

**Dreams for the kingdom;
El Salvadorian pastor ministers to reach youth, the poor and hurting**

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San Salvador, El

Salvador—When Javier Osorio envisions his ministry he needs an Imax-sized screen to capture all of his dreams.

Take his idea of a hospital to serve this city's poor.

“Seventy percent of the people here do not have health insurance,” Pastor Osorio says. “They are either unemployed or they work in the informal sector as street vendors or maids, so they don't have coverage. Medical care is very expensive here. An operation costs from \$5,000 to \$7,000 and people don't have the money to pay for them.”



Or take his idea of a safe place to reach and protect those who are in trouble. “We need a shelter for adults and children who are homeless,” he says. “There are 500 or 600 children living on the streets in San Salvador. They are often abused. And, there are abandoned mothers who need long term help such as food and shelter.”

Or take his idea of reaching out to gang members and potential gang members. “The problem is political, social, economic and spiritual,” he says, explaining why up to 70 percent of the city's young men are attracted to the violent Mara Salvatrucha gangs that control much of the capital.

Pastor Osorio and his wife Karla are energetically working to reach children, youth and adults on this city's marginal south side where gang members demand monthly protection payments of \$50 from businessmen, youth roam neighborhoods looking for something to do and violence keeps most people off the streets at night.

Recently, he added the formation of a Christ for the City International base to his work as pastor of the fast-growing Altavista Baptist Church. Through this ministry, Pastor Osorio envisions expanding ministry throughout the city beyond just what his church can do.

Already CFCI has started a clinic that serves around 25-30 patients a day and sponsors a soccer evangelism ministry to reach the area's disadvantaged youth. "Our goal is to care for people with dignity," he says.

El Salvador's problems run deep. The explosion of gang activity has its roots in the country's 1980s civil war that took the lives of 7,000 people, Pastor Osorio explains. Young people who fled to the United States with or without their families, mostly to Los Angeles, found themselves without work and family ties and thus attracted to violent street gangs. When the United States repatriated thousands of them back to El Salvador without work or any hope for the future, they carried their gang lifestyle with them.

Today, Mr. Osorio says, the gangs continue to grow and contribute to an increasing climate of violence in the country. He attributes that growth to:

- ✓ Political issues. "Young people find themselves in political anguish and in the midst of a corrupt justice system that cannot control them," he says.
- ✓ Family disintegration. "Seventy percent come from divorced families or where there is marital infidelity and a macho culture," he says. "Few families are solid and many are dysfunctional. We are counseling with many of them and holding courses for married couples."
- ✓ Economics. With many people working in the informal and thus under-employed sector of the economy, families are facing difficult poverty. In addition, many young people cannot find adequate work.



- ✓ Spiritual. "There is no consciousness of God among many people," Pastor Osorio says. "They say that 30 percent of this country is Evangelical Christian, but that is not so."

Addressing such deep needs is a very work-intensive ministry for the pastor and his wife. "I worry when he is called out at night to go to the hospital or

be with a family," Karla Osorio says. "Sometimes he doesn't come home until after midnight and the streets aren't safe after dark."

Pastor Osorio says that he takes caution and feels that "the Holy Spirit protects us." He says that the churches are not forced to pay protection fees to the gangs because gang members know that they are working for the good of the community.

Now, the pastor believes that by initiating the ministry of Christ for the City he can involve his congregation as well as others in reaching out to address the community's problems. CFCI works in a number of countries around the world to meet the greatest needs of the poorest cities. The mission's purpose is to help people transform cities by transforming lives. Missionaries from CFCI accomplish that by determining what needs people have, meeting those needs out of the love of Christ and building relationships so they can share the Gospel and change lives.

To accomplish such lofty goals, the pastor says he needs long-term help through CFCI. "We are looking for missionaries who will come to El Salvador and help us develop an English as a Second Language program for teens and children." Having the ability to speak English makes a young person more employable.

"We also need some doctors and nurses who will come and work in our clinic and help us start the hospital," he says. "And, we need people who will come to work with the youth, developing the sports ministry and other activities."

Pastor Osorio says that he also needs to raise around \$200,000 to construct the modest hospital facility.

In addition, the ministry could use short-term groups to work with evangelistic programs in local churches and also provide medical teams for the clinic.

Already some volunteers have spent time in El Salvador to help out. In February a team from Roseboro, North Carolina and the Atlanta, Georgia area spent a week with Pastor Osorio helping to prepare for a weekend festival that attracted around 5,000 participants.

The group went door-to-door in the Altavista community and to local schools to pass out flyers advertising the event. "It's all about sharing the Gospel," said Steve Smith of Roseboro. Referring to the outreach in the schools, Smith said, "It was great to have the freedom to work in the schools. If I had tried this in the United States, I would have been in jail by now," he joked.

Meanwhile, Pastor Osorio and his wife continue their ministry and dreaming. Watching a youth band practice for worship in the church's auditorium, he muses, "I have seen kids changed by coming here. We need to build a high school here at the church to help educate them and keep them out of the gangs."

More information about Christ for the City International can be obtained on line at www.cfc.org or by writing to Christ For the City International, P.O. Box 241827, Omaha, NE 68124-5827 or by calling 402 592 8332 or toll free, 888 526 7551.

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