



## Churches Growing in Nayarit, Mexico

*By Steven Shepard*

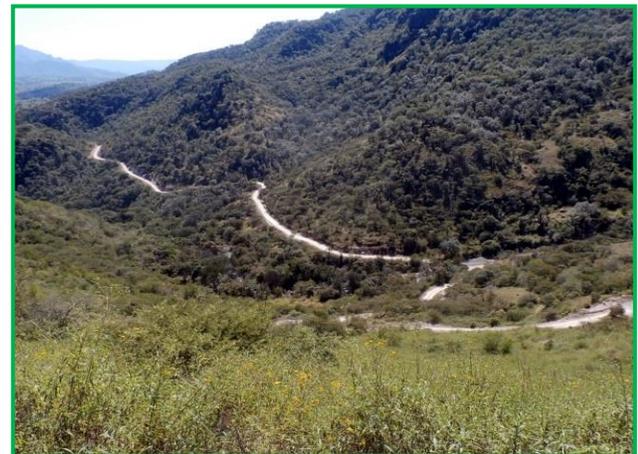
From October 30 to November 19, I was in Nayarit, Mexico, to visit five churches planted by CPI's native missionaries. I was joined by co-workers Gary Ackerman of Oregon, Ohio, and Gary Schmidt, of Lititz, Pennsylvania. Pastor Lenon and his wife Merary have planted three churches in needy areas and all have grown. I was especially blessed to see the new work in Tepic, which started with just 15 people about one year ago. It has now grown to about 80 in number. Our team taught at all three churches and in meetings for married couples, youth, and leaders. We also enjoyed a visit with Pastor Jose and Olga, and the church in San Cayetano, which was founded in 2002.

For four days we visited a Huichol church located in the remote Sierra Madre Mountains. This church was planted by Pastor Domingo and his wife Azucena about fifteen years ago. Before that time there were no churches in the entire region which includes a major village and several "ranchos." The small band of believers, which was persecuted and almost expelled from their community, saw little growth in their numbers for many years. Now suddenly the church has almost tripled in size. The growth began to occur during the last year of Domingo's life, before he unexpectedly passed away this past March. Azucena continues to teach the women and children, and serve as advisor. Two Huichol men that were under Domingo now share the teaching three times a week. Believers we met were full of spiritual hunger and gratitude. One sister told me personally how grateful she is that in 1998 I had come to her community, and that her village can now learn about God's Word. I can only attribute this amazing growth to the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.



**Above:** with the two Huichol leaders, Daniel (left), and Esiderio (with his wife Avelina and daughter)

**Below:** the road to the Huichol village of Guadalupe Ocotan



**Above:** a part of the congregation in Guadalupe Ocotan

**Right:** Gary Ackerman and I in Tepic with Pastor Lenon, wife Merary, daughter Valeria, and son Jonathan



# Celebrating the One True Light

*Devotional Article by Preston Smith – Preston has an M.A. in Theology and currently lives with his wife, Sarah, and their three children in Indian Land, South Carolina, where he works in advertising. Preston serves CPI part time as Director of Operations and Development, and is currently raising support to go full time.*



**“For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.” (Luke 2:30-32)**

If you traveled the I-81 corridor between Harrisonburg and Lexington, VA., at any point in December during the 1990s, I can almost guarantee that you saw my parents’ house aglow from its hilltop perch several miles off the interstate. Each year, my Dad and I would spend hours outlining our home with countless strands of Christmas lights and constructing a 20-ft. tall wooden star that often drew traffic onto our little country road for a closer look. From our beautifully lit tree and the electric candles in the windows to the bright glow of our home’s exterior, I always loved the lights at Christmas. As an adult, I’m still very fond of decorating with lights and can’t wait to put them up each year around my own home (on a much smaller scale). This holiday season, I’ve been reflecting a lot on the theme of light in the life of believers. Every day, we’re reminded that darkness is both real and powerful in our world, but as a follower of Christ, we’ve been given a Light to shine into the darkness.

All throughout the pages of Scripture, light is a dominant theme from both the physical and spiritual perspectives. In the Creation account, “Let there be light,” are the first words of God recorded for us (Genesis 1:3). In the closing verses of Revelation, we’re told that night will cease to exist in Heaven, and that God Himself will be our light. From the Prophets to the Apostles, the Bible’s authors mention light often in their writing – especially when speaking of the Messiah. Isaiah prophesied: “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.” (Isaiah 9:2). In the opening of his Gospel account, the Apostle John calls Jesus “the true Light, which coming into the world, enlightens every man” (John 1:9). Later, John records Jesus as saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12).

Jesus’ birth more than 2,000 years ago was set in a context of darkness on many levels. Fierce conquests by the world’s most powerful empires meant that most of the inhabited world was always on the brink of war. Countless religions, many of which were steeped in demonic influence, were at odds with one another and the One True God. For the people of God, there had been nearly 400 years of silence from Him during the period between the Old and New Testaments. The world was in darkness, in desperate need of a Savior. And when He came, those who believed in Him received His Light.

Each year at Christmas, we celebrate the arrival of Jesus, the Light of the world – our hope and salvation. But our celebration of the Light must not be contained to a season or a day of the year. We’re to continue celebrating the Light all year round, both in worship of our Lord and in obedience to His command carry His light into the darkness: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14). This Christmas, let us remember that “the true Light is already shining” (1 John 2:8); and as believers in that light, let us “walk as children of light.” (Ephesians 5:8)



**Left:** Steven Shepard in Belo Horizonte, (October 1-12), teaching at a gathering of pastors from the Baptist Convention in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil

**Right:** Pastor Domingo’s family – daughter Paloma, son Isaac, and wife Azucena, who despite their loss of Domingo last March, continue to serve the Lord in the remote village of Guadalupe Ocotan



## Help CPI establish a Mission Center in the Peruvian Amazon

1. To conduct seminars and start a training center to train native missionaries
2. To send native missionaries to needy and unreached communities
3. To provide a base of operations for long term missionaries
4. To host short term mission teams
5. To engage in humanitarian works like health clinics and micro-loan projects