



Voice ^{of the} Martyrs

Reaching MEXICO'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



Serving the Persecuted Church for More Than 50 Years | July 2024

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW CHRIST IN MEXICO?

By Floyd A. Brobbel
CEO for Voice of the Martyrs Canada



“...the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” – Philippians 4:7-8 ESV

Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed in Mexico. However, due to the country’s high concentration of indigenous minority groups, with their separate identities and languages, evangelical Christians are often subjected to systematic oppression by local authorities. Many opposing members of their communities practise Christo-paganism, a syncretistic blend of ancient pagan practices and Roman Catholicism. Additionally, a formidable Marxist movement exerts its influence in the south, especially in the Chiapas state. Christians residing in the southern area encounter stiff opposition by Marxist and animist groups, as well as from their village leaders who persecute followers of Jesus in defence of their indigenous culture.

Converts to Christianity are often rejected by members of their communities and, at times, large groups

of Christians have even been driven from their homes. These converts and faithful witnesses for Christ have lost their jobs, inheritances and land. To remain in their communities would mean being marginalized, partly because they will not participate in pagan celebrations that feature drunkenness and immorality. Despite such persecution, the number of Christians has notably increased in the southern part of the country.

Fear is a natural human response when encountering the intense hatred and hostility of those opposed to Christ and His followers. However, the Bible frequently encourages the children of God not to fear the enemy but to instead readily place their trust in Him. Turning to our Heavenly Father in prayer leads to a greater awareness of His strengthening presence, as well as His overcoming peace. He alone can pro-

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Due to Mexico's cultural roots, many indigenous peoples practise "Christo-paganism," a syncretistic blend of ancient pagan rituals and Roman Catholicism.

vide needed reassurance to each troubled heart that in Him there is safety and rest regardless of the situation.

In this month's issue of *Voice of the Martyrs Canada*, you will encounter the testimonies of those who remain determined to hold fast to God amid turbulent times. Hope has not abandoned these faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

Instead, they fill their minds with things that inspire true worship of the Lord our God and sacrificial service to others.

Richard Wurmbrand wrote these thought-provoking words in his book, *Tortured for Christ*: "I have found truly jubilant Christians only in the Bible, in the underground church, and in prison." Like those of our persecuted Christian family who willingly suffer for Christ, I pray that you and I will live as faithful witnesses for His glory. Therefore, let us fix our minds on Christ and His goodness as we joyfully share the Gospel with others. After all, no circumstance is too dark or difficult when we follow Jehovah Sabaoth, "The Lord of hosts," who commissions the ministry of His mighty armies of angels in both the heavenly and earthly realms.

Grace and peace,



The goals of VOMC are expressed in our "Ministry Purposes" as follows:

1. To encourage and empower persecuted Christians to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).
2. To give practical relief and spiritual support to the families of Christian martyrs (Matthew 25:36).
3. To equip persecuted Christians to love and win to Christ those opposed to the Gospel (Romans 12:14).
4. To help believers rebuild their lives and Christian witness in countries where they have formerly suffered oppression (Nehemiah 1:3; 2:5).
5. To promote the fellowship of all believers by informing the world of the faith and courage of persecuted Christians, thereby inspiring believers to a deeper level of commitment to Christ and involvement in His Great Commission (Hebrews 13:3; Galatians 6:2).

Spending of funds is confined to board-approved programs and projects. Each restricted contribution designated towards a board-approved program or project will be used as designated with the understanding that when the need for such a program or project has been met, or cannot be completed for any reason determined by the board, the remaining restricted contributions designated for such program or project will be used where needed most. Gifts from individual donors of \$10 and more are acknowledged and receipted with an official receipt for income tax purposes.



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Reaching MEXICO'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Article Photos: VOM International



After Ruth and her family were abducted by masked gunmen in southern Mexico, their commitment to advancing God's Kingdom only intensified.

Sitting in a sunlit room of her home in southern Mexico, Ruth smiled frequently while sharing stories from her youth, a time when she was unaware of how dangerous her family's ministry work was in the region. Many of her most cherished childhood memories include the journeys she made with her father as they travelled deep into the mountains and jungles to preach the Gospel. Those formative years later launched her into front-line ministry as an adult.

When Ruth was as young as eight years old, her father took her on multi-day trips to villages that practised either animism or Christo-paganism, which is a blend of ancient pagan rituals and Roman Catholicism.

While her father met and prayed with the adults, Ruth sat with the children and taught them what she had learned in Sunday school. This young evangelist often brought the village children handmade gifts and taught them using Sunday school materials that she had prepared herself. During those memorable trips with her father, Ruth witnessed sick people getting healed and many people placing their faith in Jesus Christ.

Ruth's father always experienced great joy whenever giving Bibles to new believers. He would purchase the Bibles personally by using the money he had earned when repairing televisions and radios in his spare time. And he often travelled for two days each way to purchase Bibles in the city. Ruth recalls the time they even made the round-trip just to purchase two Bibles for a village where no one owned one. Ruth, who is now 47, remembers being deeply moved when seeing how hard her father worked to provide each believer with their own copy of God's Word.

Growing Up in Ministry

Throughout her childhood, Ruth's father oversaw dozens of churches in southern Mexico. Soon, she became a ministry leader herself – even as a child. At age 10, with the blessing of her church's deacons, she was allowed to lead a Sunday school class on a trial basis. When the class grew from 10 children to 70 children within three months, she became the Sunday school director for several churches, a position she held for the next 10 years.

As she matured and later spent more time minis-

tering to adult believers with her father, Ruth began to hear personal accounts of persecution. Violence became more common in the mid-1990s when the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) began engaging in small-scale fighting against the Mexican Army and police authorities. Members of the EZLN, a guerrilla group partially influenced by Marxist ideology, sometimes persecuted Christians because the Gospel conflicted with their political agenda. "After the [Zapatista uprising] started, everybody was told to eliminate Christians in the area," recounts Ruth.

As in the case of many believers today, those who left their family's indigenous religions to follow Christ often paid a steep price for their decision. Christian converts were frequently shunned by their families, ostracized by their communities, and/or violently attacked.

In 2004, Ruth learned that Christians suffer for the Gospel, not only in her region but around the world. A woman visiting Ruth in Mexico gave her a copy of the *Voice of the Martyrs* magazine. Although the magazine was published in English, it helped Ruth to understand VOM's mission which involves serving persecuted Christians internationally.

When she flipped through the magazine's pages, she saw a picture of men carrying boxes of Bibles that were to be distributed in areas where Bibles weren't otherwise available. She immediately sent an email to the address included in the magazine, hoping to connect with someone at VOM. Sometime later, a VOM team member visited Ruth in Mexico and helped to equip her for the work of advancing God's Kingdom. And VOM later provided Ruth 300 Bibles to distribute among pastors working in areas where Christians were facing significant levels of persecution.

Ruth took her father with her to pick up the shipped Bibles from the post office. Grateful for the unexpected gift, they praised God for the blessing of His Word. "I was crying," Ruth says with heartfelt gratitude. "That was an answer to prayer, because for us it was impossible to buy [that many Bibles]."

A New Ministry Partner

In 2009, Ruth met a fine Christian man named Aurelio who had lost his wife and was left to raise their children on his own. Like Ruth, he had a passion for evangelism. When Ruth and Aurelio got married in 2013, the couple soon began planting churches together. However, as they and other church planters entered new villages in southern Mexico, they often faced opposition. Mexico's constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but it also allows indigenous communities a

degree of self-governance so they can continue practising their indigenous customs and rituals.

Under the authority of this law, some village leaders only allow community members to practise the village's tribal religion. In such cases, local priests urge their congregations to persecute anyone trying to establish a different one. The church planters are then ostracized by the community, resulting in their electricity and water supplies being cut off, their children forbidden to attend local schools, and/or their families denied medical care at the village clinic.



"God is so good," Ruth says....
"He is bringing all the resources
needed for ministry."

In early 2015, Ruth and Aurelio started working with a large group of homeless people who had been expelled from their small town for refusing to cooperate with the Zapatistas. At first, the ministering couple focussed on helping young women who were at risk of being sexually abused. The couple's ministry work soon expanded to include the provision of meals, Bibles and job training for as many needy people as possible.

Ruth and Aurelio were able to further assist the people with the purchase of a small piece of land that could be used for farming – a means of providing for their families. There, on the same property, they built a small church building which is now also being used every Saturday to provide meals for others in need. "People come from every community," Aurelio adds. "They listen to the Gospel and eat food."

Following the success of their work in the city, the couple began visiting four other communities where church plants were not allowed. In each of these areas, they began programs to feed the children and improve literacy through the reading of the Bible. Ruth and Aurelio renamed the programs “Outreach Bases.” However, as the bases grew, they attracted unwanted attention.

Held Captive

In June 2017, Ruth and Aurelio packed their truck with 500 Bibles, which they and several Christian youth – including two of their teen-aged children – were going to distribute at one of the Outreach Bases. After the distribution, their son Gabriel rode home on a bus with some other teenagers, but their daughter Maria (who was a few years younger than her brother) stayed with them. The family drove home filled with joy, knowing that hundreds of people now had Bibles.

At about 5 p.m., just as the three of them were nearly home, a truck pulled up in front of their vehicle and came to a sudden stop. Then a car quickly parked beside them, preventing the entrapped family from driving around the stopped truck. Ruth and Aurelio realized they were in trouble.

Six masked men climbed out of both vehicles with automatic rifles, and one of the assailants opened Aurelio’s door. “We know who you are,” the masked man threatened. “You are on our list. We know what you do, and today you are going to die.” Four of the armed men then proceeded to drag Aurelio out of the truck and beat him with the stocks of their rifles – leaving him wounded on the street, bleeding from a gash on his head. “They hit me in the face so many times that I couldn’t feel anything,” Aurelio states.

Another gunman got in the couple’s truck and drove away with Ruth and Maria inside. As the driver slowed to go over a speedbump moments later, Ruth opened the door and jumped out, pulling Maria after her. The two escapees started running, but the gunman and his friends, who were following in their own vehicles, soon caught up with them. The men tied Ruth’s and Maria’s hands behind their backs and threw them into their own truck.

When Ruth sat up in the back seat, she saw Aurelio slumped over next to her. At first, she thought he was dead, but he soon regained consciousness. Aurelio’s

hands were covered with blood, which he wiped on the car window in hopes of alerting a passerby. In that moment, Ruth prayed: “Lord, I need You.... Give me the strength that can only come from You.”

Ruth says a sense of peace came over her as the vehicles stopped and the gunmen dragged the family out of the truck. With the sun just starting to set, three of the men pushed her, Aurelio and Maria down a hill. At the bottom of the hill, an area covered with trash and broken glass, the gunmen forced the family to walk barefoot into the woods, where they continued to beat Aurelio. After a while, they doused Ruth, Aurelio and Maria with gasoline.

The men beat Aurelio until he finally lay still on the ground. Ruth feared that she and her family were about to be killed. “Lord, is this Your will...?” she prayed silently. “Would You give us another opportunity? There are so many things that we haven’t finished.”

As Ruth thought about the life-threatening situation they were facing, a vivid image came to her mind. She envisioned all the boxes of Bibles that were still stacked in their warehouse. Since a new shipment of Bibles recently arrived there, she had already begun compiling a list of people who would be receiving them. Ruth continued to pray, asking God to allow her family to be freed so they could get the Bibles to those who needed them.

After nightfall, Ruth couldn’t tell if Aurelio was dead or alive. But as she grieved over the dreadful events of that night, she again felt God’s reassuring presence: “I heard Him say, ‘You won’t die; you will live and tell of My glory.’ In that moment, I felt an inexplicable peace. I didn’t feel alone anymore.... A strength came over me.”

Suddenly, one of the captors put a gun to Ruth’s head. He pulled the trigger, but nothing happened. His gun had jammed. Frustrated, he tried to light a match to set the family’s gasoline-soaked clothing on fire. The matches wouldn’t light. “What is going on?” the perplexed man yelled. “We have to finish the job!” The gunmen then walked away from the family to talk among themselves.

At about 1 a.m., the men decided to leave. Having stolen Aurelio’s and Ruth’s cellphones, as well as their truck, the attackers sped away. Ruth untied her hands



Table Talk Mexico

Alphabet Soup

Use each letter in the soup illustration to fill in the words below that relate to the country of Mexico. Each letter can only be used once. An answer key, along with printables, are available at: vomcanada.com/TableTalkMexico.



WORDS:

_u_ito T_ma_o

P_ra_id _ot_e_pe_s

_l_anoes _stiva_s

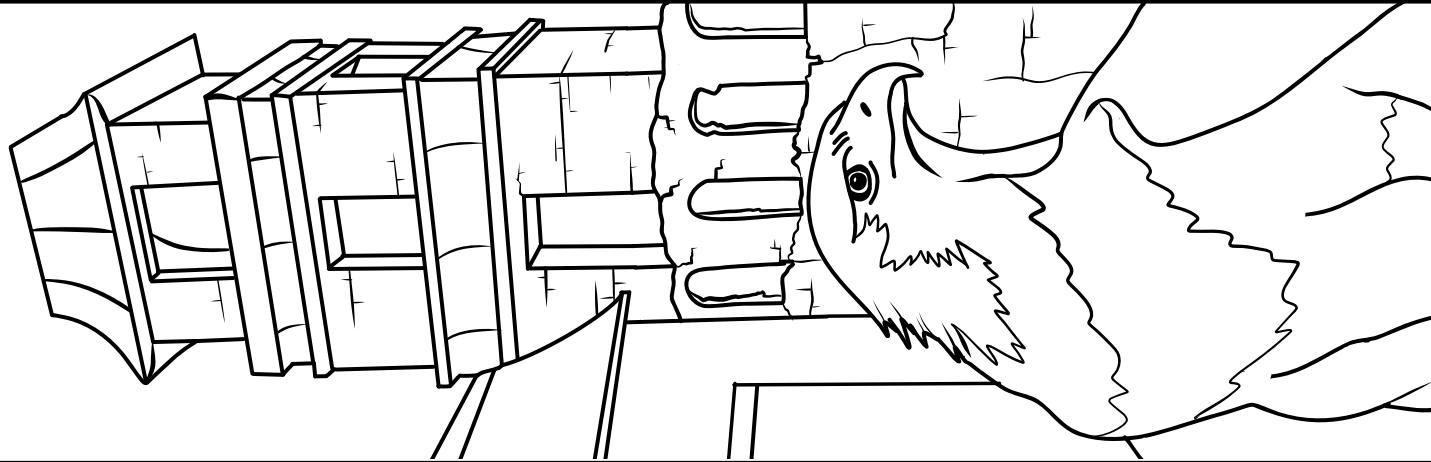
G_a_amol_ R_nfo_e_ts

Go_d_n Ea_e R_o_rande

Did You Know?
Sopa Azteca is a traditional soup that is made in many areas of Mexico. It consists of tomatoes, chicken, chickpeas, onions and love.

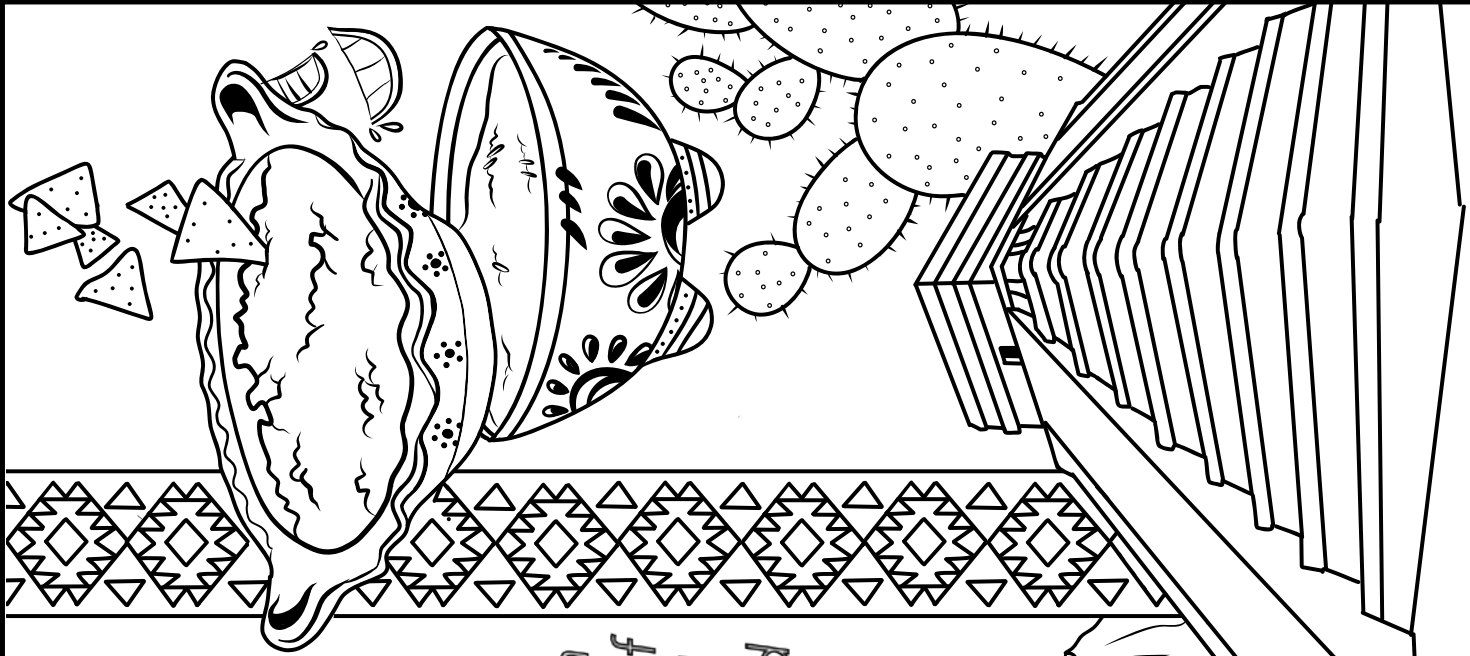
Bonus:
Can you find Mr. Sombrero?





"...Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 4:6-7 ESV



July 2024

His Way “...Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” *Philippians 4:6-7* ESV

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 PAKISTAN Pray for an evangelism team that was harassed after conducting an outreach in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region.	2 UGANDA Pray that militant Islamists who are persecuting Christians will discover the reality of Christ and turn to Him.	3 SOUTHERN MEXICO Pray for God's favour on displaced families that are returning to their villages to preach the Gospel.	4 NORTH KOREA Pray for Dylan Kim's father who is currently imprisoned in North Korea because of his missionary work.	5 INDIA Pray for new Christians facing pressure from their family members to return to Hinduism.	6 TÜRKIYE (TURKEY) Praise God for Nurettin who placed his faith in Christ soon after receiving a Bible!	
7 NIGERIA Pray for the safe return of Christians who have been abducted by Islamic terrorists.	8 BRUNEI Pray that evangelists, who risk hefty fines and/or imprisonment for sharing the Gospel, will reach more people.	9 LIBYA Pray that the country's political insecurity will cause Libyans to seek the stability found only in Christ (Isaiah 33:6).	10 PHILIPPINES Pray that several new Christians on the predominantly Muslim island of Mindanao will stand firm amid persecution.	11 NEPAL Pray that anti-conversion laws and other restrictions will not silence Christians nor hamper their ministry work.	12 MOROCCO Pray that Christians who have been imprisoned for sharing their faith will continue to be bold witnesses behind bars.	13 ISRAEL (INCLUDING WEST BANK & GAZA) Pray for Christian converts from Islam who face persecution from members of their families and communities.
14 LEBANON Praise God that children like Betul are experiencing His love through a youth program!	15 IRAN Pray that Iranians suffering from drug addictions will find hope and deliverance in Jesus Christ.	16 AFGHANISTAN Praise God for those in the Hazara people group who have come to know the Lord.	17 CHINA Pray for strength on behalf of imprisoned Chinese Christians, such as Wang Yi, Li Juncal and Zhang Shaojie.	18 CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC Pray that in the midst of the civil war, which is causing mass displacement, many will turn to Christ.	19 MOZAMBIQUE Pray for Christians who have fled attacks by militant Islamists and are concerned about the welfare of their family members.	20 BANGLADESH Pray that Christians in rural areas, including former Muslims, will have access to God's Word.
21 TUNISIA Pray for new Christians who are persecuted by their family members for leaving Islam.	22 BURKINA FASO Pray that attacks from terrorist groups like al-Qaida and the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS) will cease.	23 KAZAKHSTAN Pray for Christians who have lost jobs and educational opportunities because of their faith.	24 EGYPT Pray for the continued success of Bible distribution efforts.	25 MYANMAR (BURMA) Pray for Christians and other innocent civilians who are caught in the crossfire of the ongoing civil war.	26 DR CONGO Pray that God will minister His provision and comfort to the children of two local missionaries who were martyred.	27 MAURITANIA Pray for the courage and wisdom of underground church leaders in their approach to outreach efforts.
28 DJIBOUTI Pray that Christians who have left Islam will stand firm when encountering persecution from their family members.	29 AZERBAIJAN Pray that churches will be able to register legally with the government to avoid harassment and fines.	30 KENYA Pray for the protection of believers and their church buildings in areas where Christianity is a minority.	31 BAHRAIN Pray for unlimited print and digital access to God's Word.			



Scan to access
Digital Calendar

More about Mexico!



One Way

Christo-paganism, the predominant religion practised in Mexico, is a blend of paganism with the rituals of Catholicism. Christo-pagans may identify themselves as witches, druids or, using the most commonly referenced term, "animists."

Animism is an ancient religion in which a person believes that created things – from trees and mountains to animals and humans – each consist of a godlike spirit. Endeavouring to appease these spirits often generates fear, driving communities in the participation of rituals and sacrifices to elicit ancestral intervention. One example of this is an annual festival called, "The Day of the Dead."

There are key differences between Christianity and animism. First, while animists believe that spirits reside in objects and living things, Christians believe in one God who commands we worship Him alone (Exodus 20:3). Second, serving God is not motivated by fear based on the need to appease Him or earn our salvation through good works and rituals (Ephesians 2:8-9). Rather, Christians are free to live peacefully with the assurance that God's love is unconditional and everlasting (Romans 5:1).

Way Out

There is a significant need for the truth of God's Word in remote communities of Mexico. VOMC partners with Galcom International to distribute audio Bibles in the recipients' native languages, specifically those residing in the unreached communities and jails of Ometepe, a southwestern city of Mexico. To learn more about VOMC's international projects, please visit www.vomcanada.com.

Weigh In

1. Mexican cuisine is well-known throughout the world. However, traditional Mexican food differs significantly from that which is marketed in Canada.

Research a traditional Mexican recipe and then prepare it. A great place to find a good recipe is through the website, www.travelfoodatlas.com/mexican-food, which offers numerous authentic dishes from Mexico. Afterwards, compare how it tastes to the other Mexican foods you've tried before. Which meal did you like better?

2. There are 77 volcanoes spanning the landscape of Mexico. Many of the active, dangerous volcanoes are in close proximity to heavily populated cities.

With eruptions happening frequently, living in an area close to an active volcano can be hazardous. Even if lava doesn't affect an area, volcanic ash and smoke can be devastating. Why do you think people continue living in these areas despite the potential risks?

3. Evangelists, pastors and missionaries commonly travel for several hours, or even days, in their efforts to reach small rural communities. Often, these trips include long stretches of journey in hot, uncomfortable run-down buses.

Imagine yourself riding in an uncomfortable bus while travelling among the Mexican mountains. What do you see and how do you feel? Can you endure another day of such travel? What would make this risky trip worth it? Would your answer be the same as the Christian evangelists working in this country?

4. People in Mexico celebrate numerous festivals throughout the year. Since these festivals involve heavy alcohol consumption and immoral pagan rituals, Christians refuse to participate or pay the required tax to support these festivities. Their refusal frequently results in persecution.

What's your opinion? Should Mexican Christians pay the festival tax to keep the peace in their communities? Or should they take a stand against it and consequently face persecution? Can you think of a *Canadian* parade or festival where Christians are pressured to conform to unbiblical social standards?

Recommended Reads:

- *Off We Go to Mexico* by Laurie Krebs and Christopher Corr. (Early Readers)
- *Let's Learn About Mexico: Activity and Coloring Book* by Yuko Green. (Ages 6-10)
- *Christian Heroes: Then & Now – Cameron Townsend, Good News In Every Language* by Janet Bengé and Geoff Bengé.

Sources:

- <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/getting-around-mexico>
- <https://www.volcanodiscovery.com/mexico.html>
- <https://travelfoodatlas.com/mexican-food>
- <https://anthropologyreview.org/anthropology-glossary-of-terms/animism>

Each Saturday, more than 5,000 youth hear the Gospel and receive discipleship. Ministry workers also distribute Christmas Care Packs at the Outreach Bases. Each of these packages contain a children's Bible, water bottle, school supplies, and other practical necessities.



and, after Aurelio regained consciousness, helped her husband and Maria walk back up the hill. After making it to the road, they eventually got help.

A Time of Healing

At the hospital, Aurelio received stitches for his head wound and Ruth was treated for cuts on her feet from shards of embedded glass – the result of having been forced to walk barefoot at the bottom of the hill. The entire family also received help in dealing with the trauma they experienced that night. Ruth and Aurelio don't know who abducted them, but they suspect the attackers were either guerrilla soldiers or members of a drug cartel. Both rebel groups have a history of persecuting Christians.

In some parts of Mexico, these groups try to stop the spread of the Gospel because those who put their faith in Christ are more difficult to recruit for drug trafficking and prostitution. "There are many questions that we don't have answers to," Aurelio states. "Yet, we know that God saved us in His mercy, and it is worth taking these risks for the Gospel."

Following their ordeal with the gunmen, the family travelled to another part of Mexico where they were able to rest and spend some needed healing time together. A few months later, VOM workers invited Ruth and Aurelio to attend an annual pastors' conference in Colombia. The conference provides attendees a needed respite from the tensions and dangers of their ministry work, as well as needed fellowship with others who have experienced violence or other forms of persecution for their Christian witness.

VOM also offered to help Ruth and Aurelio relocate for their family's safety, but the couple were mindful of the message God gave Ruth during the attack: "You won't die; you will live and tell of My glory." After praying about it, they decided to stay in southern

Mexico. "The Lord put us there," Ruth adds. Aurelio shared his wife's determination. "We are going to preach double now!"

Continuing the Mission

Since their abduction by the gunmen seven years ago, Ruth and Aurelio's ministry has grown dramatically. Through a network of volunteer workers, they have planted more than 500 churches and established nearly 50 Outreach Bases – making it possible to reach three different indigenous people groups. Volunteers at the Outreach Bases host Bible studies, provide children's activities and distribute food. Each Saturday, more than 5,000 youth hear the Gospel and receive discipleship. Ministry workers also distribute Christmas Care Packs at the Outreach Bases. Each of these packages contain a children's Bible, water bottle, school supplies, and other practical necessities.

In recent years, Ruth and Aurelio have built seven temporary shelters on their land to accommodate those who have been displaced from their homes or banned from their villages for choosing to follow Jesus. The displaced believers staying at the shelters regularly receive Bible instruction and job-skills training.

In addition to the Outreach Bases and shelters for displaced Christians, Bible distribution is another aspect of their ministry that has grown dramatically. Ruth and Aurelio are now receiving much larger shipments of Bibles, which must be kept in a strategically located warehouse. And the Bibles are printed in five languages, including indigenous dialects.

"God is so good," Ruth says with a smile. "He is bringing all the resources needed for ministry. Children's lives have been transformed and, by that, their parents' lives are transformed – all for the glory of Jesus!" 🙏

RELIGION THAT'S *Pure AND Undefined*

Report by Simi G.P.

VOMC's in-country ministry partners are reaching Mexico's indigenous peoples in remote and mountainous areas of the country, providing needed ministry and practical assistance to widows and their children as well.



“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

James 1:27 ESV

“Being a believer within a small community in the mountains is not easy,” Amalia admits. After losing her husband 15 years ago, she was left to care for their seven children in a hostile environment. With little to no support from her family because of her faith and commitment to Christ, the Christian widow has been forced to provide for all seven children on her own. “It hasn’t been easy, and there are so many tests from all directions,” she says. “But no matter what, I’ll never turn away from my Lord.”

In the indigenous communities of Mexico, familial support is paramount to an individual’s life. Due to Amalia’s Christian faith, however, she has been rejected by her in-laws. One of the main reasons for this rejection is because of Amalia’s refusal to participate in the yearly celebration of a festival known as the “Day of the Dead”; a time when families think they can reunite with the spirits of their deceased relatives. Amalia’s in-laws believe that the “Day of the Dead” is the only time of the year that their deceased son can visit them. But because Amalia refuses to practise this indigenous tradition due to her Christian faith, she has been the target of ongoing hate and violence.

Despite enduring years of opposition while struggling to care for her children by herself, Amalia’s hardships were only beginning. One day, her father-in-law’s herd of cattle broke into another farmer’s plantation, causing severe damage to the crops. Denying responsibility for the incident, the father-in-law placed all the blame on Amalia in order to punish her for being a Christian. As a result, she was falsely accused, imprisoned, and forced to relinquish her

garden plot on the family farm. As Amalia had been renting a portion of the family farm, relying on the cultivated crops to provide for her family, this was a devastating situation for the Christian widow and her growing children.

During Amalia’s imprisonment, two of her children turned to their grandparents for help in their mother’s absence. Unfortunately, the children were sent away by their relatives with wrath. The angry senior couple told the children that their mother deserved to be in prison because she had not been honouring the memory of their deceased father by celebrating the “Day of the Dead.”

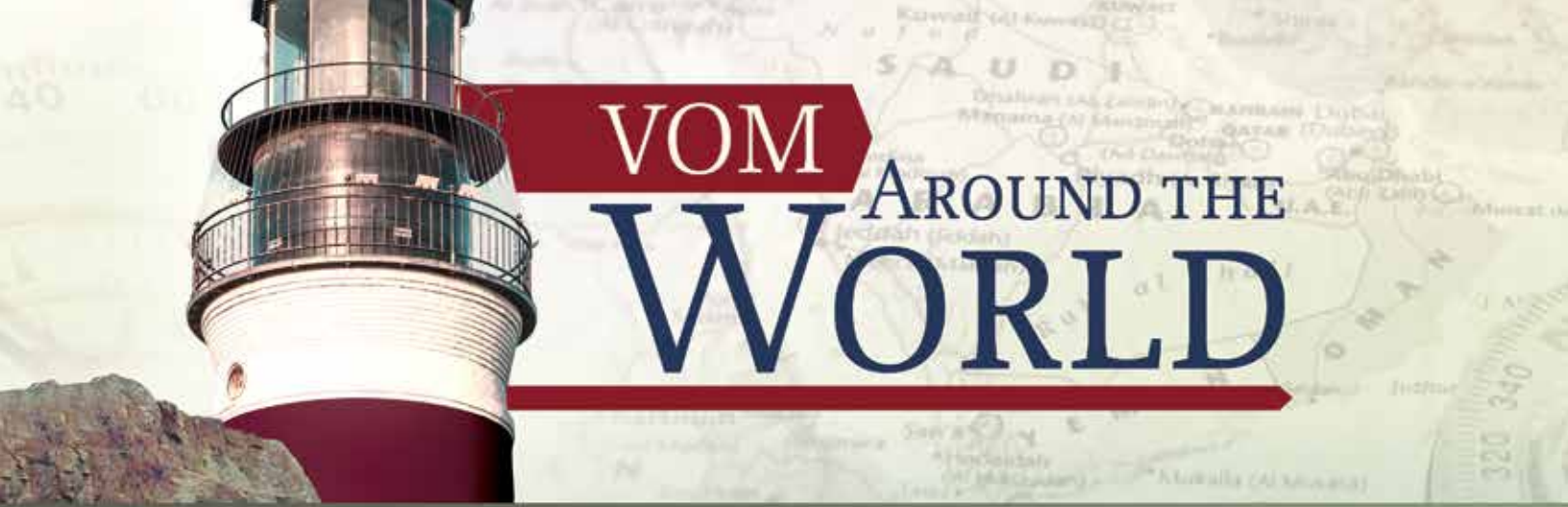
Following Amalia’s release from prison, our ministry workers travelled to the remote village to visit the Christian widow and her children, supplying them with food, clothing and financial assistance. Also, thanks to Galcom International, another one of VOMC’s valued partnering organizations, Amalia was one of the many recipients who were blessed with an audio Bible.

Regardless of everything she has been through, Amalia remains a beacon of hope, light and love for many members of her spread-out Christian community. In addition to providing words of compassion and encouragement to other widows in Mexico, she is always eager to take the Gospel to those in need of Christ by visiting from home to home. In fact, during our ministry team’s recent visit, Amalia even joined in by sharing the message of Jesus with different indigenous people groups residing in the mountains. This dear sister in Christ is grateful that her eyes have

been opened to the truth of God’s Word and prays that He will continue to give her the energy and courage that’s required to remain strong in her faith. 🙏



Indigenous peoples in remote communities of Mexico are experiencing God’s love, salvation and hope as a result of the audio Bible distributions. The Gospel is powerfully changing lives!



VOM AROUND THE WORLD

COLOMBIA: Pastor's Wife Held at Gunpoint

Javier and Katherine lead a church in Buenaventura, a coastal city that's considered to be one of the most dangerous in Colombia. The couple ministers by caring for the needs of the community, which has drawn negative attention from guerrilla soldiers controlling the area.



Through Javier and Katherine's ministry, many have placed their faith in Christ and lives have been transformed, which has resulted in further opposition. Even though their lives have been threatened, and they have been forced to move several times, they remain committed to sharing the hope of Christ.

Earlier this year, Katherine was held at gunpoint by her brother-in-law, a guerrilla commander, while Javier was trapped, unable to help her. Though her brother-in-law was initially arrested, officials released him. He has since threatened Katherine again, and she and her children have not been able to leave their house since his release. They have also suffered significant chronic health issues.

CUBA: Bibles Providing Lasting Hope

Gabriel* is in constant motion. Besides leading a church in Cuba and sharing the Gospel at every opportunity, he is a prolific church planter and Bible distributor. He also trains Christian leaders throughout the island nation of about 11 million people so they can reach their communities for Christ, some-

thing strongly opposed by the Communist government which has controlled Cuba since the 1950s.

Gabriel seriously follows Jesus' command to preach the Good News of the Gospel. He and his fellow workers regularly visit the island's unreached communities where people have yet to hear about God's wonderful plan of salvation. However, the Christian workers never know what kind of people will gather to hear God's Word. Whether ministering in "a house where there are witches" or there's "an idol" of worship located in the room, many spiritually seeking Cubans "let you in because God is working within them." Whenever the church goes out into the world, it brings God's "light in the darkness...."

Gabriel usually gets a few thousand Bibles from VOM at a time for distribution, and he estimates that his network has already distributed a few hundred thousand Bibles thus far. "Even so, there is need for more," he reports. Gabriel believes he was born for the work of distributing Bibles around the island nation, and he has a big dream for this ministry work: "It is incredible to see the hunger for God that is in this country.... I would like to put a Bible in each home in Cuba."

In areas of Cuba, Bibles are precious and scarce. Even where they are sold, a Bible can cost one-third of a person's monthly income. In some communities, hand-copied chapters of the Bible are shared among the members of one church. Please pray for the success of efforts aimed at getting a complimentary Bible into the hands of every follower of Christ in Cuba.



*Note: This evangelist's name has been changed for security purposes.

The following message has been taken from VOM Canada's devotional book, "From Under the Altar." See www.vomcanada.com/store for more information.

THE CROSS *Revealed*

By Mauricio Giancáspero
CEO for Voice of the Martyrs Chile

"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

~ Philippians 2:1-4 ESV

I grew up seeing the image of Jesus Christ hanging from the cross in Roman Catholic chapels and cathedrals in my home country of Chile. However, I did not have the blessing of knowing Christ for the first 30 years of my life – not until I moved to New Zealand. It was there in search of good Latin American friendships that I ended up at church. The Lord revealed Himself to me, and I finally understood the value of the cross, God's wisdom through it, the power in it – and the enormous price He paid for me.

I studied God's Word and received revelation and understanding, as well as a growing purpose. The more I gazed upon Christ's work on the cross, the more clearly I began to see the purpose to which He calls His church. Philippians 2:2 is the only time in Scripture the Greek word *sympsychos* is used, meaning "of one accord" or "harmonious." Three notes make one chord. There is distinction and harmony when we come together in one purpose.

I became aware of Christian persecution thanks to the VOM New Zealand magazines I found at church.

I learned that some Biblical events still occur today. The characters, nations, and contexts are different, but the Bible's instruction to purposefully remember our brothers and sisters who suffer for Christ's sake (Hebrews 13:3) is written for Christians of yesterday and today. We are called to share in their suffering as one family united. Our purpose is to live for Christ *together*.

When I eventually returned to Chile, I was empty-handed, but Christ is more than sufficient. These past five years, I've met, spoken, prayed, cried, and laughed with members of our persecuted Christian family in different countries. I have met Christian brothers and sisters who have lost everything for their faith – for not disowning God's name. Through these "divine appointments," I've learned from their lives and drawn closer to God...

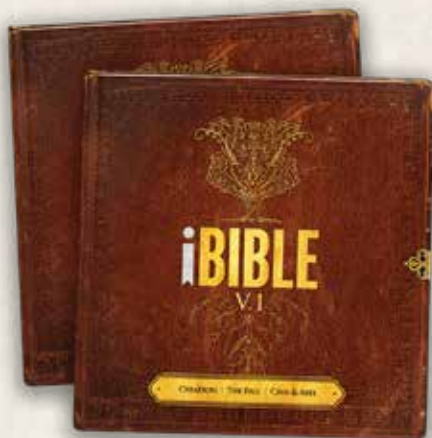
Walking in the shadow of the cross, in one accord with my Christian brothers and sisters, has revealed a life united in purpose, joy, and peace that defies victimhood. Together we say, "Amen!" 🙏



VOMC

RESOURCES

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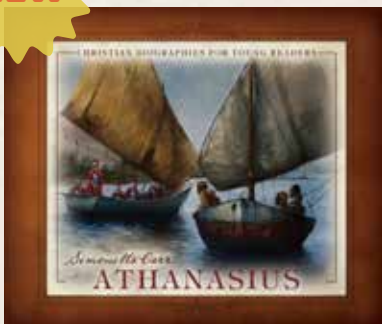


iBIBLE Storybooks: Volumes 1 & 2

\$15 each

Adapted from the *iBIBLE* video series by RevelationMedia, the world's first visual and interactive presentation of the Bible, these *iBIBLE Storybooks* are designed to help children and youth encounter the life-changing Word of God. The first volume of this vibrant book series includes the Biblical accounts of Creation, the Fall, as well as the story of Cain and Abel; while the second volume features the stories of the Great Flood and the Tower of Babel. Alongside each book's engaging renditions of the listed Scriptural accounts are many visually stunning illustrations. Children will be captivated as they read through the wonderfully depicted pages featured in each volume. Hardcover, 96 pages per book

NEW



Athanasius

Illustrated Biography Book

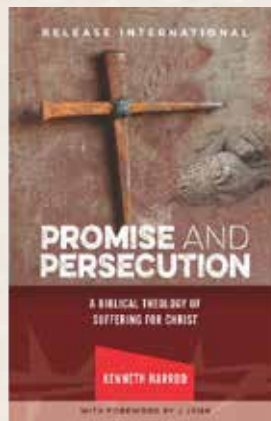
\$20

A complex and fascinating character, Athanasius, who served as the bishop of Alexandria (Egypt), is best remembered as the Father of Orthodoxy. During a time of

great persecution, he steadfastly upheld the doctrine of the Trinity against the Arian heresy.

In this illustrated storybook, which is part of the *Christian Biographies for Young Readers* series, author Simonetta Carr introduces children to the life and times of this important church father who tirelessly defended the Nicene Creed – a statement of belief that's still being recited by believers today as the confession of their Christian faith.

Forced five times to leave his community, and constantly threatened by those who tried to ruin his reputation, Athanasius provides us a fine example of Godly faithfulness. The beautiful illustrations – along with the book's winsome, simply written narrative – will help children of all ages acquire a greater understanding of the Nicene Creed, prompting relevant discussions on the divinity of Christ as conveyed in the church's historical creeds and confessions. Hardcover, 64 pages



Promise and Persecution

\$15

Author and Bible teacher Kenneth Harrod goes behind the headlines to help us understand the persecution of Christians in the context of God's bigger plan of salvation.

In his book, *Promise and Persecution*, he adopts a theological approach to persecution by tracing the theme of God's promises throughout various stages of the Bible and observing the world's opposition to those promises.

In addition to delving into the Scriptures, Kenneth gleans from his travels in Africa and Asia where he has heard many first-hand testimonies of Christians suffering for their faith and the proclamation of the Gospel. As a result of his findings, he concludes the book with key principles for shaping a Christian response to persecution – something all believers need to better understand and more meaningfully live out. Paperback, 142 pages

For information on the ministry's other helpful resources,
visit: www.vomcanada.com/store