



GUATEMALA

Literature Project Saturates Guatemala

Roger and Vicki Grossman, missionaries to Guatemala, coordinate an effective method for Scripture distribution.

The Gospel Saturation Project, a Guatemala Baptist Mission publishing and literature distribution initiative launched in 1999, is geared to permeate the country's Western highlands with the Gospel. "We are dedicated to see that everyone hears and understands the Gospel," says Roger Grossman, project director.

Gospel Saturation Project's strategy is simple: publish portions of *The Picture Bible* in booklet form and recruit volunteers to distribute them to targeted households in four visits. "Each week the volunteer returns with another portion, reminding them that this is the Word of God," explains Grossman. At the end of the distribution period, people are asked if they understood the message and invited to join a Bible study. "We want God's word not just to be in the homes of everyone in our target areas but to be understood and in the minds and hearts of everyone."

The follow up strategy is effective in many ways. Recipients are less likely to discard the literature as



they anticipate a second or third visit. The strategy is fruitful because the volunteers have an opportunity to meet and discuss the contents of the booklets with the readers. The approach, which ensures that the material is read could be a model for literature distribution in other parts of the world. The Grossmans look forward to "larger quantities" of literature and "wider distribution."

The Project has three stages. First is the selection and publication of booklets that, in Grossman's words, "present the pillar stories of the Bible and a glimpse of the life of Christ." Second, is the recruitment and preparation of the volunteers to distribute the books. The final phase is the distribution to targeted households and the personal invitation to accept Christ or join a church.

Publishing right books

Gospel Saturation Project's publishing decisions are guided by the ultimate goal of leading readers to Christ. Since some 50 percent of the people who live in the targeted households cannot read, the books need little text and must communicate mostly through pictures. "We wanted to put something visual and concrete in people's hands and hearts," says Grossman.

Rather than spend much time and money developing such a product, Grossman and his team decided to ask for permission to use portions of *The Picture Bible* published by Cook Communications Ministries. Extracts were used from this book to create four 36-page booklets entitled *The Creation, Moses, Two Kings* and *Life of Jesus*. With Cook's permission, the project team went on to use more direct quotations from the Bible. "In this way, the people will be convinced that it is God's Word, not just our spin," explains Grossman.

The 36-page books are designed for adults with a beginning literacy level, but also appeal to children and young people. Offering a product that is attractive to children and teens is critical because, according to the Pan American Health Organization, 45 percent of the population of Guatemala is under the age of 15.

Preparing volunteers

Before the "saturation" initiative could start, there was a need to train the people who would do the distribution and follow. An intensive training conference was organized for workers to learn about evangelism, learning styles, illiteracy, culture, and some apologetics.

The advance team, consisting of four Americans and seven Guatemalans, then walked through targeted areas praying for those who live there. They put up 1,000 large posters of Jesus, which stated "Do You Know

This Man? He is Just, He is Honest ... and He is God. He is Guatemala's Hope ... Read your Bible to know Him."

The training ended with a commissioning service that was led by Rosalio Ramirez, secretary of Guatemala's National Baptist Convention.

Installation distribution

The distribution phase of the Gospel Saturation Project was tedious but rewarding. Each volunteer distributed one book per week to 300 households. The booklets were also distributed on a military base housing 400 soldiers. They have been eagerly received. When volun-

teers revisit a household, they ask the residents whether they read and understood the previous installment. Often the people are waiting for the next installment.

On the fourth and final visit, volunteers ask readers if they are ready to accept the Lord and if they would like Bible study to be held in their homes. Those who respond positively are encouraged to invite friends and neighbors to join the study group.

Impact of project

By the end of the year, 12 Bible study groups were active in the targeted areas. Attendance varies,

but as many as 45 people (adults, youth, and children) have sought help at a single Bible study. In view of the success of this initiative, other groups have also begun similar programs for their neighborhoods and cities.

"God is honoring the distribution of his Word," concludes Grossman, "Guatemalans are coming to know the Savior." ❖

AFRICAN ADVENTISTS MARK 150 YEARS OF BOOK EVANGELISM

"Empowered by the Holy Spirit to Finish His Work," was the theme of the Seventh Day Adventist Church's Eastern Africa Division Literature Evangelist Congress held this past December in Blantyre, Malawi. The five-day event marked 150 years of book evangelism by the Adventist Church and was attended by book evangelists from eight East and Southern African countries.

Political instability and civil conflicts were identified as the leading cause of poor distribution in parts of the continent. "Tribal and civil wars in some west and central African countries have been a great challenge to literature evangelism in the last decade" observed Daniel Dankwa, a publishing director. "For example, in 1989, during the civil war in Liberia, large consignments of books were burnt."

Wars in Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, made travel difficult and risky, resulting in poor book distribution and sales. The Congress participants prayed for peace and courage to continue the work.

Literature evangelists also noted that political and economic instability have created nations of poor people, who buy food rather

than books. Publishing and distribution of Christian literature must be subsidized through donations from church members.

Despite the challenges, booksellers encouraged each other to be creative in finding alternative distribution avenues.

Participants were urged to use Christian books to reach all people, even people in high government positions. To underscore this message, a delegation from the Congress presented a gift of Christian literature to Malawi's President Bakili Muluzi, a Muslim.

Congress participants acknowledged the need to develop local writers. Adventist publishers, like many other African publishers, rely heavily on Christian books from abroad, especially Stanborough Press in the United Kingdom. Imports and reprint rights enable publishers to provide a broader range of titles but may not address locally relevant issues.

The Congress ended on an upbeat note. Participants were reminded that though Satan works to stop literature evangelism, Jesus is ready to answer our prayers for the success of Christian publishing and distribution in Eastern Africa.

—Willie Kanthenga, Malawi