

## First to Mexico Then to Peru

– By Steven Shepard

### Mexico: January 30 – February 11

With constantly changing Covid restrictions that vary from country to country, traveling these days isn't easy. But of all the countries we travel to, Mexico is the least restrictive. So, on January 30, Christy and I traveled to the west coast of Mexico, then three hours by bus to Tepic, and after visiting our co-workers, took off for the mountain village of Guadalupe Ocotan. There we visited a church among the Huichol where we have been working for over 20 years. During our time in the village, we counseled with the leadership team, conducted training, and encouraged the believers. The church has been without a pastor now for seven years. But plans are underway to send young Elian Chavez, who grew up in the church, for ten months of additional biblical training in Ensenada. About a year ago, Elian completed some intensive missions training in Oaxaca. Elian is fluent in both Huichol and Spanish, and currently preaches on Sundays in the Huichol language.

### Peru: February 28 – March 15

It wasn't as easy going to Peru. When Christy and I returned from Mexico, both of us had very mild cold-like symptoms. Although we both had fully recovered when it came time to take our required Covid test for travel to Peru, Christy tested positive. So sadly, at the last minute she was not able to make the trip. After two years of being away, we both were so looking forward to seeing our close co-workers in Peru.

My main objective in Peru was to hold a retreat at our base in Lima that would bring together friends and co-workers from both the jungles and Lima. In 2017, CPI established Misión CPI, an officially recognized Peruvian missionary organization. Most of our co-workers from the two areas had either never met or didn't know each other well. Even in Lima, with a population of over 11 million, the people are very spread out from one another. When everyone came together there was a powerful outpouring of joy and love. They had all experienced harsh lockdowns and isolation and seen so many of their friends and family die. For three days about forty of us stayed together, worshipping, hearing God's Word, reporting on our ministries, taking meals together, laughing, hugging and sharing the love of Jesus. With our vision rekindled and unity strengthened, it was for me – and I think for many others – a little taste of heaven on earth.

After the retreat, the rest of my time was filled with opportunities to teach all over Lima. We also climbed a very steep hill and ministered to some Quechuas. There is no church where they are living high above the city below. The church at the CPI base is now planning regular trips to teach God's Word in their community on top of the hill.



**Above:** leadership team in Guadalupe Ocotan, Mexico, from left Azucena, Josefina, Chicho, Elian, and Paloma

**Middle:** final breakfast session at the retreat

**Lower:** outpouring of love after communion



## About Planting Churches – By Steven Shepard

*Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied. (Acts 9:31)*

This text provides a good example of how local churches can have a powerful impact as the believers walk faithfully with the Lord, grow spiritually and are comforted by the Holy Spirit. God uses local churches to accomplish His purposes. Below are a few thoughts about church planting: the purpose, importance, and process of planting biblical churches.

**Purpose of church planting:** The purpose of church planting is to establish organized communities of believers in new communities. A local church can be defined as an assembly of people that profess faith in the biblical gospel of Christ alone through faith alone, and who meet regularly to worship the Lord.

**Importance of church planting:** Church planting is important because the local church is God's instrument to reach the world with the gospel. Each local church becomes a beachhead of God's Kingdom having the potential for long-term impact in the communities where they are established. Local churches are very beautiful. God's presence is among His people, and through His people God manifests His character, holiness, and love to a watching world.

**Process of church planting:** The process of church planting is to evangelize, teach new believers, train leaders, organize the ministries, and finally ordain the pastors or elders. CPI seeks to aid native missionaries to plant churches in communities where there is no church, or where there is not a strong, biblical, gospel-proclaiming church.

**Just below on left:** Marcial Sanchez and wife Doria share at Misión CPI's retreat in Lima about their ministry. They are involved in church planting in five Shipibo villages. About 15 people came from the jungles to the retreat in Lima.

**On far right:** Florencio, a Word of Grace Bible Student, shares about his ministry in a Shipibo village.

**Below middle:** Orlando Franco and wife Consuelo share about a new church plant in Lima.

**Far bottom on left:** Christy Shepard is with Azucena, in Guadalupe Ocotan, in the mountains of central-west Mexico.

**Far bottom on right:** I'm with my co-worker and fellow Bible teacher, Otoniel Pardo, who is involved in helping with three church plants in Lima.



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