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INTERNATIONAL

Okay, so I know you're sick of all the election stuff. But read the stories below, and you'll appreciate our democracy a bit more . . . you might even think the half hour it took to cast your vote actually mattered (you did vote, right? ☺)

Many Mexican non-Catholics are being persecuted for their faith. I don't mean being made fun of or not being admitted into exclusive clubs . . . but rather arbitrary jailings, illegal fines, denying children access to public schools, prohibiting people from reading the Bible, destruction of churches and homes, banishing people from their homes, businesses and towns, even assaults and murders. And no . . . it's not just happening to a few people in a few small fanatical towns. According to secular newspapers more than 35,000 Protestants have been thrown out of their towns in recent years . . . often by the very authorities that are supposed to protect them.

For example, in August of 1994, some 400 evangelicals were escorted by the government back to their former homes in San Juan Chamula. Shortly thereafter, three were publicly executed by hanging. No one has been charged. According to the evangelicals, they didn't get the protection they were promised by the government.

And just a few months ago Ymelda Yescas and 13 other Protestants were imprisoned in the town of San Juan Yae. Many of them were released when they paid a fine of 400 pesos (ten percent short of an average month's wage) for the misdemeanor of professing a religion other than Catholicism. But Mrs. Yescas remained, unwilling or unable to pay the fine, which for her was 1000 pesos because she was the town's founding Protestant. Frustrated, town officials released her from jail after 48 hours. But then Genaro Hernández, the town president, ordered her expulsion from town. The two officials who were given this responsibility refused. They were then detained by police while townspeople destroyed the church, Mrs. Yescas' home, and expelled her from town along with another Protestant couple whose house was expropriated. The existence of conflicting federal laws make the situation even more difficult. One law gives equal protection to all religions, and another states the illegality of professing to be anything but Catholic.

Stories of injustice and suffering remind Annette and me of the overwhelming challenge before us. But we are also encouraged by the odd coincidence that, in the face of violent opposition, there is also amazing openness to God's Word. According to a recent worldwide study by the missions wing of the Baptist Church, México is the world's second most responsive field to the gospel (you're wondering who is #1, aren't you . . . it's Brazil). This reinforces our conviction that we're in the right place at the right time. So we continue moving forward, learning from and helping train people in how to minister to the nearly 70 percent of the population that is children and youth.



In the middle of a crowd in Mexico City -- can you find us?

So when you see something on television about Mexico or think about us, please pray that: 1) God will provide Mexico with just leaders; 2) those who are persecuted would bring glory to God by responding in love not vengeance; and 3) God would guide us every step of the way . . . and that we'd follow. THANKS!

John & Annette