

November 1995


INTERNATIONAL



Our team leader, Steve Griswell, and his family, Jan, Joel, Nathan, and their Mexican lab, Christy.

It is such fun to be able to write to you knowing where we're going — Mexico — and having a target date of early January — only two months away. It's amazing to us that it has taken us a whole year to get to this point. But as we look back over the past year since we joined OC, we are also amazed at all that we have learned. We've learned in new ways how God's ways are not our ways, His time is not our time. Looking back we see how we treasure the many experiences we've had, especially the opportunities to visit with family and friends before we leave. Our faith in the perfection of His timing grows. We've been overwhelmed at the outpouring of love, support, and prayers for us. I am always deeply moved when I hear someone mention that they have been praying for us. Know that you are greatly appreciated! We regularly pray that God will bless with a generous measure you who so bless us.

Now we're beginning to learn about Mexico. Since Mexico is so close to the US, and since so many Americans go there on both vacations and short-term mission trips, somehow we assumed that it was a well evangelized country. But from our time in Mexico and our studies of Operation World (a compilation of recent statistics and information about every country in the world) we've seen another view of Mexico. Eighty-seven percent of the population claim to be Roman Catholic. Keep in

mind that the Roman Catholic church there is different from here. It is syncretistic, often mixed with the pagan religious practices that were part of the Indian's worship before the Spaniards came. As Operation World says, "The power of the ancient gods and spirit world has yet to be broken in the Spanish-speaking majority and, more especially, in the Christo-pagan Indian minority groups." (p. 380) Another strong force among Mexican Roman Catholics is the worship of the Virgin of Guadeloupe. Legend says she appeared to an Indian and told him to build her a church. Interestingly, she "appeared" on the very site where the Indians worshipped an Aztec god they called the "Queen of Heaven." Outside of Catholic churches we saw them selling stickers with a picture of the Virgin that said "This is a Catholic home. We do not accept propaganda from Protestants or any other cult." People put these up all over, by their front doors, in taxis, and in stores. And despite being very "religious" people only about 10% of professing Catholics actually go to mass. In general 10% of Latin America's population is Protestant Evangelical. But in Mexico the percentage is much lower: 4.3%. And in Mexico City there are even fewer evangelicals. Only about 1.5% of people in the largest city in the world go to an evangelical church.

Because Mexico is so close to the US, we thought it was probably flooded with missionaries there. But there is only one per 46,900 people. And then there are the youth: a staggering 50% of the population. But you'll hear more about them at other times I'm sure. We hope these numbers, and the people they represent, lay on your heart a burden for Mexico the way they have for us.

With Thanksgiving for you and God's many other blessings,

Annette & Tim



Kevin Rasmussen training lay leaders of newly planted Maranatha Presbyterian church in Toluca, Mexico.