

Missionaries Battle Prince of Darkness in Guatemala

A quarter of Guatemala's population call themselves evangelicals, and churches are as plentiful as tortillas. But for many of the indigenous population of this Central American country, ancient Mayan beliefs lie just below the surface. Jesus and Mary are equated to the Sun God and Moon Goddess. Shamans or witches wield great power as healers and casters of spells in rural communities, and it's not uncommon to see individuals wearing protective amulets against the "evil eye."

When four Operation Mobilization (OM) volunteers were assigned to work with the pastor of a tiny church in the mountains of Guatemala this past November, they had little idea of what they'd be up against.

God had led Pastor Noé Godoy to the town of Trapiche 10 years before. He was aware that the territory had already been claimed by the Prince of Darkness. Violence, drinking, sickness and death oppressed the residents. A number of young people were using insecticides to take their own lives. During his first years there, local witches performed supernatural "miracles" and incited people to attack the pastor with boiling water and machetes. Evangelism was forbidden. And even though the roof of the tiny building he used for a church was ready to collapse, it wasn't until after his main opponent's death that he was allowed to make repairs.

"Yet," affirmed Pastor Noé, who has elected to remain single rather than bring danger upon a wife and children, "our church has seen great miracles of healing and protection as well. And as our people shared the evidence of God's power with other families, they too came to Christ."

Although church members owned very little, they actively began

to help some 200 widows and single mothers, as well as 225 orphans. "We have the vision and even the plans for a dormitory, kitchen and dining room to help these women and children but so far, no way to make it a reality. Meanwhile, we do what we can in the midst of the difficulties and keep trusting that God will accomplish His purposes here."

For OM's four "Love Guatemala" volunteers, Trapiche provided a dramatic first exposure to **spiritual warfare**. At night villagers threw stones at the house where the girls were trying to sleep. And while going house to house during the day, one of the men, Otto, found himself in the home of two witches. What could he say to them? After silently asking God for help Otto opened his Bible. His eyes immediately fell on Revelation 22:14-15, a passage condemning those who practice magic arts. Otto boldly delivered God's message.

The Lord had a very different message for the team: *"Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—the Most High who is my refuge—No evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent."* (Ps. 91:9-10)

Swiss team member Nathan Schmutz was one of the few non-Guatemalans to take part in the outreach. He admitted, "I wasn't prepared for such a confrontation with evil! But I learnt a lot about the power of prayer."

Guatemala's 10 million people suffer the highest chronic malnutrition rate in Latin America and the fourth-highest rate in the world. On average, about one out of two residents are malnourished. Concerned by the obvious poverty of Trapiche church members, OM Guatemala staff made an extra trip to deliver used clothing, shoes, food parcels and even toys for Christmas. The pastor couldn't hide his personal delight at finding a suit that fit. A young mother named Nora had given her life to the Lord through the team's visit a few days before. She had five children and they were barely subsisting in a nearby hovel. The unexpected provision of food, clothing

and toys gave the family new courage.

At the end of the outreach Pastor Noé voiced his gratitude. "Some unbelievers opened their doors to the OM team, and we hope they have helped to change the mind of this community. They have been a big blessing to us. We have no way to pay them back, but God will!"