

Migrants Flock to Mexican Border Church and Find Jesus

When Gustavo Banda opened his small church in Mexico, little did he know that it would become a refuge. Sitting near the border, tens of thousands of migrants stop there as part of their search for freedom in America.

Six miles west of Tijuana, and a short distance from the U.S.-Mexico border, lies one of this city's poorest neighborhoods.

Pastor Gustavo Banda of the Ambassadors of Jesus Church told CBN News, "This area is on the outskirts of the city. Not everyone knows about it. Not everybody wants to come here either."

It's easy to see why. There are no paved roads. The hillside is strewn with garbage. There's no sewage system here. And crime is rampant.

"When we moved here there were only cows, horses, chickens and people with a lot of needs," Banda said.

In 2011, Banda and his wife, Zaida Guillén, moved to Cañón de Alacrán, or Scorpion's Canyon, after hearing from the Lord in a dream. "It was a clear mandate from God to move here even though there was absolutely nothing in this place," he recalled.

Teachers by trade, the Mexican couple was touched by the overwhelming needs of the community. Most folks here were poor subsistence farmers.

"God gave me a dream that I had to build a church. We worked for eight months, day and night. We knew God was going to do something special, but nobody had a clue about what was really going to happen," he explained.

That year, Templo Embajadores de Jesús, or Ambassadors of Jesus Church, was born in the heart of Scorpion's Canyon.

Banda held services on Sunday, then hit the rugged roads the rest of the week going house-to-house, ministering to physical and spiritual needs.

"We shared the love of Jesus with them. It was the mandate from God that we have to go to the poor," he said.

In 2016, that focus drastically changed when thousands of Haitians, escaping poverty and back-to-back natural disasters, began to carve a dangerous 7,000-mile path to the border.

Many landed on the church's doorsteps, less than 30 minutes from the San Ysidro border. "Within months, 22,000 Haitians had arrived in the city of Tijuana," he recalled.

The church became a place of refuge. "I did not know, nor did I ever imagine, that there would be so many people in the church," he said.

Since then, Banda has opened his church doors to migrants from all parts of the world.

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