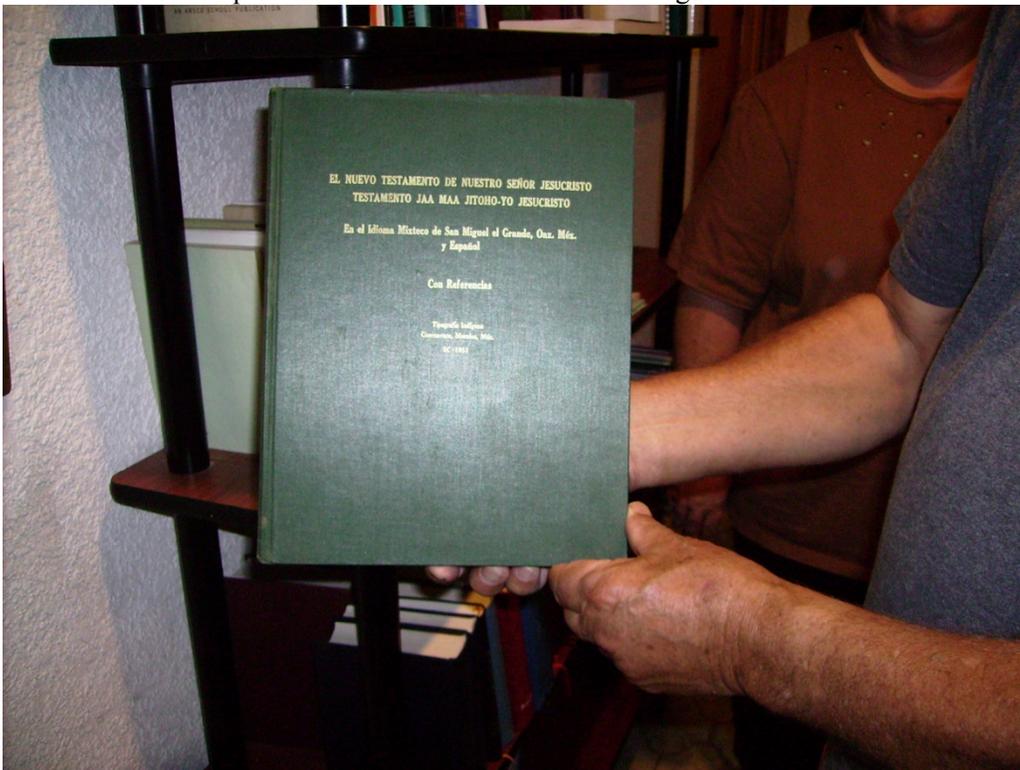


Photo 10 First completed translation in Mexico – San Miguel el Grande



Photos 11 Market Day in Chalcatongo

