

Where a
YES
Can Take You

By
Ramón Sierra
and
Juan Vásquez Pla

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MISSION EDUCATION RESOURCES

Books

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WHERE A YES CAN TAKE YOU

by Ramón Sierra and Juan Vásquez Pla

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**NAZARENE MISSIONS
INTERNATIONAL**

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Dedication

To Nazarene international missionaries, including volunteers, who have served the mission of God in Puerto Rico and who have inspired Puerto Ricans to serve in the same way, locally and abroad.

Editor's Note

In this book, the reader will see the paths of those who said 'Yes' to God's call on their lives. Individuals from the United States, who said 'Yes,' and followed that call to the tiny island of Puerto Rico; and those in Puerto Rico, who came under the influence of early missionaries to their shores, and said 'Yes' to God's call. Those individuals, represented here by four faithful couples, whose 'Yes' took them to various countries in South and Central America and to the United States, are reminders that God is at work everywhere. He precedes and accompanies those who go in faith, whatever their culture or language. He extends His touch and holy influence through these faithful lives.

These stories are an account of four Puerto Rican couples whose lives were impacted by missionaries who first came to their shores. Those who mentored these four couples are numerous, but in every life there was a 'Yes' that made a difference in other lives, that drew out a 'Yes' from the next generation, which led to further missionary enterprise. The positive network of God's grace, His call, the faithful 'Yes' of those who followed, and the changed lives that resulted, is testimony to how God can use anyone in missions who dares to say 'Yes' to Him.

In chapters 2 through 5, the author introduces the missionary couples from Puerto Rico, explains some of the unique traditions surrounding their names, and relates their testimonies—stories of where their ‘Yes’ took them in ministry and missions.

Note on Unfamiliar or Non-English Words or Names

We celebrate the fact that the Church of the Nazarene is a global church. With that in mind, you may notice spelling, punctuation, measurements, usage, and pronunciation of words that differ from where you live. For non-Spanish-language speakers, we have included the written accents and the phonetics for some names and places in keeping with the cultural preferences of those involved. You may have some fun in trying to reproduce their phonetics.

Thank You for the Opportunity

In writing this book about four Puerto Rican couples who have served as international missionaries, I have been given the undeserved privilege of being the narrator of their stories, as well as my own. We have been close personal friends and ministerial colleagues for over 50 years. Our lives have intersected as we served the Lord during these years. I know them well.

Our original testimonial material in Spanish was compiled in writing by Ramón Sierra. It was extensive and intended for a different audience and another type of publication. Ramón and NMI personnel entrusted me with the narrator's task of summarizing and rewriting to make the material fit within the limits of this small missions book. I trust I have been fair to everyone.

And to everyone, thank you for the opportunity to write *Where a Yes Can Take You*.

Juan Vázquez Pla

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Foreword

Acts 1:8, adapted: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Aguadilla [ah-gwah-DEE-yah], and in all Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, and to the ends of the earth.

This book tells the fascinating story of brave Puerto Rican couples who were obedient to God’s call to bring the good news of Christ from Borinquen [boh-REEN-ken]¹ to the ends of the earth. Although I confess that these missionaries are my heroes, those reading this book will discover that they are ordinary people from Barceloneta [bahr-se-loh-NE-tah], Ponce [POHN-se], Carolina [kah-roh-LEE-nah], Utuado [oo-too-AH-doh], and Santurce [sahn-TOOR-se]. It was God’s pleasure to use these people to impact thousands of lives across the continent! But the key is availability to God’s call. They devoted themselves to the Lord and sacrificed personal plans—abandoning their families and the beautiful Isla del Encanto [EES-lah del en-KAHN-toh] (Island of Enchantment)—to embody

¹ Puerto Ricans often call the island “Borinquen,” a derivation of Borikén, its indigenous Taíno [tah-EE-noh] name, which means “Land of the Valiant (or Brave and Noble) Lord.”

the transforming, sanctifying message of Christ in distant lands. While being Boricuas [boh-REE-kwahs],² they embraced the diverse cultures where they ministered. They learned to change their fritters for pies, cakes for tamales, and beans for beans. These servants of the Most High happily gave some of their best years in service to the Lord throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. They dedicated their talents to advance the kingdom of God, and the seeds sown in tears, sacrifice, and love have increased throughout the continent.

Why write this book? Is it with the desire to impress the reader? Or is it for their Puerto Rican partners who sent them and supported them with prayers and offerings? I doubt it is to achieve great gains in sales. Undoubtedly, these friends and family in Christ have shared their humble testimonies to honor the Lord and to inspire us all to listen and obey God's call.

When reading about the mighty hand of Christ working in and through them, we are confronted with the question: "Am I willing to also obey the call of God?" Could it be that God continues to call people today to abandon all, take up His cross, and follow Christ? The sincere prayer of these colleagues in the vineyard of the Lord is that those who read this book will devote their lives in radical obedience to God's call. Whether we minister in Jerusalem or the

² "Boricua," or the plural "Boricuas," is another name for a native of Puerto Rico or their descendants born and living in their diaspora. It was the Taíno term for the inhabitants of Borikén, the pre-Columbian name of the island.

ends of the earth, every Christian hears these words of the heavenly Father, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” May God grant that, like the prophet of old, all will respond with joy, enthusiasm, and abandonment, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8).

Jerry D. Porter,
General Superintendent Emeritus
Church of the Nazarene

Introduction

The story of Elijah and Elisha is one of the most bizarre stories you could find in the Bible. Nevertheless, it may well illustrate the main point of this missions book: there are mentors and there are mentees (or something like both) in the dynamics of fulfilling the Great Commission. Let's take a quick look at our Bible story taken from 2 Kings 2:1–3, 7–12a (VOICE).

Elijah and Elisha were leaving Gilgal when the Eternal One planned to snatch Elijah up into the heavens by the power of a fierce dancing wind.

Elijah (to *Elisha*): I ask you to remain here. The Eternal has commanded me to go all the way to Bethel.

Elisha: As certain as your own life and the life of the Eternal, I refuse to abandon you.

So the two men traveled down to Bethel together, where Elisha was approached by the prophets' disciples who lived there.

Prophets' Disciples: Are you aware that the Eternal One is going to snatch *Elijah*, your mentor, away from you today?

Elisha: Yes, I am aware *of this*. *I want you* to keep quiet about it.

[Here the Bible's narrator went on to show that this exact exchange of words between Elijah, Elisha, and the prophets' disciples happened in two other locations, first in Jericho and then near the Jordan River. And then the narrator concludes his unusual story as follows:]

While Elijah and Elisha were standing near the Jordan *River*, 50 of the prophets' disciples *from that area* stood at a distance from them on the other side. Elijah removed his cloak and rolled it up; then he struck the water with it, and the water divided. Elijah and Elisha then walked across on dry land. After the two had made it to the other side *of the Jordan*, Elijah spoke to Elisha.

Elijah: Tell me what it is you would like me to do for you before I am taken away from you.

Elisha: Please, I wish to receive a double portion of your spirit. *As your successor, I want to have twice the portion of your power.*

Elijah: What you have requested of me is challenging, but it will be done if you witness my departure. But if you do not watch, then you will not have your double portion.

Now as the two continued walking along and talking *as they normally did, something incredible happened*. A blazing chariot pulled by blazing horses *stormed down from the heavens* and came between Elijah and Elisha. Then Elijah was swept up into heaven by the *fiery* storm. Elisha witnessed this *amazing spectacle*.

Elisha: My father, O my father! The chariots and riders of Israel!

Elisha never saw Elijah again.

The Bible says that Elisha continued his mentor's work, even calling out Elijah's name for help, and doing things at times as unusual as his mentor. Ramón and Blanca, Mario and Raquel, Pedro and Justita, and Noemí and I do not claim that any of our testimonies as international missionaries will be as bizarre as those found in the story of Elijah and Elisha. Yet, we would like to think that our testimonies reflect our willingness to say 'Yes' and the interplay between our lives and those God brought alongside in our faithful service.

In the ministry opportunities that the Church of the Nazarene has granted us over the years, in Puerto Rico as well as in other countries, we have crossed paths with many missionaries (as well as many others who may not have formally been considered missionaries, but acted as missionaries nonetheless). Some of these missionaries and workers are now with the Lord. Some others still live and

remain active. In these pages, we testify with appreciation that many of them were like mentors to us.

These individuals may not have had a modern understanding of “mentoring” in mind as they built relationships with us. However, to the extent they sacrificially and intentionally invested in us, and to the extent they trusted us in our call to ministry, they were our trusted teachers, counselors, and guides. They were our enablers and our encouragers. We hope and pray that our testimonies will reflect these relationships.

As you read, also be watchful, like Elijah’s 50 other disciples. You may find out that you too were part of this story, connected with our lives and the lives of those who mentored us.

Chapter 1

A New Mission Field in a World at War

Mark 13:7. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

The Island Where We Were Born

Puerto Rico (Spanish for “Rich Port”), claimed by Christopher Columbus for the Spanish Crown in 1493, has a long and intricate cultural and political history. Officially called “Free Associated State of Puerto Rico,” the island’s relationship to the United States of America (as an unincorporated territory since 1898), adds to Puerto Rico’s peculiarities. Our island, along with Hispaniola (the island that encompasses the Dominican Republic and Haiti) and Cuba, form the Greater Antilles, in the northeast Caribbean Sea.

With a population of 3.4 million people and an area of 9,103 square kilometers (3,515 square miles), Puerto Rico ranks among the top 25 countries worldwide in population density. The island’s mestizo [mes-TEE-soh]³ population—peoples of a beautiful, God-created blend of

³ A person of mixed blood.

mainly pre-Columbian, European, Mideastern, African, and Asian ancestries—is known for its warmth and hospitality.

Spanish and English are the official languages of Puerto Rico. Tourism and pharmaceuticals are two of its main industries.

Puerto Rico as a New Mission Field

The launch of Puerto Rico as a new mission field more than 75 years ago was a significant part of the Church of the Nazarene's heroic response to a world at war. The United States' involvement in World War II and the Great Depression that preceded it, shattered the U.S.'s economic structure and that of many other countries around the world. The multifaceted human tragedy caused by World War II (1939-1945) made pessimism and despair a prevailing sentiment among many people in the United States and elsewhere. Yet, at the peak of the war, Dr. J. B. Chapman, a Nazarene world leader, cried out:

We believe we can make our best contribution to world peace and every other reform and world good by preaching old-time, personal salvation and praying down a heaven-sent revival upon our churches and upon the world.⁴

⁴ James B. Chapman, general superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene, as cited in *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene*. Floyd T. Cunningham, editor. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2009, pp. 331-332.

This mission manifesto was proclaimed to the General Board of our denomination in 1943. The very next year, the Church of the Nazarene rallied financially through its World Evangelism Fund by declaring Puerto Rico a new mission field.

Taking such a bold step of faith for Christian missions in a world at war was a clear testimony of the church's full commitment to world evangelism. Puerto Rican Nazarenes were extremely thankful. The stories of missionaries to Puerto Rico and from Puerto Rico to other world areas shared in this book would not be told without this core-commitment of our church to the Great Commission of our Lord.

First International Missionaries to Puerto Rico

When Nazarene missionaries, not native to Puerto Rico, arrived in 1952, the work of the Church of the Nazarene had been in existence for almost a decade under the leadership of a Puerto Rican, J. R. Lebrón Velázquez [le-BROHN ve-LAHS-kes]. Through a merger, he brought to the Church of the Nazarene a small but growing number of existing churches in the holiness tradition under the name of Iglesia Evangélica El Salvador [ee-GLES-ee-ah e-vahn-HEL-ee-KAH el sahl-vah-DOHR] (Evangelical Church of the Savior).

Experience has shown it is culturally challenging for non-native leaders to share with native leadership the responsibilities of growing the church. Harold and Gladys Hampton, our first international missionaries, as well as those

who prepared the way for them, were graced for that task.

Noemí and I remember the Hamptons well despite our young age. Harold and Gladys mastered Spanish. Harold's lively accordion playing, singing, and fiery holiness preaching made an impact among early Puerto Rican Nazarenes. He also was responsible for starting a formal ministerial course of study program to train Nazarene ministers on the island. The Hamptons initiated an era of profound influence by Nazarene international missionaries that lasted for nearly five decades.

The Global South

After World War II, many conflicts continued to plague the world. However, Christian missionaries, from diverse denominations and mainly from North America and Europe, faithfully continued to “go and make disciples of all nations.” The Church of the Nazarene with its holiness message was an active participant of this global mission. The abundant fruits of such faithful labor and obedience to the Lord's Great Commission, became especially evident in a movement of the Spirit of God. “The Global South” is a term used in transnational studies to refer to countries primarily in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

The rapid church growth and development within the Global South prompted a related phenomenon—an increasing number of international missionaries coming from

the southern countries of the globe. By 2010, “nearly half of the world’s top missionary-sending countries” were located in the Global South.⁵

Noemí and I, along with the other three Puerto Rican couples whose testimonies are shared in this book, believe our response to God’s call to global missionary service has been a part, although small, of this movement of the Spirit. When the first of us were invited to serve in other world areas almost 40 years ago, we were among a very few Nazarene international missionaries from the Global South. Today the number of Nazarene missionaries from the Global South increases every year. Our church, sensitive to God’s leading in this mission corps inclusive vision, is reaping the rewards.

⁵ Melissa Steffan, “The Surprising Countries Most Missionaries Are Sent From and Go To” *Christianity Today* (25 July 2013): www.christianitytoday.com/news/2013/july/missionaries-countries-sent-received-csgc-gordon-conwell.html (18 September 2017).



Ramón and Blanca

Chapter 2

Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples...teaching them...”

First, let’s talk about the full name of Ramón and Blanca. As those familiar with the Spanish naming system will attest, a person traditionally bears a single or composite given name, or “nombre” [NOHM-bre], and two surnames or “apellidos” [ah-pe-YEE-dohs]. Spanish people value this naming structure. The full names of Ramón and Blanca are as follows: Ramón Ángel Sierra Mastache [rah-MOHN AHN-hel SEE-e-rrah mahs-TAH-che] and Blanca Dora Campos Ríos [BLAHN-kah DOH-rah KAHM-pohs REE-ohs]. In day-to-day usage, Puerto Ricans would call the other person by one “nombre” and the first of the two “apellidos” unless the person prefers the full name. Thus, Ramón would be commonly known as Ramón Sierra, and Blanca as Blanca Campos.

Ramón

Ramón was born in Barceloneta [bahr-ce-loh-NE-tah], a town in the north central coast of Puerto Rico. His mother, Miriam, was living with Ramón's maternal grandparents while his father, Ramón Sr., was serving in the armed forces of the United States overseas.

Ramón grew up in a Christian home. Most of his extended family attended the Church of the Nazarene in town, pastored by founder José Sastre Robles [hoh-SE SAHS-tre ROHB-les] and his wife, Eva.

When Ramón was three years old, his family moved to New York City. They were among the many Puerto Rican immigrants who came to the continental United States in the late 1950s. Not long after settling in East Manhattan, Ramón's family found out that they lived close to a Hispanic Church of the Nazarene plant pastored by Alberto Espada Matta [ahl-BER-toh es-PAH-dah MAH-tah], also a Puerto Rican.

Pastor Alberto was an exceptional pastor, and in many ways ahead of his time. He had a great vision for the Hispanic work in the area. He was a church planter, had a radio program, began a ministerial course of studies to prepare pastors and lay leaders, actively participated in community organizations, and was a social worker by profession. The inspiring example of Pastor Alberto and the work of other Nazarene pioneers among Spanish-speaking people in the north-eastern United States would stay with Ramón the rest of his life. Ramón considers the work of Pastor Alberto and

others like him in the 1950s and '60s as Nazarene missions at its best.

In his early teens, Ramón became seriously ill. He was diagnosed with epilepsy, and according to his doctors, he would have to learn to live with it. He, however, testifies to a miracle: God healed him. He never had to take medication again and has enjoyed a normal life.

In the meantime, an even greater miracle had already taken place in Ramón's life. "At age 13," he says, "I surrendered my life to Christ."

After a few years, his family returned to Puerto Rico and settled in Palmas Altas [PAHL-mahs AHL-tahs], a coastal village of Barceloneta. Ramón's family joined the Nazarene congregation where his grandparents had become members. "There we worked together for the Lord," remembers Ramón.

Ramón went on to finish high school, completed an associate degree in chemical engineering, and secured a job in the flourishing pharmaceutical industry in the area. One summer he attended a youth camp. In God's plan, it became another turning point in his life. Responding to one of the sermons preached at the camp meeting, he felt in his heart the voice of God calling him to pastoral ministry.

Ramón moved back to the continental United States in 1973 to attend the Spanish American Nazarene Seminary in San Antonio, Texas, where he completed a bachelor's degree in theology—the first in his class. He notes that he was pleased with the excellent professors he had at the seminary. Some of them had been missionaries in Latin America. Ramón speaks highly of professor José Rodríguez [hoh-SE

rohd-REE-ges], whom he has often referred to as “the most distinguished theologian among the Hispanics in the States and in Latin America.” Rodríguez had studied under H. Orton Wiley, the leading Nazarene theologian of his time.

Blanca

Blanca was also born in Barceloneta to happy parents, Juan and Blanca. Her family lived in the same area of Barceloneta to which Ramón’s family would return after being in the continental United States.

The Nazarene congregation—originally a church plant started several years before from the mother church in downtown Barceloneta—was building a small chapel on the property next to Blanca’s home. She still pictures this Nazarene chapel being built next door. It was in the early 1960s. Noemí and I were the pastors of the mother church in downtown Barceloneta, but Noemí was also assisting the church plant in Blanca’s neighborhood with teaching, preaching, and visitation from house to house. Noemí once visited Blanca’s home and asked if she could enroll five-year-old Blanca and her siblings in Sunday School. Her mother agreed, and the life of a future Puerto Rican international Nazarene missionary had unobtrusively begun in that village.

When Blanca was 15 years old, she gave her life to God. “At that time,” Blanca testifies, “I knew Christ as my Savior.” She soon proved her leadership gifts by becoming a children’s Sunday School teacher, the church board secretary,

and a local youth leader. Blanca has always acknowledged with deep gratitude how supportive her pastors and lay leaders were during her formative years in the church. She is particularly indebted to two of them: Virgilio Torres [veer-HEE-lee-oh TOH-rres] and Duhamel Rodríguez [doo-HAH-mel rohd-REE-ges].

Blanca enjoyed reading the missions books promoted by her local Nazarene Missions International organization. Inspired by missionary literature, Blanca decided to become actively engaged in personal evangelism in her own neighborhood. She remembers calling her neighborhood her own “little mission field,” never imagining that someday God and the church would call her and Ramón to serve in a “huge mission field” far away.

After graduating from high school, Blanca completed a degree in secretarial sciences. The skills she developed have proved extremely useful serving alongside Ramón in the church at home and abroad.

Together in Ministry

“On 21 September 1979, Pastor Virgilio Torres married us in the Palmas Altas Church,” says Ramón, “where we had met and had served the Lord together as laypeople, for several years.” Two weeks later Ramón and Blanca were appointed to their first pastorate.

Ramón began his postgraduate work in theology at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico. Working on his Master of Divinity degree was considered an answer to prayer. They

had visualized themselves in ministry “centered on training leaders,” they said, reflecting on that stage in their advanced academic training.

Ramón would eventually transfer to Nazarene Theological Seminary (NTS) in Kansas City, Missouri, to complete the Master of Divinity degree. While Ramón studied at the seminary, Blanca worked at Publications International (now Global Nazarene Publications), with Spanish literature.

“The professors at NTS were excellent scholars in the subjects they taught,” Ramón remembers. Yet, it was the professors’ Christian lifestyle and their willingness to help students that would inspire Ramón the most. “I had the privilege of having as professors, already mature of their thought, individuals like Kenneth Grider, Charles Shaver, Rob Staples, William Greathouse, Morris Weigelt, Don Whitlock, Ed Robinson, [former missionary] Eunice Bryant, and Harold Raser, among others.”

While completing his postgraduate work (he eventually earned a Master in Religious Education degree also), the call from God to serve as missionaries in the Church of the Nazarene became “clear” to Ramón and Blanca. They said ‘Yes’ and applied for missionary service. Ramón and Blanca were well equipped both academically and professionally for their assignment, making their mentors proud.

In Paraguay

Paraguay was the first country in which Ramón and Blanca served as non-native missionaries. They went there

in 1991. Today, with a population of 7 million, Paraguay is socially and politically considered part of “the Southern Cone,” along with Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile [CHEE-le] in South America.

Paraguay has two official languages: Guaraní [gwah-rah-NEE], their indigenous language, and “Castellano” [kabs-te-YAH-noh] (“Castilian” or “Spanish”). For Ramón and Blanca, although Spanish was their first language, they had to make some “adjustments” to their day-to-day vocabulary. “We had to adjust our Spanish,” says Ramón. “Some words that for us were vulgar, were not for them, and vice versa.”



Eunice and Larry Bryant

Eunice and Larry Bryant served as missionaries for the Church of the Nazarene in Guatemala, Mexico, the USA, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Peru for 35 years. Both were ordained elders in the Church of the Nazarene and graduates of Olivet Nazarene College (now University) in the USA, and Nazarene Theological Seminary, where Eunice received both a Master of Divinity and a Doctor of Ministry degree.

Eunice Bryant was an educator, both on the mission field and at the Hispanic seminary in San Antonio, Texas, when they returned to the United States in 1979. Larry served as a pastor on several districts in the USA in addition to being a missionary. On the mission field, he was a minister, a teacher, a Bible school director, a district superintendent, and was instrumental in launching the Church of the Nazarene in El Salvador. Larry passed away in 2009, and Eunice passed away in 2015. The Bryants had five children: Kenneth, Marilyn Baker (a Nazarene pastor), Mark, Joyce Collins, and David.

Ramón and Blanca first worked to plan and develop the course of study for pastors and leaders. During their three and a half years in Paraguay, several students graduated. “Also, as all missionaries are called to do,” reports Ramón, “we challenged the Paraguayans and other leaders to use the resources they had and to undertake responsibility for the advancement of the work.”

In Argentina

After their first assignment in Paraguay, Ramón and Blanca’s ‘Yes’ took them to serve in our seminary in Pilar [pee-LAHR], Argentina, a major town in the area known as Greater Buenos Aires [BWE-nohs IE-res]. Argentina, and especially the Buenos Aires area with its (then) 13 million people and its unique culture, was “another world” and an even greater challenge for them. “Our ministry expanded from one country to three countries as academic dean,” Ramón remembers. They worked as a team with Rubén [roo-BEN] and Mónica Fernandez [MOH-nee-kah fer-NAHN-des], the administrative deans, and with the seminary director, Christian Sarmiento [sahr-mee-EN-toh], who also served as the regional coordinator of theological education during that time.

Ramón’s constant travel took him to many different places to teach courses in the ever-increasing number of theological education by extension centers in Argentina. These centers were called CENETA (the Spanish acronym for Nazarene Centers for Theological Studies; pronounced

se-NE-tah). The CENETAs had become a key strategic initiative in providing high quality ministerial training to a larger number of students more quickly than ever before in the South America Region and elsewhere.

While in Argentina, Ramón and Blanca also became deeply involved with evangelism, church planting, and church development. Ramón said it best in his service summary report: “During our time in the Southern Cone, we were exposed to a great evangelism vision that covered all the Church of the Nazarene in the South America Region, directed by Louie Bustle and Bruno Radi [RAH-dee]. We worked extensively with the Plan Impacto [eem-PAHK-toh] with its three guiding principles: Each one reach one; each pastor prepares another pastor; and each church plants a new church.”



Louie Bustle

Louie Bustle is a graduate of Trevecca Nazarene College (now University) and Nazarene Theological Seminary, both in the USA, and is an elder in the Church of the Nazarene. He and his wife, Ellen, served as missionaries to the Virgin Islands, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Peru. (Louie was instrumental in opening the work in the Dominican Republic.) In 1983, Louie was elected director of the South America Region, Church of the Nazarene; and in 1994, he was elected director of Global Mission for the Church of the Nazarene. He served as Global Mission director until his retirement in 2012. Louie and Ellen have a son, John, and a daughter, Beth.

As in Paraguay, and to fill various administrative needs on the region as mandated by the Church constitution, Ramón, because of his theological training, was temporarily appointed as superintendent of two districts in the northern Argentina province of Formosa.

In Chile

In 1996 Ramón and Blanca said ‘Yes’ to a move to Santiago [sahn-tee-AH-goh], Chile, where Ramón became the director of the Nazarene Bible Seminary.

Ramón and Blanca speak of Chile as a “very beautiful country, with lovely and progressive cities and towns.” Chile and its people impressed Ramón and Blanca in a special and positive way, so much so that it prompted the following social assessment from Ramón: “During the years we ministered in Chile [the country was] already amid an



Bruno Radi

Bruno Radziszewski, or Radi as he is better known, was born in Italy and became a citizen of Argentina. He was an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene and served as a missionary to Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina, and Ecuador. Bruno passed away in June 2005. His wife, Liliana, still serves as a missionary to Argentina. Bruno and Liliana had two daughters, Johanna and Keila; and he had two children from a previous marriage, Alejandra and Carlos (also a Nazarene missionary).

economic peak with a strong emphasis in education and with the ambitious goal of doing away with poverty. There was a mind-set of inclusion in the country, accepting the existence of plurality in all of society. They were modern and even postmodern in many aspects. The evangelicals were a little over 25 percent of the population, so that the evangelical church was recognized and respected by the authorities.” No doubt, the Church of the Nazarene and its almost century-old compassionate ministries contributed to the positive social atmosphere in Chile.

While expecting to work from the seminary facilities, Ramón and Blanca worked in the seven CENETA centers scattered throughout Chile because of decentralized theological education. This is how Ramón summarized his ministerial training responsibilities in their new host country: “We had the privilege of teaching in the centers and working together in their administration. At the seminary, we also coordinated annual classes at the *licenciatura* [lee-sen-see-ah-TOO-rah] level (a post-graduate degree before the master’s level). As part of our work as director of the seminary, we conducted a general evaluation of the ministry of the institution, we updated the bylaws, and elaborated a proposal for reopening our residential program in the seminary.”

Ramón was also given temporary responsibility of providing leadership as the superintendent for three of the four districts in Chile: the North District in Arica [ah-REE-kah], the Bío Bío [BEE-oh BEE-oh] District in Concepción [kohn-sep-see-OHN], and the Central District in Santiago.

Non-native missionary Al [Alfredo] Swain, and his wife, Arlene, were serving as mission director when Ramón and Blanca first came to Chile. They completed the “team” Ramón and Blanca always wanted. Long-time Chilean leaders Alfredo Veloso [ahl-FRE-doh ve-LOH-soh] and his wife Francisca were of great inspiration to Ramón and Blanca during their time in the country. “Alfredo was an excellent educator, preacher, and district superintendent,” Ramón said. “Both he and his wife were Nazarenes with sensitive and compassionate hearts, who served sacrificially.”

Ramón and Blanca left Chile in September 2004, after eight years and eight months of sacrificial service to the church and its mission. “It was painful separating and leaving behind brothers and sisters, friends and beloved leaders, and a fruitful ministry there. We left part of our heart in Chile.”

In the Former MAC Region

In 2005, Ramón and Blanca arrived in Guatemala City to serve in the Mexico-Central America Region (MAC) (then comprised of Mexico and Central America, and now part of the Mesoamerica Region, which also includes the Caribbean). They ministered in the MAC Region for six years as the regional discipleship coordinators, including Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries International.

Ramón and Blanca briefly describe the changing but fruitful nature of their MAC missionary assignment in this way: “We lived in Guatemala City the first three years and the following three years in Mexico City. In MAC,

the nature of our ministry changed radically, from being the only missionary couple in Chile during most of our ministry there, to being part of a team of coordinators of diverse ministries, under the guidance of the regional director.”

While in MAC, to facilitate discipleship training, Ramón and Blanca prepared a *Manual de Capacitación Básica de Discipulado* [kah-pah-see-tah-see-OHN BAH-see-kah DE dee-see-poo-LAH-doh] (A Handbook for Discipleship Training), which was published in Spanish in 2009 by Casa Nazarena de Publicaciones [KAH-sah nah-sah-RE-nah DE poo-blee-kah-see-OHN-es] and in English in 2013 by Global Nazarene Publications (GNP).

An Update on Ramón and Blanca

In February of 2011, after 20 years of faithful service to the mission of the Church under Global Mission in other countries, Ramón and Blanca’s ‘Yes’ brought them home to their native and beloved “Borinquen Island.” By then, they had become the longest serving “Boricua” international missionaries under Global Mission.

Ramón, with Blanca as district first lady, currently serves as superintendent of the Puerto Rico West District. They continue to be actively involved in the training of pastors and lay leaders on the island.



Mario and Raquel

Chapter 3

Acts 26:16

Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me

The full names of Mario and Raquel are as follows: Mario Aníbal Cintrón Cordero [MAH-ree-oh ah-NEE-bahl seen-TROHN kohr-DE-roh] and Raquel Reyes Ramos [rah-KEL RE-yes RAH-mohs]. In a non-formal treatment, he would go by the shorter form Mario Cintrón, and she would be known as Raquel Reyes.

A Youth in Mission Trip to Where?

It was in the early 1980s. Raquel and Mario were pastoring the Las Palmas [LAHS PAHL-mahs] Church of the Nazarene in San Antonio, Texas (now on the Texas-Oklahoma Latin District). Veteran missionaries William “Bill” and Juanita Porter were in town to talk about the prospects of opening the work of our church in Venezuela.

The Cintrón family and the Porters knew each other well. Mario had given his life to Christ and joined the Church of the Nazarene in Puerto Rico while Bill and Juanita were still serving as missionaries on the island several years back.

The Porters were extremely enthusiastic about the assignment to pioneer the work of our church in Venezuela. They would not leave town without asking Mario and Raquel to pray and consider being part of a Youth in Mission Team to Venezuela in the summer. The Cintróns' decision to join the Porters in this short-term volunteer missionary trip would change the life and ministry of Mario and Raquel forever.

Venezuela

The Church of the Nazarene had been advancing the holiness cause in Latin America for more than 75 years, but Venezuela remained the only Spanish-speaking country



Bill and Juanita Porter

Bill and Juanita Porter served as pastors and missionaries for the Church of the Nazarene in the USA, Puerto Rico, New Zealand, Venezuela, and Spain for more than 40 years. An ordained elder, Bill was a graduate of Bethany Nazarene College (now Southern Nazarene University) in the USA and the Puerto Rico Conservatory of Music. Bill passed away in 2004, and Juanita has since remarried. The Porters had two sons. Their son Jerry is a general superintendent emeritus for the Church of the Nazarene; he and his wife, Toni, now serve as missionaries. The Porters' son John is a research scientist at the University of Hawaii

without our holiness witness in the whole South American continent. Venezuela was also the country with the lowest percentage of evangelical Christians in the Americas.

Officially called the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, its current population is more than 31 million. Although colonized by Spain in 1522, evidence exists of human habitation in the area from about 15,000 years ago. It became one of the first Spanish-American colonies to declare independence in 1811, although it did not gain full independence as a separate country until 1830.

Venezuela is among the most urbanized countries in Latin America. Most Venezuelans live in the cities of the north, especially in the capital, Caracas [kah-RAH-kahs].

Oil was discovered in the early 20th century. Venezuela has the world's largest known oil reserves and has been one of the world's leading exporters of oil.⁶

“Mario Is Mario”

Mario first became acquainted with our Puerto Rico holiness work through the main congregation in San Juan, its capital. Mario was invited by friends who attended the church there. After returning home from military service, he visited his friends' church again. Serving as supply pastor was Harry J. Zurcher [ZUHR-kuhr], a non-native, international missionary, and his family recently arrived from Perú.

⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuela>. n. pag. Web 05 September 2017.

Benjamín Román [ben-hah-MEEN roh-MAHN], an experienced and successful Puerto Rican pastor, was soon called to be the pastor of Mario's local church. Mario and Pastor Román developed a life-time relationship that led Mario to consider Román "my mentor and guide." Mario also refers to Pastor Román as "a great model and friend." Since the very beginning, Mario's way of doing things in his service to the Lord and the church would be strikingly different to many. In response to those who inquired of Pastor Román about Mario's unusual ministry style, he would always ingenuously answer, "Mario is Mario."

Mario acknowledged how God in His providence had prepared him for ministry through his secular training experience. This included photography (from his father, a well-known photographer), teaching (through his mother), the military, drama, and medicine (surgical nurse) in college. He was the youngest of six siblings. "The Lord kept moving the pieces on the board," says Mario, "and I was ready even before I met Him."



Harry J. and Helen E. Zurcher

Harry Zurcher was a graduate of Olivet Nazarene College (now University) in the USA and an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene. In addition to pastorates in the USA, the Zurchers were missionaries to Peru and Puerto Rico for 28 years. The Zurchers had five children, Laurence, Linda, Margaret, Sharon, and Betty.

Raquel, “A Missionary from Birth”

Raquel was born in Barceloneta in 1945 to Pedro [PED-roh] and Lydia Reyes [LI-dee-ah RE-yes]. It is worth noticing that she was born in the same northern coastal town in Puerto Rico where Blanca and Ramón were born. Raquel was the second of four siblings.

Anyone who knew Raquel well enough (I was her pastor when she was a teenager in the early 1960s) knew she always testified to having a call from God to be a missionary. Her parents supported Raquel’s convincing attitude by saying, “She is a missionary from birth.”

Raquel was very active in her local church. She would enroll children in the neighborhood for Sunday School, teach a Sunday School class, serve as youth leader, and do hospital and house-to-house calls. She represented her local church in zone and district events and actively engaged in summer camps with her local youth group. Her deep spirituality was evident to everyone.

It was at district-level events, such as youth conventions and summer camps, that Mario and Raquel became acquainted, a relationship that eventually led to dating and engagement.

Marriage, Family, and Early Ministry

After Mario's graduation from Puerto Rico Nazarene Bible College⁷, Raquel and Mario were happily married in 1966.

That same year, Mario and Raquel were assigned to their first pastorate. They served the church with Mario as a bivocational pastor, as he was already professionally employed as a surgical nurse in a local hospital. Two other pastorates in Puerto Rico followed.

While in their second pastorate, Raquel became seriously ill with bronchial asthma. It was devastating. She lost their first child by miscarriage. Health problems persisted over the years. Nothing, though, deterred her from working hard alongside Mario in their ministry and raising a family. Mario and Raquel said: "God rewarded us and finally gave us the gift of our first child, 'Macky' (Mario Abner)." In time, "God gave us our second child, Raquel Liz," they added. Missionary Harry Zurcher, now the Bible College director while Mario prepared for ministry, dedicated Mario Abner and Raquel Liz to the Lord. The influence, guidance, and modeling of this faithful missionary had become evident in Mario's life and ministry.

Consistent to Puerto Rico culture, by asking missionary Harry to officiate in the dedication of their two infants,

⁷ The Puerto Rico Nazarene Bible College (Instituto Biblico Nazareno) officially opened in 1954 to train Nazarene pastors. Over the years, many pastors traveled to the USA to study. In 1971, the school in Puerto Rico was closed and the Spanish-American Nazarene Seminary (San Antonio, Texas) became the official training school for Spanish-speaking pastors in the USA and the Caribbean.

Mario and Raquel were saying to him and his family, “You belong to us; we are family.”⁸

While Mario served in his third pastorate in Ponce, the main city on the southern part of Puerto Rico, he was also the director of a recently established theological education by extension program for the area. Two new churches were planted in the area in partnership with Mario’s downtown congregation.

Back to San Antonio, Texas

But we need to go back to San Antonio, Texas, where our story of Mario and Raquel as Puerto Rican missionaries really began.

In retrospect, Mario and Raquel would consider their work in San Antonio a sort of “first mission field because of its unique Tex-Mex American hybrid culture.” It may have been a cultural challenge for him and his family, but “the acceptance and support of the congregation made everything easier,” Mario remembers.

God blessed Mario and Raquel with another growing ministry in San Antonio. Many souls were saved, with healing miracles reported, like that of Arturo Valdez [ahr-TOO-roh VAHL-des], who had been declared brain dead.

After Mario’s return from his Youth in Mission trip to Venezuela, he shared with his family and his congregation in San Antonio about God’s dealing with him and the possibility of returning to Venezuela with his family to do

⁸ Author’s Note: Missionary Harry also dedicated our two first boys several years before.

missionary work on a regular basis. Raquel and their children prayerfully agreed. However, as Mario reported, they decided they would not make definite plans to go unless the congregation also “agreed” that the Holy Spirit was leading the Cintrón family to serve in Venezuela. The congregation’s ‘Yes’ released the Cintróns to go where God was leading.

Mario’s Venezuela Report

When Mario and his family arrived at the airport in Caracas to officially begin their missionary service in the country, he remembers Juanita Porter saying, “Now we have completed the team.” For Mario and Raquel, those were encouraging words. Bill and Juanita modeled true commitment to God, to the mission of the Church of the Nazarene, and to its holiness message. Mario and Raquel were eyewitnesses of the Porters’ faithful dedication in serving the people of Puerto Rico as missionaries.

Mission Director Porter outlined the first phase of the groundbreaking work to include two aspects. The first aspect was land purchasing and building construction. Alabaster funding and the Work & Witness building program would be essential. Missionaries James and Christina Bowling would oversee construction.

The other aspect would be to manage the merging of several independent groups in Venezuela already interested in joining our church to advance the message of holiness throughout the country. Mario and Raquel would help the Porters in this urgent task.

The following are highlights of Mario’s testimony of their service in Venezuela.

- Mario found out that “the first missionary” (his words) in Venezuela was World Mission Radio (now World Mission Broadcast) through *La Hora Nazarena* [LAH OH-rah nah-sah-RE-nah] (The Nazarene Hour)—a weekly radio program reaching all 21 Spanish-speaking countries, including Venezuela. This international radio ministry was funded by Nazarenes everywhere through their World Mission Radio offering. Many of those joining the Church of the Nazarene in Venezuela were regular listeners of *La Hora Nazarena*.⁹
- It was really inspiring for Mario to become closely acquainted with Venezuelan pastors like Jeremías López [he-re-MEE-ahs LOH-pes], himself a listener of *La Hora Nazarena*. He and his group of other independent pastors and congregations joined our church from places, such as Barquisimeto [bahr-kee-see-ME-toh], Valencia [vah-LEN-see-ah], Maracaibo [mah-rah-KIE-boh], and Las Piedras [LAHS pee-E-drahs]. They were ready to work alongside the missionaries in what Mario considered “a true movement of the Spirit of God.” He adds, “From the beginning, our meetings were spiritual parties. We celebrated, with praises, sinners that repented, believers that were sanctified, and those who were called to ministry. Everyone testified with courage and

⁹ Author’s Note: At the time, I had the privilege of being the speaker and producer of this global mission radio outreach, out of San José, Costa Rica. More on my involvement will be addressed later in this book

enthusiasm about God’s wonders in their midst.” Part of Mario’s responsibility was to help these new pastors and their congregations become better acquainted with Nazarene doctrines and the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene.

- Theological education by extension centers (CENETA by its Spanish acronym), facilitated by professors from the Seminary in Costa Rica, were also designed to be a key part of the Nazarene pioneer work in Venezuela by quickly training new pastors to serve in this rapidly growing mission field. Mario served as the first coordinator of CENETA for Venezuela.
- Another missionary responsibility assigned to Mario was helping with the implementation of Plan Impacto, an evangelistic, discipleship, church planting, and church development thrust in the South America Region under the slogan of “Each one reach one; each pastor prepares another pastor; and each church plants a new church.”
- Mario and Raquel were extremely appreciative of the many Nazarenes who came from their native Puerto Rico to help in the trailblazing efforts of our church in Venezuela. They were, in Mario’s words, “tools of the Spirit” in those early days.
- Mario always had a deep, personal note of gratitude to Raquel, his faithful companion. Raquel excelled in her hospitality for her new Venezuelan brothers and sisters and with those from abroad visiting their home for church-related matters on a regular basis. This hospitality work soon became a round-the-clock task for Raquel.

- His deep, personal gratitude also extended to their two children: Macky and Raquel Liz were like missionaries, working hard in teaching, in music, and with the Venezuelan youth.

“When we left Venezuela 4 years after our arrival, there were 36 Nazarene churches and missions, some with more than 100 in attendance,” Mario remembers, “with over 140 ministerial students in 8 CENETA centers, and an average attendance of over 1,600 in Sunday School and Sunday morning worship.”

Raquel’s health began to deteriorate after some time. The Cintrón family needed to return to the continental United States for her to get additional medical care. They settled in Bethany, Oklahoma, where their two children completed school and planned to attend the Nazarene university. Providentially, Harry and Helen Zurcher, now retired and living in this same city, were instrumental in helping them get settled. These mentors from the past were ready to assist their previous mentees in their time of need. Mario said the Zurchers were of “great blessing for our spiritual and social life.”

Mario’s Last Missionary Assignment with Raquel

Once settled in Bethany, Oklahoma, Raquel went through extensive medical tests revealing that she had

cancer. Nazarenes everywhere the Cintrón family was known, loved, and appreciated—especially in Puerto Rico—united in prayer and constant encouragement for Raquel and the family.

Raquel's health improved; and 18 months after starting treatment, doctors told Mario it was controlled. The Global Mission Medical Board of the Church told them that they could return to active missionary service, but Raquel would have to return to the States for medical checkups at least every six months. The plan was to station them in a country close enough to the continental United States to allow for these regular checkups and to continue with preventive chemotherapy.

It was 1990; and Jerry Porter, at that time director of the Mexico-Central America Region for the Church of the Nazarene, welcomed Mario and Raquel to the regional office in Guatemala City, Guatemala. Mario and Raquel had known Jerry since he was a child growing up in Puerto Rico as a missionary kid.

Jerry appointed his friend and colleague Mario as a field director (now field strategy coordinator) with the responsibility of supporting district superintendents, pastors, and other ministerial and lay leaders in church development, evangelism, theological education, compassionate ministries, and construction for the countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Unfortunately, after several months in their new missionary assignment, Raquel's health took a turn for the worse.

Raquel's Last Days

During a checkup in Oklahoma, Raquel's test results were not favorable: an aggressive form of cancer had returned.

Mario broke the news to the many Nazarenes who were prayerfully following Raquel's evolving health condition: "She has been given three to four weeks to live. She wants to return to Puerto Rico."

In June of 1991, Mario took Raquel back to her "beloved town of Barceloneta, to be with her parents, friends, and family...After just a few weeks, leaning on my arms and that of her parents, with a house full of family and friends, Raquel entered the presence of the Savior."

Raquel had said her final "Yes." Funeral services were held with hundreds of people from all over the island in attendance.

An eyewitness said, "It does not look like a funeral; it looks like a party. Almost no one is crying. There is only gratitude and praise."

Mario, Macky, and Raquel Liz said, "That's what she wanted to see."

As her parents used to say, Raquel had been born "to be a missionary," and her family, her church family, and her friends were celebrating her life of saying "Yes" many times!

Mario returned to Guatemala City three weeks after Raquel's burial to continue his missionary service. He tried

hard for the next few months. At the end, it proved to be an impossibility. He resigned effective 1 January 1992.

“We left behind seeds planted and fruits reaped,” Mario says. “I have kept memories, many memories, memories of victories and triumphs against sin and evil in this world. Joy and satisfaction and a ministry fulfilled.”

An Update on Mario

Several years later Mario returned to full-time ministry to pastor a church in Puerto Rico while I was serving as a district superintendent. He had remarried; and Betty, his new wife, along with Marbel and Francis, Mario’s two daughters from this new marriage, served well in their pastorate there. He later spent time as an itinerant evangelist mainly in Puerto Rico, the United States, and Canada, but also in Venezuela and other Latin American countries.

In time, Mario went back to San Antonio, saying ‘Yes’ to help in ministerial training on the Texas-Oklahoma Latin District.

Mario is now a retired elder in the church, but still conducts revivals when the opportunity arises.



Chapter 4

Isaiah 12:5

Sing to the LORD, for he
has done glorious things;
let this be known to all
the world.

Pedro and Justita

Pedro and Justita's full names are: Pedro Eduardo Cruz Maldonado [PEH-droh e-DWAHR-doh KROOS mahl-doh-NAH-doh] and Justita Febo Vázquez [hoos-TEE-tah FE-boh VAHS-kes].

Pedro

Pedro was born in Utuado, a picturesque town nestled in the central mountain range of Puerto Rico. The town is known for being the archeological site of an ancient settlement of the Taínos [tah-EE-nohs], the peaceful people who inhabited the island before the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1493. Pedro spent the first few years of his life in a village near this historical treasure.

Pedro's parents and five siblings migrated to Chicago, Illinois, USA, when he was three years old. Extremely difficult times in his parents' marriage ended in their divorce. His mother's poor health hastily brought her and her children back to their hometown in Puerto Rico. But, instead of being received with open arms, they were shunned by family and friends, and Pedro's mother and all five siblings ended up spending their days homeless, staying in the town's square. His youngest sibling was only a few months old.

The town's human services agency placed Pedro and his siblings into different foster homes in the area. His mother was sent to a sanatorium to recover from tuberculosis. Pedro remembers sadly spending several years living with a strange family and suffering physical and emotional abuse. His siblings did not fare well with their foster parents either. Those years were an extremely low point in the life of young Pedro.

Providentially, Pedro's mother recovered her health and set about gathering up all her children to start again as a family. A second marriage to an abusive husband also ended in divorce. In part because of this second divorce, she decided to move to the island's capital city in search of a better life for her and her children.

Pedro Becomes a Nazarene

Pedro's mother came to know the Lord at the Church of the Nazarene in their new neighborhood. Pedro was 13 when he made his own profession of faith in Christ. His first pastor was missionary Harry J. Zurcher. Pastor Harry

and others in the church were very influential at this critical stage in Pedro's life. "I came into the church," Pedro said, "full of conflicts and resentments resulting from my traumatic experiences over my parents' divorce and having been separated from my brothers and my only sister." But he added: "The love and acceptance I found in the church kept me from being shackled to the vices and crime so prevalent in my new neighborhood."

Pedro still has his baptismal certificate from 1961.

Young Pedro joined the church choir and immediately became deeply involved with Christian music as a whole. Music has remained a vital part of his ministry in the church.

Justita

Justita, the youngest child in her family, was born in Carolina [kahr-oh-LEE-nah], the industrial capital of Puerto Rico, a city located on the northeastern part of the island.

Justita knew the Lord as her personal Savior through the influence of her mother and her uncle Ángel Vázquez Carrillo [AHN-hel VAHS-kes kah-REE-yoh], who at the time was serving as the pastor of another of our churches in San Juan.

Marriage and Family

When Pedro and Justita fell in love, he remembers how he had to "skillfully maneuver through a challenging courtship." Justita was the only girl in the family and "was always

surrounded by two protective parents and four even more protective brothers.” But Pedro succeeded! They were married in June of 1967. “God gave us three children: Pedro Elías [PED-roh e-LEE-ahs], Darybell [dah-REE-bel], and Enid [E-need].”

Pedro and Justita recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. When people ask them how they have been able to make their marriage last so long, Pedro jokingly answers: “What else could you expect? Our wedding was performed not by one, nor two, but three ministers!” (One of them was missionary Bill Porter, who was then serving as Puerto Rico District superintendent.)

God’s Call and Early Ministry

Pedro received God’s call to ministry during a youth camp in 1964. Accepting this call was not easy for Pedro, who recalls: “I already had in mind to become a graphic artist and earn a lot of money.” After much spiritual struggle, he said ‘Yes’ to the Lord and accepted the call.

He enrolled in the Puerto Rico Nazarene Bible College to begin ministerial training, while also completing his studies as a graphic artist and becoming involved in his first musical venture outside the local church. He was part of a male quartet that gained popularity among Nazarene and evangelical churches throughout the island, reported Pedro. His quartet soon had its first recording out. Nazarene missionary Lyle Prescott, a skillful pianist, was invited to be the instrumentalist.

Around this time, Pedro was also invited by José Bocanegra [boh-kah-NE-grah], a well-known and beloved pastor of one of the larger Nazarene congregations in the capital city, to become his associate pastor. To Justita's surprise, Pastor José also invited her, Pedro's fiancée at the time, to transfer her membership to his local church, advising her that she was going to be trained as "a future pastor's wife!"

Justita went on to finish her high school and completed college level studies in secretarial sciences.

Justita had been interested in Nazarene missions since she was a child. She remembers the missionary stories told in the monthly missionary service, sponsored by what was then called the Nazarene World Missionary Society (now Nazarene Missions International). She also became well-acquainted with the foreign missionaries and their families



Lyle and Grace Prescott

Lyle Prescott was an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene. He and his wife, Grace, served as missionaries for the Church of the Nazarene for 26 years in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The Prescotts served in Puerto Rico from 1957 to 1961, at which time Lyle was superintendent of the Puerto Rico District.

The Prescotts had four children: Robert, Delia, Elwood, and Ruth. (Over the years, Robert Prescott planted a church in Puerto Rico, served four years as a Nazarene missionary, helped Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, and led his district's Nazarene Missions International.) Lyle Prescott died in a fishing accident in 1970, and Grace passed away in 1998.

then serving in Puerto Rico. “I was inspired by them,” she said, “and dreamed of someday being in distant and strange places serving the Lord.”

Shortly after their marriage, the Cruzes were assigned to their first pastorate and later to a second pastorate, continuing to mature in ministry.

In 1971 Pedro received a call from God to be an itinerant evangelist. He served in this role for the next seven years, with a special spiritual burden for the younger generation being influenced by the morally-relaxed culture of the day. He combined preaching with his singing (he was now as a soloist) and illustrated his sermons with his drawings as a graphic artist. His service as an evangelist took him to many places in the Caribbean, Central and South America, and the continental United States, conducting services both in Spanish and in English. As was the case with his first pastorates, he supported his ministry as a bivocational itinerant evangelist through his well-paying job as a graphic artist.

While serving as an evangelist, our church in “Country Club,” a suburb of the capital city, called Pedro as their full-time pastor, and he answered with a resounding ‘Yes.’ The Cruzes faithfully and fruitfully served this church for the next eight years, until he was elected as district superintendent in 1986. He followed in the steps Benjamín Román, who had served faithfully in that position for 15 years and had brought the Puerto Rico District into a fully self-supporting status, the first one to reach that level in the whole Caribbean area.

Ministering “In Distant Places”

God still had new ministry challenges in store for Pedro and Justita. Justita’s childhood dream of serving one day as a foreign missionary “in distant places” suddenly came to fruition. Here is a brief and fast-moving account, based on the Cruzes’ testimonies, of how that call to serve the Church of the Nazarene outside Puerto Rico developed.

While serving as district superintendent, Pedro and Justita were invited by the Church of the Nazarene to serve as area director for Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama, then part of the MAC Region (now part of the Mesoamerica Region). Their three children in Puerto Rico were now grown, so Pedro and Justita accepted the invitation to serve these countries and their people as God’s will at that stage in their Nazarene ministry.

Under Regional Director Mario Zani, Pedro was mainly involved with training national leaders and the implementation of the programs of the denomination. This included evangelism and discipleship programs and the planting of new churches. Pedro also served for some time as acting rector of our seminary in Costa Rica during a leadership transition period.

Justita was deeply involved in developing an awareness among Nazarenes to become more involved in supporting Nazarene global missions everywhere with their prayers and their World Evangelism Fund offerings. She also encouraged them to be open to a call from God to serve as missionaries in “distant places” themselves. Thanks in part to these

educational efforts, Pedro and Justita ended their service on the MAC Region, believing they had contributed to a clearer view of Nazarene identity.

- In 1997, they accepted an invitation to the West Texas District to establish a Hispanic work in Lubbock.
- Following a brief assignment to assist various New England districts in furthering the advancement of their Hispanic ministries, Pedro was called to pastor a Church of the Nazarene in Huntsville, Texas. Pedro and Justita's 'Yes' was a ground-breaking opportunity of service for them. Their first language was Spanish, and this was an English-speaking congregation. They were accepting the challenge of ministering for the first time mainly in their second language. At some point in this pastoral assignment, Pedro reported: "The church multiplies in attendance, membership, and finances. The groundwork has been laid for the planting of a new Hispanic congregation."
- In 2002, the invitation came for Pedro and Justita to serve as missionaries in Venezuela. Under South America Regional Director Bruno Radi, their assignment in Venezuela followed a similar job description as when they served as field directors in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. They helped districts in the development of national leadership, ministerial education, and worked with an excellent group of foreign missionaries assigned to Venezuela and to the South America Region. "It was a tremendous blessing," said Pedro at the end of their assignment there.

An Update on Pedro and Justita

Returning to the United States in 2014, the Tennessee District assigned the Cruzes to pastor a small Hispanic congregation in the Nashville area. The church grew under their leadership, becoming “one of the strongest in the district,” said Pedro. He added, “At one point the church came to have twelve different nationalities represented from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.” Pedro and Justita, now veteran missionaries, felt at home among this “league of nations.”

In addition to pastoral work on the Tennessee District, Pedro served as a Hispanic district coordinator and taught the Modular Course of Study in Spanish to a growing group of women and men called by God to ministry.

Justita, always the greatest source of inspiration and support for Pedro, served where she always did best: promoting missions through NMI, Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries International, and women’s ministries within a Hispanic constituency.

At this writing, Pedro and Justita are pastoring the Church of the Nazarene in Abernathy, Texas, USA, an English-speaking congregation in the West Texas District with a vision to reach an ever-increasingly diverse community thanks to the influx of newcomers, mainly with Hispanic backgrounds. Pedro normally introduces his preaching at the Abernathy Church by singing a solo in his still clear, high tenor voice.

Their two daughters, Darybell, an English as Second Language teacher, and Enid, a homemaker, live with their families in nearby cities in western Texas. Pedro Jr., a biological research scientist, lives with his family in the state of Florida, USA. Between shepherding the Abernathy congregation and enjoying grandparents' life with their nine grandchildren near and far, Pedro and Justita continue to joyfully say 'Yes' to the Lord.



Juan and Noemí

Chapter 5

1 Corinthians 15:10, adapted

But by the grace of God we are what we are, and his grace to us was not without effect.... Yet not we, but the grace of God that was with us.

It is an honor to share our own testimonies as Puerto Rican-born international missionaries sent by the Church of the Nazarene to serve in other countries. Although Noemí and I are the last to share our testimonies in this book, chronologically we were the first from the island to serve in such capacity.

As shown in the previous testimonies of our colleagues, Noemí and I are also indebted to mentors in our Christian life and ministry. Again, some of them, particularly the foreign-born missionaries to Puerto Rico may be familiar to you, to your extended family, or to friends in your local church.

My full name and that of my wife are Juan Ramón Vázquez Pla [HWAHN rah-MOHN VAHS-kes PLAH]

and Noemí Quintana García [noh-e-MEE keen-TAH-nah gahr-SEE-ah]. In Spanish-speaking countries, when needed, we say the full name of a person in sort of a running mode. If, in your culture, names are shorter, try our long names in this running mode and see how it goes.

Noemí

Noemí was born in Ponce [POHN-se], “the Pearl of the South” as the main city in the southern part of Puerto Rico is popularly known. She was the fifth of nine siblings born to Jorge [HOHR-he] and Mariana [mah-ree-AH-nah], small business owners. Their cafeteria sold what were reputed to be the best Puerto Rican frites [FREE-tes] (fries), and the best mabí [mah-BEE]¹⁰ refreshment (both original formulas) in town.

Noemí gave her life to Christ when she was 12 years old in the Church of the Nazarene in her community. Shortly before she became acquainted with our church, the congregation had inaugurated a brand-new building, built with Alabaster offerings. Noemí has told people everywhere that she is “a Nazarene Alabaster girl.”

Juan

I was born in San Juan, the capital city of Puerto Rico. I was the sixth of seven children born to Ramon and Julia—he, an artisan, and she, a seamstress by trade.

¹⁰ Mabí is a tree bark-based beverage consumed in the Caribbean. It is made with sugar, the bark and/or fruit of certain trees, spices, and other ingredients.

My mother brought me, along with my siblings, to the Church of the Nazarene when I was three years old. That was in 1943, and she was a divorced mom with six children who had recently returned to Christ. That same year the General Board of the Church of the Nazarene designated Puerto Rico as a Global Mission field.

My mother was an energetic woman, who was enthusiastic about seeing Churches of the Nazarene multiply. By the time I was 17 years old, our family had been charter members of three other Nazarene churches in the San Juan metropolis. José Bocanegra and Ángel Vázquez Carrillo, the church planters in the area, would become my first two mentors in ministry.

I met Christ as my personal Savior when I was 14 years old in a family camp with missionary Lyle Prescott as visiting evangelist. He was then serving the church in Cuba. I have never forgotten the way he challenged all campers to have a personal relationship with Christ using his skills with scissors and paper to surprise us with a moving invitation to come to Christ.

Our Call to Christian Ministry

Before receiving our call to Christian ministry, and after having been born again in Christ Jesus, both Noemí and I had been blessed through the personal experience of the outpouring of God's love upon our hearts through His Holy Spirit (Romans 5:1-5). As for our call, we both understood it was initially a call to pastoral ministry. (Noemí insists that,

in her case, it was a call “to be a pastor’s wife.” As you will see, it would include other areas of ministry as well.)

Noemí received her call when she was 14 years old. Even at her young age, she fervently served the Lord in her local church. “I taught a Sunday School class and actively participated with others in missionary services,” Noemí says. “We would go out to visit door-to-door in the neighborhood, we would hold services in their homes, we preached open-aired in the streets, and we would enroll and teach children in Vacation Bible School. What a wonderful time of my life it was!”

As for me, I received my call to Christian ministry when I was 17 years old. I had already been deeply committed to Christian service in the church both locally and at the district level in several areas, including being the president of our Nazarene Young People’s Society (now Nazarene Youth International).

At the district level, I played the trombone in the Puerto Rico Nazarene Bible College band, directed by recently arrived missionary William “Bill” Porter. Missionary Bill, an accomplished musician, was my trombone teacher; and Juanita, his wife, was my piano teacher.

In one of my trips with missionary Bill to a band event, he somewhat surprised me with this question: “Juan, have you ever thought of the Lord calling you to ministry?” I had just finished high school as the valedictorian of my graduating class and had enrolled at the University of Puerto Rico with a full academic scholarship to major in business administration. My plan was to become a businessman upon graduation.

Yet, missionary Bill told me to pray about this call to Christian ministry, and that he too would be praying with me about it. Just a few months later I was testifying to missionary Bill, to my mother, to my pastor, and to other friends of my own call to pastoral ministry.

Marriage, Family, and Early Ministry

Noemí and I met at a district youth convention. It was love at first sight! We were happily married two years later in 1961. We were honored by three ministers officiating in our wedding: Domingo Rivera [doh-MEEN-goh ree-VE-rah], Noemí's pastor; José Bocanegra, my childhood pastor; and missionary Bill Porter, then mission director of the Nazarene work in Puerto Rico. Missionary Harry J. Zurcher, with his unique mastering of a very nice camera, was our official photographer.

Our First Pastorates

Before Noemí and I were married, missionary Lyle Prescott, who had recently transferred from Cuba to Puerto Rico and was serving as our mission director, had assigned me to my first pastorate when I was 19 years old.

Our first pastorate together, a year later, was at our church in Barceloneta, the northern coastal town mentioned before in this book. Noemí and I were welcomed by a wonderful group of Nazarenes. Some of the church members helped us get readily acquainted with its sugar mill, its sweet pineapple

fields, and taught us a little about catching crabs near the river bank late at night.

Although, in the evangelical atmosphere of Puerto Rico in the 1960s, the idea of both husband and wife pastoring a church was still unheard of, we always approached our pastoral ministry as being pastors together. In fact, Noemí became the first Nazarene woman to receive a district minister's license in the history of the Church of the Nazarene in Puerto Rico.

During our fruitful pastorate in downtown Barceloneta, we became acquainted with a 16-year-old young woman named Raquel Reyes, who in time became, with her future husband, Mario, Nazarene missionaries to foreign countries. (You have read her testimony in a previous chapter of this book.)

Three years later we were transferred to our church in Barrazas [bah-RAH-sahs], a rural enclave in the majestic eastern mountain range of El Yunque [EL YOON-kay], the only rain forest inside and outside the continental United States.

While pastoring our church, we welcomed our first two sons into the family, Juan Marcos [HWAN MAHR-kohs] and Jorge Enoc [HOHR-he E-nohk].

Thanks to the steady growth and faithful Christian stewardship of this rather young congregation, during our pastorate we became the first self-supported church with a full-time pastor on the island.

Furthering Ministerial Training

God opened doors for us to move to the continental United States to further my ministerial training.

I first attended our Bible College in Puerto Rico, then Seminario Nazareno Hispanoamericano [se-mee-NAH-ree-oh nah-sah-RE-noh hee-spahn-oh-ah-me-ree-KAH-noh] in San Antonio, Texas, and followed by Bethany Nazarene College (now Southern Nazarene University), in Bethany, Oklahoma. There I had the opportunity to complete my ministerial course of study, a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, and a Master of Arts in Religion.

While at our school in San Antonio, I had the privilege of studying under H. Orton Wiley's disciple José Rodríguez. While at our school in Bethany, I had the privilege of studying under professors Rob Staples and Don Owens, the latter recently returned from his missionary service in Korea. These devoted Nazarene higher education professors and others like them were an inspiration for me and Noemí because of their faithful Christian service to the Lord and the church.

Pioneering the Puerto Rico West Holiness Movement

As Noemí and I were seeking God's guidance for ministry after completion of my postgraduate work, prayerfully in consultation with our leaders in Puerto Rico, we volunteered to pioneer the Holiness Movement to the western part of the island. The Church of the Nazarene had been

preaching its holiness message for almost 30 years on the island, yet no work by any holiness denomination had been established in its western area.

As volunteer church planters, Noemí and I would need to become “tentmakers” (find a secular job to support our family and partly finance our initial church development efforts in the area). How God would put together what, at first glance, looked like a puzzle was yet to be seen.

After exploring various options with our district leaders, it was decided that we would begin Sunday morning services in Aguadilla, the main city on the northwestern tip of Puerto Rico and home of a large military air force base of the United States government. There were two Nazarene families among the military personnel there, the Andersons and the Santanas, originally from the state of Texas. They were willing to open their homes and support our church-planting efforts on base and among the civilians in town.

I would preach in English to the new group on base, and in Spanish to the new group in town. Luis [loo-EES] and Adelaida Acosta [ah-de-LAY-dah ah-COH-stah] and their children, a Puerto Rican Nazarene family from one of our churches in the capital city, had recently moved to Aguadilla and opened their home for our first services in Spanish.

And my secular job as “tentmaker”? Providentially, it was a position as religion instructor in the Interamerican University, the largest private university on the island. During my time as an instructor at the university, God, by His grace, brought some of my students to Christ and to the local Church of the Nazarene.

By the time we left the mother church in Aguadilla almost 10 years later, the English congregation had been inactivated because of the closing of the military post. However, its Spanish congregation had mothered six other daughter churches, home mission projects, and regular preaching points in the Puerto Rico west area. All the necessary ministerial personnel needed for this fast-expanding Holiness Movement had been called by God and trained in the ministerial course of study by local Nazarenes.

A strong radio ministry, which greatly benefitted our holiness pioneering work on the island, was aided by professionals in the radio industry who became Nazarenes.

Oseas Gedeón [oh-SE-ahs ge-de-OHN], our youngest son, was happily added to the family during this time of service in the Puerto Rico west area.

Missionary Service in Other Countries

Since the very beginning of our call and our ministry, we felt that our commitment to the Great Commission literally meant what it said. If an opportunity presented itself, we wanted our hearts to be open to serving the church beyond our Jerusalem, our Judea, and our Samaria, and in the words of our resurrected Lord in Acts 1:8, to include “the ends of the earth.” What follows is a summary of the doors our denomination opened for us to fulfill that desire during the next 17 years.

- Near the end of the 1970s, my old Puerto Rico Nazarene Bible College fellow band member (playing French horn

like his father), Jerry Porter, was an international missionary in the church and was appointed rector of our seminary in Costa Rica. He explored with us and with the Department of World Mission (now Global Mission) the possibility of inviting me to join their faculty. The church concurred, and my family and I soon moved to Costa Rica, “the Switzerland of Central America.” Our service to the church abroad began. Some Central American countries were going through civil wars; the whole region was in turmoil. My family and I would soon feel the impact of this unsettling political atmosphere in our own lives. One time, crossing the border in one of the countries, I was temporarily put in jail when I was identified by border police as a Nazarene missionary!

- My teaching ministry in training pastors at what was later renamed Seminario Nazareno de las Américas [se-mee-NAH-ree-oh nah-sah-RE-noh DE LAS ah-ME-ree-kahs] included serving as visiting teacher at their recently inaugurated theological education by extension program (CENETA). This teaching ministry took me to most of the Spanish-speaking countries in the New World.
- Early in the 1980s, I was offered still another extraordinary opportunity for missionary service in the church. It was to be part of a new joint venture between the seminary and World Mission Radio (now World Mission Broadcast), then under the direction of Ray Hendrix, son of former missionaries to Latin America and the Caribbean. Because of my previous experience in radio

ministry in Puerto Rico, I was invited to be the speaker and producer of *La Hora Nazarena*, the official radio voice of the Church of the Nazarene. It aired on 300 radio stations around the Spanish-speaking world, including Spain and the United States. The seminary students, helping with our listeners' follow-up through mail, received scholarship money and were trained in the different areas of radio ministry and Christian mass communication. Noemí supervised this mail follow-up work of the students. Hundreds of letters were received every month. At one point in our follow-up program, we had 800 radio listeners enrolled in our Bible correspondence course for new believers. As mentioned in a previous chapter, providentially it was through this follow-up work with our radio listeners that initial contacts were made with independent holiness groups to start the work of the Church of the Nazarene in Venezuela.

- During a leave of absence from my work in Costa Rica, I was invited to serve in Publications International (now Global Nazarene Publications) as Spanish editorial director. My work included adult periodicals for the Spanish-speaking church worldwide. My family and I moved to the denomination's Global Ministry Center, then located in Kansas City, Missouri.
- In 1989, Noemí and I were assigned to serve at the Caribbean Regional Office (today part of the Mesoamerica Region) under veteran mission administrator and Regional Director James Hudson. The regional office was then located in Miami, Florida, "the capital city

of the Caribbean,” as it is called by many. I was to assist the regional director with the implementation of all denominational programs and projects on the region. We served 28 districts, 800 churches, and 4 residence ministerial training centers in 5 languages: Spanish, English, French Creole, French, and Dutch. Noemí supported this regional office ministry in as many ways as she was asked and often traveled with me to help with women’s ministries in the area. During our time of service in the Caribbean Regional Office, Hurricane Andrew hit the area as one of the largest and most costly natural disasters in the history of the United States to date. Our beautiful townhouse was a total loss, but Nazarenes everywhere rallied to quickly put us on our feet. We continued to serve the Region until the end of our assignment there.

- Our next assignment was to our beloved Nazarenes in Mexico. I was the mission administrator and Noemí was involved in the Child Sponsorship Program. It was at this time our next opportunity to say ‘Yes’ came.
- The Puerto Rico East District elected me as district superintendent on the first ballot. After more than 15 years serving our church and its holiness cause as foreign missionaries, we prayerfully felt in our hearts it was time to return to our beloved island. Our home was with the Puerto Rican Nazarenes who had supported missions so faithfully with their prayers and sacrificial giving while Noemí and I were abroad. We served our district until my retirement and until Noemí completed her fruitful pastorate in one of our local churches.

An Update on Us

We are writing our testimony from a suburb in the greater Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan area, in Texas, where we live with our youngest son Oseas and his family.

After our retirement from active ministry in Puerto Rico, we received one more “call.” This time it was from our three loving children. All three of our children had established themselves professionally and familywise in the continental United States. They wanted us to be near them, and we wanted it too. Juan Marcos and his wife, Danna; Jorge Enoc and his wife, Mayela [MAH-ie-lah]; and Oseas Gedeón and his wife, Janet, are committed Christians and have blessed us with six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Back in the States this last time around, we first settled in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, where two of our children and their families then lived.

While we enjoyed family life together again, Noemí was invited by Pastor David Gallimore to help Western Oaks Church of the Nazarene pioneer a Latino ministry as part of the multicultural efforts of this local church to reach an increasingly diversified community. I was invited to serve as Southwest Oklahoma District Hispanic coordinator under District Superintendent Carl Summer and as Latino students recruiter for Southern Nazarene University. We spent eight additional years serving our church in these and other capacities as needs arose.

We are now “officially” retired elders on the West Texas District. Currently Noemí and I have been in ministry for

the Church of the Nazarene for 56 years. We are active in our local church. We also work from home primarily in print mission media and continue to say 'Yes' when the Lord directs.

Chapter 6

Missionaries to Puerto Rico Hall of Fame

2 Timothy 2:2. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

One day, my missionary colleagues and I featured in this book, or maybe someone from a future generation, may have the opportunity to gather all the names and testimonies of Puerto Rico native Nazarenes who have faithfully served the Lord of the Great Commission in the United States and in other countries throughout the years. As you may remember from the second chapter of this book, some of their names and their groundbreaking work for the Church of the Nazarene date back to the 1950s.

This was the case, for instance, with pastor Alberto Espada Matta and his pioneering work in the New England area of the United States. The names of these other Puerto Rican-born Nazarenes of times past are many, and they all deserve a place in a future Hall of Fame. They were “missionaries” in their own rights.

And then there are those more recent Puerto Rican volunteer missionaries like the late Sylvette Rivera Geeding (she married Chaplain Dan Geeding from Wisconsin), who became, for so many of us, the embodiment of Nazarene Missions International in her passion to serve, to educate, to promote, and to inspire others for missions everywhere. A book of its own on her sacrificial life of service to others should also be written.

Today, Nazarene ministers and laypeople from Puerto Rico, whether as volunteers, as bivocational, or as full-time workers, still leave the island to get involved in evangelism, in planting and developing churches, and in support of the mission outreach of the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and elsewhere. Undoubtedly, they will continue to do so in the future. Missions are in the DNA of Puerto Rican Nazarenes, and part of that DNA is the willingness to say ‘Yes.’

This book, however, has been intended to honor many of the foreign-born missionaries who at some point in their lives came to Puerto Rico to serve our people for a period of almost 50 years. They came to us, with our distinctive beliefs, values, and customs. To the best of their ability, they learned how Puerto Ricans think, feel, and behave. And they did it with one aim in mind: To make Christlike disciples among us. It was time for us to honor them by inducting them in our own Hall of Fame, to thank them for saying ‘Yes.’

Our “Missionaries to Puerto Rico Hall of Fame” contains a complete list (to the best of our knowledge) of their names and years of service in the island.

We, the four missionary couples from Puerto Rico highlighted in this book, did not get to know all the international missionaries on the list. We did not have the opportunity to work with all of them in ministry on the island. Some of them still live and others are now with the Lord. But it is important that all their names are inducted in this “Hall of Fame,” not only for us as Puerto Ricans but for you as our readers.

Some of their names may be familiar to you. In fact, you yourself, your parents, and even your grandparents may have supported them in prayer and through your faithful giving to the World Evangelism Fund and Mission Specials, and you will rejoice in finding their names in our “Missionaries to Puerto Rico Hall of Fame.”

“As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” (Romans 10:15).

Missionaries to Puerto Rico Hall of Fame

(In Alphabetical Order)

Names	Years Served in Puerto Rico
Kenneth and Ruth Carney	1988-1990
Victor and Nancy Dunton	1984-1988
Harold and Gladys Hampton	1952-1958
Cleve and Juanita James	1965-1973
John and Naomi Lewis	1970-1973
Samuel and Evelyn Ovando	2004-2008
O. K. and Ruth Perkinson	1981-1985
William "Bill" and Juanita Porter	1954-1976
Lyle and Grace Prescott	1957-1961
Herbert and Alice Ratcliff	1966-1972
Steve and Judith Ratlief	1975-1976
Edward and Ruth Wyman	1964-1967
Harry and Helen Zurcher	1958-1973

Afterword

Will You Say ‘Yes’ to a Call for Missions?

In the Foreword of this book, you read our “Boricua” General Superintendent Emeritus (he was raised in Puerto Rico) Jerry D. Porter’s passionate plea for more Nazarenes everywhere to respond to God’s call to missionary service.

In Chapter 2, we shared with you the testimonies of Ramón and Blanca and their call to serve as international missionaries in the Church of the Nazarene and their faithful service resulting from that call.

As you will remember, the Sierras have now returned to Puerto Rico, and Ramón is actively serving as superintendent of the Puerto Rico West District. As with Jerry (everybody affectionately calls him by his first name in our island), Ramón and Blanca remain passionate about their expectations of more Nazarenes responding to the missionary call from the Global North, as well as from the Global South. I believe it is fitting that we include as an afterword the plea of Ramón and Blanca in this regard. It comes from the bottom of their hearts. Let’s plead together with them:

We want to challenge our youth to put their gifts and abilities in the hands of God and make them available to the Church. May we be sensitive and attentive to the voice of God that is calling to ministry. We anticipate for the future an army of missionaries...going into the world to share the love of Christ.

Act On It

- The Church of the Nazarene in Puerto Rico has always been enthusiastic about Nazarene missions and has faithfully supported missions in prayer, education, and giving throughout its more than 70 years of history. Will you join them?
 - Pray daily for the Church of the Nazarene worldwide.
 - Learn about what God is doing through the Church of the Nazarene globally to pray more effectively.
 - Giving opportunities, like the World Evangelism Fund, help further the gospel through the Church of the Nazarene. Be an active participant in the financial support of missions.
 - Encourage children, youth, and adults to be involved in missions support and to be willing to say ‘Yes’ should the Lord call them to serve cross-culturally.
- As emphasized throughout this book, increasing numbers of missionaries from the Global South create new missions opportunities. What can your church or you, as an individual, do to support these people and their ministries?
- Former international missionary Howard Culbertson has written in *Engage* magazine a rather insightful article on being a sending church.¹¹

¹¹ Howard Culbertson, “Mission briefing: Be a Sender” *Engage* magazine, 29 June 2017. www.engagemagazine.com/content/mission-briefing-be-sender (21 December 2017).

Not infrequently, people think the only way they can participate in to-the-ends-of-the-earth evangelism is by flying to another country....“Going” is just one avenue of world mission involvement. Indeed, those who leave home to become career missionaries need a cadre of consecrated and zealous supporters back home...[In view of passages like Romans 10:15 and 3 John 7, they could be called “Senders,” Culbertson and others suggest.]

How do Senders support and take care of missionaries?...To be sure, money...is needed in world evangelism. However, Senders can and must do more than give money. As one example, in almost every one of Paul’s letters, he requested prayer for his ministry from his Senders....

In addition, Senders contribute to Great Commission fulfillment ranging from keeping missions bulletin boards updated to locating and shipping needed equipment and supplies. A variety of gifts and talents can be used to facilitate the work of missionaries serving far away.

Here are half a dozen areas in which Senders can support missionaries:

- Emotional support (encouragement via emails, cards, Skype conversations [where available], showing up at deputation services, and more).
- Mobilization (raising global missions awareness in one’s own local church or district).

- Financial support (giving, and encouraging others to give).
- Intercessory prayer for world evangelism (praying, and calling others to prayer).
- Logistics help (providing housing and transportation for missionaries on home assignment, making arrangements for shipping, ironing out details for events and more).
- Re-entry assistance (being a “safe” listener, helping returned missionaries find their way around, and more).

Senders have been known to be so passionate about supporting missionaries that they adjust their lifestyles to pray more, serve more, and give more.

Be a Sender. Impact the “ends of the Earth” from your own doorstep.

- Be creative in encouraging missions support. When I was a child, my mother, Julia, was a fervent promoter of global missions in the local church and came up with all kinds of simple, but effective, ways to boost global missions the Puerto Rican way. At one point, she was featured as a champion fund raiser for missions in an early missions book on Puerto Rico written by Bill and Juanita Porter.
- Have faith in what you and your church can do. Make a plan, and follow through.

Epilogue

As this book was being prepared for publication by the editorial team of Nazarene Missions International (NMI) at the Global Ministry Center of the Church of the Nazarene, tragic news about Puerto Rico broke out worldwide. Allow me to briefly update you on this painful situation from my own perspective.

“María,” a hurricane named such by the Weather Bureau with wind speeds of up to 155 miles (247 kilometers) per hour, hit Puerto Rico and other parts of the Caribbean. The devastation was unprecedented.

In 2017, the hurricane season in the tropics was particularly destructive. Tragically, as of this writing, many hurricane-related deaths and thousands upon thousands of displaced victims continue to be reported in many affected areas. Material losses are in the billions of dollars. Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States inhabited by 3.4 million people, is believed to have been hit the hardest:

- The electrical system was completely wiped out, and it is estimated that it may take at least three months for power to be restored to most of the island. As of mid-January 2018, it was reported that 40 percent of residents are still without power.¹²

¹² www.nbc12.com/story/37248965/dominion-energy-crews-continue-to-assist-in-rebuilding-puerto-rico-power-grid.

- Out of caution, local and federal government agencies were still recommending that people take precautions when coming in direct contact with water sources.¹³ Health officials have warned about the potential of an epidemic related to contaminated-water illnesses.
- Mental health experts have observed that the most vulnerable people, especially children and the elderly, are showing signs of mental and emotional confusion and distress.

Yet, God's providence is being manifested through massive human solidarity in countless ways. Many agencies and countries are offering their helping hand in relief, recovery, and long-term reconstruction efforts in Puerto Rico and with Puerto Ricans. The United States government and its generous people are leading the way. Basic needs like drinking water and food are being met, and shelters remain open.

All of us, the four Puerto Rican missionary couples featured in this book, are members of large extended families from the island. Providentially, no hurricane-related deaths have been reported among any of our relatives or among our Puerto Rican Nazarene family. However, extensive damage to church property has been reported by both Andrés Hernández [ahn-DRES er-NAHN-des], the Puerto Rico East District superintendent, and by Ramón Sierra, the Puerto Rico West District superintendent:

¹³ https://response.epa.gov/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=12403.

- At least two church buildings on the East District were severely damaged.
- The West District seems to have been hit the hardest. Ramón Sierra reports as follows: “Most of our church buildings suffered some damage, but six of them and our campgrounds suffered the most damage. Many of the communities surrounding our churches and many of our church families had considerable loss in their homes.”
- In the midst of this widespread crisis, Sierra adds: “Our churches continue to meet for worship and to minister to the community in new and innovative ways.” A similar compassionate mobilization to serve their communities and those in the direst of needs has been reported by Nazarenes on the East District.

The response from the Global Ministry Center and the Mesoamerica Regional Office has been overwhelming as Nazarenes around the world give to the Global Emergency Relief Fund. Within a few days after the storm, humanitarian aid supplies were flown to Puerto Rico by groups working with Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, including Heart to Heart International, Convoy of Hope, and World Relief. Work & Witness teams are ready to help in worship sites reconstruction, as soon as conditions are suitable, which includes the availability of the now-scarce construction materials.

Just like many in the Caribbean during the hurricane season each year, *Boricuas* (meaning “sons of the brave and noble lords” in Puerto Rico pre-Columbian language)

are not taken completely by surprise in natural disaster situations like this one. An average of 10 storms, mostly originating in the Sahara Desert in northern Africa, visit the area every year. All the foreign-born missionaries we have honored as our mentors in this book and their families endured hurricanes with us during the more than 40 years they served in Puerto Rico.

General Superintendent Emeritus Jerry D. Porter has copied me in his response to an email he received from a friend regarding our devastated island. As I have noted elsewhere, Jerry grew up in Puerto Rico as a missionary kid. He affectionately tells his friend that he is praying “for God’s tangible love to flow to *La Isla Bendita* [LAH EES-lah ben-DEE-tah]¹⁴ from people everywhere.”

As I conclude this brief report on Hurricane María, I know that many Nazarenes everywhere will continue to pray for God’s love to keep flowing to our beloved island in as many specific ways as possible. Puerto Ricans are grateful people, and more sooner than later, as they get themselves on their feet, they will want to see God’s love flowing in the opposite direction, from Puerto Rico to other places in need.

Boricua Nazarenes have always been enthusiastic about fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, their blessed Lord and Savior. While at the time of this writing most of the island remains without light, Nazarenes know that Jesus is “the light of the world” (John 8:12). While there is still

¹⁴ Jerry Porter, personal correspondence by email, 23 October 2017. *La Isla Bendita* means “The Blessed Island.”

scarcity of running water for many, they know that Jesus will always be “a spring of water welling up to eternal life” for those who believe in Him (John 4:14).

Puerto Rican Nazarenes will continue to proclaim Jesus Christ and the holiness message on the island in the power of the Holy Spirit. They will always be supportive of the mission of God around the world through their giving and, yes, through more of their own people being sent as missionaries abroad. They want their ‘Yes’ to be contagious.