

Student Risks Life Daily to Share Gospel in Chilean Village

Maria, a long-time victim of **domestic violence**, had reached her limit. Seeing no other way to escape, she was considering suicide. But because of the faithfulness of Southern Baptist missionary Karen Wright and Chilean university student Ruth Aguirre, she chose to live for Christ instead.

Maria had received a Gospel of John when Wright and Aguirre were prayer walking on Polanco Hill, one of the 42 hills upon which Valparaíso, Chile, is built. By the time Aguirre visited her several weeks later, Maria had read the entire Scripture portion. That day she accepted Christ and agreed to let Aguirre begin a Bible study in her home.

Aguirre was even more amazed when Maria's husband—her abuser—said he, too, wanted to learn more about Christ.

Aguirre recently “adopted” Polanco Hill as part of the 42 Hills Project, an initiative Wright begun. The project links U.S. churches with Chilean believers to reach the 42 hills of Valparaíso—Chile's chief seaport—with the gospel.

It was during a vision trip with Wright that Aguirre felt called to reach Polanco, a dangerous place for any outsider but especially for a single, 22-year-old female. Aguirre realized she would be trusting God with her life every time she stepped foot on Polanco Hill.

“It was difficult at first to go,” she said. “I was afraid. But once I finally began going and praying, I became very aware of the needs of the people.”

Like much of Valparaíso, Polanco Hill is dotted with brightly

colored houses. But beneath the cheery appearance is an area riddled with poverty, crime and violence. Alcohol is cheap and readily available. A house on one street is painted completely black, a sign it is used for drug deals. **Unemployment rates** are among the highest in the country.

Many of the youth in Valparaíso suffer from broken homes and lack strong role models. A majority of teens never finish high school; faced with a bleak future, they often turn to theft and dealing drugs. Throughout the city, groups of young people loiter in the streets with nothing to do—a perfect breeding ground for peer pressure and poor life decisions.

Aguirre sometimes **prayer walks** the area alone despite the risk.

“It’s a little hill, but there’s a lot of need,” she said. “There’s a strong sense of abandonment, of desolation.”

But she also sees the hand of God at work in her adopted community. Many people are beginning to share with her about their lives and struggles; such transparency is uncommon here.

“I feel like God has put a sign on me that I can’t see, but that other people must see,” she said. “It must say, ‘Talk to me, tell me your problems!’”

One day as she was leaving Bible study, a man on the street corner noticed the Bible she was carrying. He came up to her and said he wanted to study it, too.

“People are responding to God’s desire for them in this place,” Aguirre said. “It’s an unusual phenomenon here.”

Aguirre desires to begin more **Bible studies** in homes throughout Polanco. She also wants to work with local youth, many of whom face a life of crime without Christ.

Recently, Aguirre expanded her ministry to O’Higgins Hill after Maria and her husband moved there from Polanco. Every

week Aguirre leads a Bible study in Maria's new home.

"God is teaching me to do His will and to obey Him, and that in the Bible I can find what God wants for me," Maria said. "He has me here for a purpose, and I will find that purpose ... as I dig deeper in His Word."

Aguirre rejoices at what Christ is doing in Maria's life, but grieves for other area residents who haven't yet responded to the gospel. Aguirre needs Christian partners to help her in reaching them.

"We are seeing the Lord at work, and it's an exciting thing," said Wright, who is from Kentucky. "My prayer now is for Chilean churches to step up and see that this is their mission field, too."

Of the 42 hills in Valparaíso, only four have a Baptist church in the community. Some have no **evangelical** presence at all.

Wright said more U.S. churches are needed as well to partner with Chileans like Aguirre and reach the other hills of Valparaíso. Churches that "adopt" a hill will be asked to pray for their hill and send volunteer teams several times a year to evangelize and start Bible studies.

"There are 42 hills," Aguirre said. "God is working there, and He's going to use either me or someone else to get His Word out. Pray that God will shine through Polanco and [His Light will] spread to the other hills."

To learn more about the 42 Hills Project and how your church can get involved, [click here](#).

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