

## **Writing medical and spiritual prescriptions; Christians in El Salvador reach out to earthquake victims**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

LAM News Service

Los Patios, El Salvador (LAMNS)—Dr. Gustavo Magaña believes that God permitted him to be a doctor for a reason. “I work in the name of Christ,” he explains. “I am able to cure illnesses and do evangelism.”

“I see many needs,” says Gustavo who explains that 75% of the patients he treats during the week do not pay him. “They come to be healed and to hear the Gospel. I’m able to speak to them about Jesus Christ.”



Gustavo is part of an active team of medical personnel from the Iglesia Bautista Vista Hermosa (Beautiful View Baptist Church) in the capital of San Salvador that spends at least two Saturdays a month bringing medical and dental services and the Word of God to remote towns such as this one.

Rising early enough to leave the church by 5 a.m., the group loads heavy medical equipment into a rented bus and sets off for an almost two-hour trip to the heavily earthquake-damaged region of this small Central American country.

Two strong earthquakes shook El Salvador last January 13 and February 13, leaving over 1,100 dead, nearly 7,000 injured and destroying 280,000 houses.

Over 95% of the houses in Los Patios and the nearby town of San Agustin were leveled by the quakes. “The first time we came here we treated people under the trees,” remembers Dr. Mario Palencia, a dentist who has organized the medical caravans. The team chose Los Patios because the small community had been bypassed by governmental and private agencies. “The nearest doctor and hospital are two to three hours away from here by bus,” Mario says.

Today, the sounds of hammers and saws ring out across the community as residents are building new concrete block homes. “There has been a lot of construction here in the last

two months,” says Doctor Roxana de Cordero, a dentist who has worked with every one of the clinics since they began.

“For months after the quake there were no tents and the people lived outdoors,” she says. “Then they built temporary shelters with laminated tin sheets and plastic.”

Now, neighbors are helping neighbors to put up simple homes that will be permanent and hopefully withstand future earth movements. “Everybody in town is helping with the construction,” says Luis Alonzo Romero who is putting finishing touches on the building that will house him along with his wife and children. There is no electricity in the town, Luis explains, but running water is available from three faucets located throughout the community.

On a clear, warm Saturday nearly 80 patients line up to share their physical complaints with the team of five doctors, three dentists and a host of volunteers who keep records, wash equipment, dispense pharmaceuticals and counsel the residents.

“The most common problem is intestinal parasites,” says Gustavo who also lists malnutrition, respiratory infections, eye problems, vaginal infections and dental problems as issues the team must address.

“One of the major problems is the lack of education about health protection,” he says.



El Salvador's earthquakes, and the aftershocks that shook the country for weeks, were followed by a drought that has already destroyed one complete crop this year. “Many people lost their harvest and are suffering from depression,” says Oscar Maricio Juarez, an accountant who helps with the project's logistics. Oscar said that his church has financed the total ministry itself other than gifts from organizations such as the Latin America Mission that are helping to pay for medicine and equipment.

Many people come to the clinics seeking not only medical assistance but spiritual help as well. “We provide them with a spiritual prescription,” explains Mario.

“Many of those who stopped to talk were not Christians, but were serious in their inquiries,” says Benjamin Arteaga, a retired reading teacher who talks with many of the patients who pass by. “We have Bibles, Gospel portions, and literature from the church for them.”

In addition to the Saturday clinics, the Vista Hermosa church sends a church leader to the community each week to hold a Bible study and evangelize. "Many of the residents of Los Patios are ex-guerrillas, very poor people," says the church's pastor, Edwin Castellanos.

There is no industry or business in Los Patios, and many residents eke out a subsistence living. "It would be good if we could help develop a fertilizer plant or teach the people how to make cement blocks," Edwin says. "What they need to improve their life style is jobs," he explains.

The medical and spiritual ministries are bringing results. Twenty-three people are attending the weekly Bible study, nine have made professions of faith in Jesus Christ and two have been baptized.

"God is using us to speak to the people," exclaims Gustavo. "It's incredible!"

Latin America Mission works in partnership with churches and Christian agencies throughout Latin America and supports missionaries and projects in many Latin countries as well as in Spain. LAM is seeking to place new missionaries throughout the region. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami, FL 33152, by e-mail at [info@lam.org](mailto:info@lam.org), or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission's web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>. LAM's Canadian office is at 3075 Ridgeway Drive, Unit 14, Mississauga, ON L5L 5M6.

**Writing medical and spiritual prescriptions; Christians in El Salvador reach out to earthquake victims, *LAM News Service*, Nov 30, 2001**