

April 2001

Dear friends,

Greetings from the beautiful Huasteca. Actually, I am finding something that rather disturbs me, but which I suppose is the inevitable result of living in the information age. I find tourists coming into the Huasteca who have more information on the region than I have - all accessed through the many, many websites which apparently explain in detail all the tourism locations in the area. One can only pray that as the region makes the mighty leap into the "modern age", as it inevitably will do, that it will be spared the evil which so often comes with the "progress". There is, without doubt, much work which we still must do, and perhaps even more so now with the wind of change in the air. Some things have not changed in 1,000 years, and these will resist change. However, other things are changing with a speed which is both astounding and breathtaking. It is not unusual to pound your way down a mudslick, tire rutted, boulder cobbled path into a ranchito with its collection of mud walled, thatched houses to see several boasting of satellite dishes and electric lighting. Kitchens remain as they have for 2,000 years. Tortillas, frejoles, and nopal is prepared and eaten as it has been for centuries - still in houses with stick walls, open fire pits, and mud floors. Now, however, the family can sit around the TV set and watch the immorality and intrigue of daily Soaps as they share their meal. How wonderfully we have improved the culture!

I am currently sitting in a church in Cd. Victoria, about 150 miles north of Cd. Valles with the portable typewriter on my lap trying to concentrate as I write this letter. Today I am chauffeur for a group of a dozen women from the church in Valles who have come for a two day training and planing session for Vacation Bible School. We often have the self-inflated, and erroneous idea that we, as the American (and Canadian) Church, have dubs, somehow, on what God is doing in the world. I invite you to come with me for a very brief tour of the Church of the Huasteca which is represented by the local church of Valles, of which I am a part. Certainly there is much, much more that needs to be done. There is so much need in the region. So many souls which have never even heard of Christ's love for them. Still, I want to report a Church which is strong and growing. Men and women who are willing to put aside personal preferences, desires, comforts, finances, and in many cases, careers, in order to serve God. There is a very strong evangelistic thrust to the children through Summer Bible programs as is evidenced all around me today. There is a thriving, and ever growing solidarity and ministry within the men's and women's groups within the church. Their emphasis is on prayer, fasting and evangelism. The House Fellowship/Home Church movement is strong and growing - the local church in Valles having grown from four fellowships to ten over the past four months. Many new souls are being won to the Lord through these intimate fellowships and are being plugged into the church where they can continue to grow in their new-found faith. Prayer, fasting, and the seeking of God's direction is an almost daily activity within the Church Body. New churches are being planted on an almost monthly basis as the Church thrusts out into new areas. And now, the message of the Gospel is being spoken and enacted through medical and dental clinics on a twiceweekly basis.

So, "why then", you ask, "are you there?" The answer is very simply because there is still a great need. God is doing a mighty work within his Church here in the Huasteca, but there is still so much that needs to be done, and we are able to stand beside and enable the local Church in it's ministry. I believe that in missions we need to shed the ludicrous, and long-since antiquated notion that we, the Great White Gringo, hold the hot line to God (along, of course, with the purse strings), and begin to become coworkers together with the indigenous Church. If this is true, then we must learn to release what we have for so many years held onto so tightly.

Yesterday I returned from the little, secluded village of Tanlacut where I accompanied Carlos

Salvador and Moises. The rainy season is just beginning and it became questionable if we would make it out over the mountain road, but God gave us grace as we slipped and spun our way long. Here, there is a little fledgling church pastored by Carlos. Here also, the medical and dental team, as an evangelistic arm of the church, has been holding clinics and services every month for five months in order to assist Carlos in the church plant. This trip, however, was not for clinic purposes, rather it was to minister the Word. Carlos, his wife, and four young children have committed themselves to planting a church in this isolated village. In so doing, they must uproot from all that they have back in Valles and move out to this dusty little valley. In Tanlacut we were met again with love and hospitality. The children all were disappointed that Maribel was not with us as they have all fallen in love with her. Maribel, all twenty two years of her, has been anointed with an incredible ministry in evangelism, preaching, and children's ministry. On two different occasions I have seen where around thirty children have given their hearts to the Lord through her ministry to them during a lull in the clinic sessions. It is almost a shame to limit her to assisting Juan Carlos, the dentist, although she usually preaches each evening service. During this evening service Moises delivered a powerful message and there was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people there. Carlos is actively seeking a plot of land so that he can build a house which will serve as home and house church, and allow him to move his family out in order to establish a full-time presence there.

The clinics continue to be used mightily in evangelism and many doors are opening to the message of Jesus' love as never before. I am happy to report that Juan Carlos, our dentist, has been able to join us on a full-time basis (incidentally, I am not too sure that I know of too many American or Canadian dentists who are willing to put aside two days out of every week of their practice, all for the love of their Lord). Also, we have the addition of Laura Gabriela who is my assistant and person savvy in the ins and outs of the local, Mexican medical system. Her assistance is greatly appreciated.

We have also been blessed with some much needed tools for the work. Medical and dental work on the village level, as you can imagine, is very different from the leather-couched, sterile, alcohol-smelling offices to which you are accustomed. Here we have dust, dirt, pigs, chickens, dogs, mud, lack of water, rickety old chairs and tables (if any at all) all covered with chicken excrement, rain, and extreme heat, or bone-chilling cold, depending upon the season and location. It became obvious that there were some changes which needed to be made, and of which we were capable of making and still remaining mobile. This fact became very apparent when a chicken decided to jump into the "sterile" field during a dental procedure. I don't mind pigs and dogs under feet while I am examining patients since sterility is not so critical. However, dental surgery is another matter all together. Also, on more than one occasion we have had to pack up the pharmacy because as the evening wore on the chickens had roosted in the tree above us and the droppings with which we were being blessed certainly were not rain. With all this in mind, we have been blessed with some very wonderful things which will make our lives easier and allow us to serve our patients better. Friends of mine, Dr. Mike and Sue Noel from Houston, were down and bought a "carport" tent and folding, plastic, eight foot table for the work. With this we can have a completely covered and clean pharmacy area totally independent of any other buildings. This becomes very important during rainy season as well as during the heat of summer. Other friends from Houston, J.W. and Alma Cunningham, blessed us with a 1 ton, 1991 Chevrolet van. As you know, this has been a matter of prayer for months now. It is an extended, 15 passenger van and allows us to transport all of our medicines and supplies inside the van, as well as providing adequate seating for the team. What a blessing this is not only for the clinics, but for the church in Valles as well (for a baptismal gathering down at the river the other week I was able to carry 30 pasengers from town to the service. We ran out of seat belts, but we won't mention that part). Mike Fick, a dental

missionary friend whom I have mentioned before, donated a dental chair and dental drill and supplies. I purchased a small air compressor, fold-out card table, gazebo-type screened tent, and fold-up cloth camping chairs. We now can pull into a village, set up our MASH-type dental "office" complete with tent, real dental chair (as opposed to lawn chairs or high backed wooden chairs), dental drill with compressed air, and have a clean table to place out the dental tools and sterilizing chemicals - all without the usual traffic - human, animal, or foul, which usually graces the work site. (We are assuming, of course, that there is electricity to run the compressor. We do not have a generator for those times when there is no power). We can then whip out the "carport" and 8 foot table, back the van into the end, and set up the pharmacy utilizing both the van and the table. When the clinic is over we can now use the enclosure for the evening service - rain or shine. I must confess, my area of work remains a bit more primitive, although at least I can now boast of a couple cloth, fold-up chairs so that I and the patient can sit down. But then, my needs are basic and uncomplicated. One other thing which has been a blessing to the work is an AC/DC amplification system for the services. This allows us to use a microphone and sound system even in villages where there is no power, and greatly increases the ability to be heard.

God is doing a mighty work. The team is solid and faithful to the ministry to which God has called them. Ezequiel and Veronica, along with the local church are taking ownership of the outreach of the medical and dental clinics and are seeing it as an arm of the ministry of the local church. Most importantly, the message of the Gospel is being proclaimed and souls are being saved. Men and women, boys and girls, are hearing and seeing the love of Jesus and are having their eternal destiny changed.

Thank you so much for your faithfulness. I have been overwhelmed and blessed to see how so many of you are giving and opening, not only your hearts, but also your pocket books to the work here in the Huasteca. I am fully aware that for many, many of you it is the "widows coppers", not in amount, but in the fact that the gift comes through the agony of your own lack. I know that for many of you your giving digs down to the very threads of the bottom of the pocket. However, God is even more aware, and it is promised that He who sees in secret will reward openly. May God multiply your blessings as you partner with us here in the Work of the Kingdom.

Your Missionary,