

# How Prayer Is Breaking the Machismo Stronghold

Last weekend was an unusually violent one for Barranquilla, Colombia. On Saturday, a woman was found dead in a hotel, and police said she had been strangled with a chain. Another woman was found murdered in a different part of the city. The next day, a 26-year-old woman was hospitalized after her ex-husband beat her relentlessly with a broken glass bottle and almost gouged her eye out.

The local newspaper said the man who blinded his ex-wife was initially in custody but he was later set free. Police could not explain why he wasn't charged.

Why is there so much violence against women in Latin America? Why don't the police and the courts protect women from this abuse? And is there anything the Christian community can do about this crisis?

Last Sunday, Christians from dozens of different denominations took a huge step toward ending the violence in Barranquilla. They didn't do it through political protest but through prayer, worship and repentance.

At 4 PM a large group of believers from Barranquilla marched through the downtown area. Then the men knelt on hot pavement across from the city's main cathedral and repented publicly for the way women are being brutalized and abused. Some of the men wept as various pastors from the city lamented the mistreatment of women and asked God to forgive Colombian men for causing so much pain to their wives, daughters and girlfriends.

As I looked out over the crowd that had gathered at the Plaza de la Paz, I could see that many of the women were astounded. They had never witnessed anything like this. Men in Colombia

have never publicly apologized for violence against women. Men had never publicly shed tears for the pain their women endure.

After the prayers of repentance, women leaders from the city prayed and released forgiveness to the men, and asked God to heal the women who have been silenced, traumatized and emotionally crippled by the *machismo* culture.

And I felt the Lord saying: "I am sending a wave of healing to Latin America. As My people cry out in repentance, I am changing the hearts of men and breaking the forces of darkness that have held women in captivity. Prepare for a massive cultural shift."

Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for women. A Colombian woman dies at the hands of her husband every four days. In 2011, more than 150 women were the victims of acid attacks in the country. So far in the Barranquilla region, 15 women have already been murdered by their husbands or partners this year.

The murder rate is so high in Colombia that it is ranked second in the world for femicide—with Guatemala at the top of the list. After Colombia, the list includes El Salvador, Bolivia and the Dominican Republic.

At the root of the problem is *machismo*, the belief that men are superior and that they have the right to dominate, control and abuse females. Male pride is certainly not unique to Latin countries, but because of certain unique cultural circumstances in this part of the world, *machismo* has triggered horrific levels of domestic violence, rape, sexual molestation and murder.

Many Latin American women have been conditioned to believe that domestic violence is normal. In Bolivia, women in indigenous communities are known to say of their husbands: "Cuanto más me golpea, más me ama" ("The more he beats me, the more he loves me"). They are not shocked to hear that a man in

their neighborhood broke his wife's collarbone or gave her a black eye. That's just what men do.

But the gospel is slowly breaking the *machismo* mindset—and prayer events like the one in Barranquilla last Sunday give clear evidence that God is ending the sad legacy of abuse. One of the pastors who prayed in the “No Más Violencia” rally was 29-year-old Sergio Castro, who leads Iglesia de Camino, Verdad y Vida. He publicly renounced machismo and repented on behalf of Colombian fathers who have taught their sons to be macho.

Castro prayed: “Lord, we repent on behalf of all the previous generations of men who have treated women as inferior. Heal our land, change our hearts, change the mindset of society. Teach us to love our wives as Jesus loves the church. Teach us to serve them and to love them with a sacrificial love.”

All churches and missionary organizations working in Latin America should prepare for the coming shift. When God answers these prayers, machismo will be uprooted from the church first—and then the rate of femicide and domestic violence will drop as fathers, husbands, sons, policemen, judges and politicians decide to protect and respect women.

**J. Lee Grady** is the former editor of Charisma. You can follow him on Twitter @leegrady. You can learn more about his ministry, *The Mordecai Project*, at [www.mordecai.org](http://www.mordecai.org). His work to protect women from abuse was featured in the March issue of Charisma.

To make a tax-deductible donation, go to [www.mordecai.org](http://www.mordecai.org) and click on The Mordecai Project icon on the home page. Checks can be mailed to Charisma Cares, 600 Rinehart Rd., Lake Mary, FL 32746. Be sure to put “The Mordecai Project, India” in the notation.