

A Rural Church with a World Focus

BY ANGIE GERGELY

When more than a hundred people gather this summer in Monclova, Mexico, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Workers for Mexico Mission, they will hear of the important role a small rural church in Bath County, Kentucky, has played in the mission's success.

I grew up at Sugar Grove Christian Church, though it was 60 miles from our home in Grayson. My father and mother, Francis and Pam Nash, have ministered there since 1968.

My dad is a professional broadcaster, but his other passion is missions. He leads the church into thinking beyond the boundaries of its community to world evangelism. He preaches missions with a passion, believing if we are serious about being Christians, we must be serious about the reason Christ came—to bring salvation to the entire world.

Spending 95 percent of the church's resources here at home was never an option. Instead he preached that the 10 percent most congregations gave to missions wasn't sufficient—that it should be more like 40-50 percent with at least half of

that going to foreign work—if we ever realistically expected to fulfill the Great Commission.

Those were lofty goals! Talking about them often inspired a church of fewer than 150 folks to give more than \$50,000 a year to missions. During one exceptional year, the amount doubled to \$100,000.

FIRST EFFORTS

I was 16 in 1986 when I approached my parents about skipping the family

joined me on a work team.

Soon my dad was taking groups from Sugar Grove and became acquainted with the work of veteran missionary Clinton Looney. Brother Looney had moved to Mexico in 1961 with his family after a stint in the Navy during World War II, Bible college, and successful stateside ministries.

He trusted God completely to provide for him when his work started in central Mexico. That work included an extensive radio ministry, thousands enrolled in correspondence courses, training evangelists, helping students, and starting camps. He later went to the border area to establish more churches and work among children and the deaf in the northeast part of the country.

His mission had supported Mexican congregations and national evangelists in a variety of programs with funding from U.S. churches. The work was growing but Looney was aging. In 1996, in a meeting in

Harlingen, Texas, my father and Looney formed a partnership to create a mission that would continue to support the vari-



A team of workers from Sugar Grove Christian Church, Bath County, Kentucky, joined by members of Highland Christian in Mayville, Kentucky, helped to rebuild a flooded church building in Reynosa, Mexico. Sugar Grove is a strong supporter of the Workers for Mexico Mission.

Christmas celebration to take a two-week mission trip to Mexico. I think they shed a few tears, but they let me go. Two years later, my sister Melodie, my parents, and my future husband, Don,

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ous Mexican men and their families as they sought to win their own people to Christ. The partners also laid plans to expand the mission further.

My dad asked his church, Sugar Grove, to serve as trustee for the new corporation and oversee and advise him in the work as director. Dad continued to serve as weekend minister as well. Dad began seeking ways to communicate the message and the needs of Mexico to people and congregations here in the States, and also began studying Spanish so he could effectively administer the work among the Mexican preachers.

He's living proof you can teach an old dog a new language, but it's a slow process! He even has managed to preach in Spanish. I've heard the muffled laughter of the good-hearted Mexican congregations, but I've also heard some hearty "amens" as he spoke of his passion for reaching the lost. It's a passion they share.

THE MISSION TODAY

The mission now encompasses more than 20 cities and more than 30 Mexican families, in addition to American missionaries and many benevolent programs. It is being supported by more than 100 different churches and individuals throughout the United States. The beauty of giving to Workers for Mexico Mission is that all the money goes directly to the field. Dad volunteers his time, and Mom serves as the secretary and treasurer. They use the kitchen and spare bedrooms of their house as offices and storage facilities to coordinate the work.

Since those first trips in the 1980s, Sugar Grove has seen 84 of its 140 or so members take Mexico mission trips; many of them have been there a dozen times or more. My dad had to do some smooth talking to convince some of the church folks, who hadn't been very far from home, to get on a plane and

travel to Mexico. In addition, they have taken more than 65 different folks from other congregations with them to introduce them to foreign work. My sister, Melodie, still attends Sugar Grove with her family; she works as Dad's chief cook and helper on many trips.

Looney continues to help and expand the work into new areas. He has the gift for inspiring people and groups to keep coming back to build churches, and for continuing with monthly support. His love for the Word of God and for the people of Mexico is an amazing testimony.

GOING FORWARD

While Sugar Grove directs much of its support to Workers for Mexico Mission, it doesn't neglect other mission endeavors in different lands. It also continues to do much at home. With no paid staff, it takes a lot of volunteerism to make the church go forward.

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Sugar Grove recently built a new community center building for youth and fellowship. The church maintains an active benevolent fund for local needs and two vans to transport people, especially youth, to services. For many years, Sugar Grove has been known for its local radio ministry of 60-second mini messages my dad produces. It also publishes a bimonthly paper, *The Greeter*, containing Christian living and evangelistic articles, which goes into the community.

While Sugar Grove is a country church, five miles from the nearest town on a narrow, winding road, the members have always tried to implement the newest innovations and outreach programs. There are church ball teams, youth outings, and small groups ministries. And when the church and our family gave Dad a laptop computer and projector for his anniversary a few years ago, he incorporated video into each Sunday service and the worship team began putting music on the screen.

The emphasis on missions, I believe, has served to inspire people to broaden their outlook, see the world in need, think globally, but continue to act and work locally. Different veteran mission trip workers from the congregation have done such things as start a jail ministry, become local preachers, join a traveling gospel quartet ministry, become involved in youth work for troubled teens, and start an Hispanic outreach program with the local health department, which the church now helps to fund.

I'm proud to be an outstretched arm of Sugar Grove as well. I moved with my husband to Noblesville, Indiana, in 1992 when he began as worship pastor at White River Christian Church. Our church began sponsoring Workers for Mexico by taking on the Instituto Biblico in Queretaro, a college where young men and women are trained for full-time Christian service. I love the megachurch where we now serve, but I will always look fondly on the country church where I grew up in the Lord.

Sugar Grove is proof of what a little church with a big vision can do. They truly live out the church motto, "Centered in Christ—Focused on the World."

Angie Georgely serves in Noblesville, Indiana. For more information on Workers for Mexico Mission, go to the Web site www.workersformexico.org.