

Spiritual Warfare, Prophetic Declarations Rescue Over 1,000 Women in One of the World's Most Dangerous Cities

The Mexican hotel where 80-year-old Elena de Porras waged the most intense spiritual battle of her life in 1976 is gone, but memories of the Holy Spirit's profound presence and the words she uttered in response to the warfare one life-changing day still flood her mind.

So do the names and faces of the 1,032 women whose lives are the spoils of the victorious warfare de Porras waged on her knees in prayer and through a prophetic declaration that day in Juarez almost 40 years ago.

Trophies of God's grace, the women are committed followers of Jesus Christ today, living productive alcohol- and drug-free lives as quilt makers, computer operators, cosmetologists and bakers, thanks to de Porras and Reto a la Juventud, a Bible-based rehabilitation center located in one of the world's most dangerous cities.

Miraculous donations of land and money paved the way for Reto to move from two apartments it had rented since 1977 into a modern, dormitory-style building and chapel for 50 girls in 2000.

A Mexican governor and mayor congratulated de Porras at Reto's opening, despite the government's unofficial opposition to supporting Christian ministries with financial aid.

One of 30 addiction recovery centers in Juarez, Reto is the first faith-based program to recently receive financial backing and certification from the Mexican government.

And de Porras, who will turn 81 in October, is widely recognized by Christian, civic and business interests in the United States and Mexico for Reto's success.

A mother of six (one adopted) and grandmother of 17, as well as 2 great-grandchildren, de Porras has appeared on Mexican television and in newspaper stories and received top honors from the Catholic Church in 2008, when it awarded her the St. Francis of Assisi award.

"She is one of the most effective people in the kingdom (of God) that I've had the privilege of being around," says Mike Jinnette, who coordinates fund-raising for Reto in the United States and leads missions trips to Mexico.

Even with health concerns of her own, de Porras still travels the streets of Juarez searching for victims of sexual exploitation and drug addiction, many carrying lifestyle diseases.

Not lacking spiritual vision, de Porras sees vulnerable Juarez youth as a mission field; she plans to bring them to Reto for drug-prevention and abstinence messages before they meet narcotics dealers and pimps on the streets.

To reach Juarez youth with Reto's message of drug- and sexual-abstinence de Porras intends to build a 300-seat auditorium, where entire families will come to hear Bible-based messages from de Porras and her staff, which includes a pastor, nutritionist, psychologist, doctor and counselor.

Currently, Reto staff invests large amounts of time in public schools where there aren't large auditoriums, going from one classroom to another with their drug-free message.

The price tag of de Porras' ambitious goal is \$150,000, which Jinnette is helping raise among churches in the U.S.

Even with prayer and financial support, de Porras says her

greatest ally is an unseen but powerful person.

"It's impossible to rescue addicts if you don't have the Holy Spirit," says de Porras, a third-generation Methodist who first experienced the Holy Spirit's power in 1973.

Not until then did de Porras see results in jail and street ministry, which one intercessor says are the results of the Holy Spirit in and on her.

"Elena (de Porras) is one of the most anointed women I know," says Tony Sanchez.

He and other intercessors in northern Colorado say they're privileged to lay hands on—as the Bible prescribes for the Holy Spirit's flow of power—and intercede for de Porras when she visits their northern Colorado ministry, SWAT (Spiritual Warfare Attack Team).

Graduates of Reto—both staff and volunteers—offer spiritual support to heroin- and cocaine-addicted, sexually-abused women, interceding for them round-the-clock during the first three days of the nine-month program.

Borrowing from the success of the world-renowned Teen Challenge program, Reto's accomplishments are recognized by the governor and mayor of Chihuahua and Juarez, respectively.

Recently certified by the government, Reto receives Mexican aid for its program that includes prayer, Bible study, Christian discipleship and career training in computer science, cake decorating, sewing and beauty arts.

Rotary International and other service organizations applaud Reto's achievements through direct and indirect investments in the building and chapel, located on land donated by the local government in Juarez.

Reto and de Porras are frequently featured on Mexican television and in newspaper stories, including the time when

famed evangelist Nicky Cruz visited Juarez and was given the proverbial keys to the city. A front-page article told the stories of de Porras and Cruz, the drug dealing, gang leader-turned-best-selling author.

Run Baby Run chronicles Cruz' salvation and deliverance and the evangelist's close relationship with the late David Wilkerson, the founder of Teen Challenge and pastor of Times Square Church in New York.

One of de Porras' proudest moments was meeting Wilkerson, who encouraged her to continue Reto's work.

Surprisingly, it was another pastor who told de Porras—during a time of personal defeat—that she was “wasting her time and money on girls who aren't worth it.”

“I'm glad that our Jesus doesn't think like that,” says de Porras, who prays regularly for the Holy Spirit to change hearts.

“If a girl on the streets of Juarez has a chance at successful rehabilitation, it's at Reto where the Holy Spirit brings the power to change” says de Porras.

Among Reto's 1,000-plus successes is Maria (not her real name), a sexually abused young woman who escaped her father's exploitation in 2009, finding salvation and healing through biblical counsel and discipleship, job training and the Holy Spirit's comfort and power. Reconciled with her troubled family six years ago, today Maria volunteers alongside de Porras and her staff, offering students the same prayer support and Spirit-led ministry that changed her life.

Another successful graduate of Reto, Claudia (her real name) was a prostitute like her mother, using pot, pills and alcohol while walking the streets of Juarez's red-light district. It was there she heard the gospel on Saturday nights when Reto volunteers came out do street evanelism. On and off the

streets and drugs since she was 17, Claudia landed at Reto with a serious heroin addiction and a baby on the way. Today Claudia is a counselor at Reto, where for the last six years she's used her Bible degree in helping other young women walk into a sober relationship with Jesus.

The word miracle is frequent in de Porras' perfectly spoken English.

"We seek to form in them a new creation by the love and restoration of the Lord," says de Porras, who considered herself a ministry failure until she encountered the Holy Spirit's miracle-producing power.

The girls' physical and spiritual restoration involves reconciliation with family members, who attend Bible-based worship services alongside them.

"Praise God; we've been having success," says de Porras, who spends time at her home in nearby Zaragoza and in El Paso, Texas; she is a citizen of Mexico and the U.S.

Before de Porras started helping young women off the streets and drugs, she began in 1971 visiting boys and girls in juvenile jail as wife of a Mexican judge, Raul de Porras; together they adopted their daughter, Olivia, from a woman who was pregnant during her incarceration in Juarez.

There were more failures than successes in de Porras' ministry as a Methodist; more disappointments than joys until she had an encounter with the Holy Spirit in 1973. Until then, de Porras says she had not led anybody to the Lord.

Spiritual preparation for the day began in 1972 when de Porras met some young, Puerto Rican men who had been delivered from hard, street drugs through the power of the Holy Spirit at a program they called Teen Challenge in New York.

They were attending the Latin American Bible Institute in

Ysleta, Texas, and talked passionately about the Holy Spirit and Teen Challenge. Intrigued by their enthusiasm, de Porras visited an Assembly of God mission church in Chihuahua, where she experienced the the Holy Spirit's presence, power and joy.

Together the young men and de Porras continued to minister in Juarez' juvenile jails until 1975 when they graduated from Bible school, leaving her a copy of the Teen Challenge training manual.

Still, de Porras viewed herself a failure because she had not led anybody to the Lord; she had met many inmates and offered them practical help, like the time she obtained a copy of a birth certificate in 1976 for a woman named Jaky.

Upon learning that Jaky was staying at an illicit drug- and sex-infested hotel in the red-light district of Juarez, de Porras called on the Holy Spirit before she entered the Rio Escondido.

Inside, sitting on a first-floor landing and covered with a blanket, a woman raised her head and tried to focus her eyes on de Porras.

"Don't you remember me?" a voice whispered. "I'm Esmeralda. You met me in jail. I'm very sick and dying. I don't want to be alone here."

Esmeralda and de Porras had met in juvenile jail, the same place Jaky had been incarcerated.

"I'm looking for Jaky but wait for me," de Porras said on the verge of tears.

Landing on the hotel's third floor, de Porras spotted Jaky through an open door. She was in bed with another woman, both of them drunk and drugged, laughing at and mocking de Porras, who was holding Jaky's birth certificate.

"How in the world do you think I could leave this lifestyle?"

Jaky sneeringly asked.

Overcome with grief, de Porras began to cry, remembering the accusing lies of the Juarez pastor and others: "You're the wife of a prominent judge and a disgrace to him. Nobody cares about these girls. You shouldn't waste your time or money on somebody who's dying."

Just then the overwhelming presence of the Holy Spirit invaded de Porras' body, and she knew her calling was to help rescue young women from the clutches of addiction and prostitution. "That was the moment when the Lord, by His Holy Spirit, dealt with me the reality of this."

Through a quivering voice, de Porras prophetically declared: "What you are rejecting now, I know by faith that many other girls will come and receive."

Before leaving the hotel, de Porras helped Esmeralda to her feet, wrapped a blanket around her frail body and assisted the dying woman to her car.

During their trip to the Juarez jail, de Porras led Esmeralda in a prayer to receive Jesus as her personal Savior; the dying woman became the first of over 1,000 Reto women who have come to know the saving, healing, redeeming, delivering power of God since 1976.

Later that day, officials called de Porras to tell her that Esmeralda died two hours after arriving at the jail.

The Holy Spirit, prayer and the power of the prophetic gift mark Reto and de Porras, say her American supporters.

"We sometimes as Christians are surprised but it's written in the Word that God chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise," says de Porras, who will meet in June with about 500 Methodist women in Monterrey and Durango, Mexico.

"All of them are hungry for more of the Lord and the Holy

Spirit's power," says de Porras, knowing she'll be invited to lay hands on them and pray the words, "More Lord."

Ronald Mallett, now-retired director of a Longmont, Colorado, Mexico missions team focused on the state of Chihuahua, says "Elena de Porras is a modern-day Christian heroine of rare quality. She is so tuned into and responsive to the Lord's leading that it's no exaggeration to characterize her as a restorative breath of inspiration and affirmation for all those fortunate enough to know her.

"The fast-growing eastern suburb of Juarez in which Reto is located has no formal evangelical outreach, and she and the many women she has brought to Jesus can be a major force in bringing that new community into the body of Christ. The land, the plans and the foundations are there. All that's left is for a few of us fellow travelers to catch the vision and fund the project."

Though small by American standards, the \$150,000 needed for Reto's auditorium in Juarez is big in terms of Mexican pesos. Gifts are needed to fulfill the mission of de Porras for Reto, and Jinnette is overseeing funds given by churches in the U.S. Support for the project can be sent to Reto a la Juventud, in care of Vinelife Church, 7845 Lookout Road, Longmont, Colo., 80503. Donations can also be sent to Reto in care of Eduardo Pena, 2320 Juliet Low, El Paso, Texas, 79936.