

Border Station in Guatemala Reaching Mexicans with Christ's Love

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La Mesilla, Guatemala--Can a small FM Christian radio station in Guatemala plant churches in Mexico?

Absolutely! Witness the fruits of Radio Impacto, a 1,000-watt FM station that sits in the scrubby border town of La Mesilla, Guatemala.

"Our goal is to reach Chiapas state [in southern Mexico] with the gospel," said Christian Villatoro, pastor of the fast-growing Twelve Pearls Evangelical Church and general manager of the radio station. "It's difficult to do ministry in Mexico and almost impossible to put a Christian radio station there. So we decided to focus our broadcasts to that audience."



To do that, Radio Impacto incorporates Mexican music and invites pastors from Chiapas state to appear on the air regularly. In Mexico it is illegal for a radio station to be owned by a Christian organization.

Villatoro knows that the broadcasts are bearing fruit. "Three years ago a listener traveled all the way from his small town in Mexico to visit me here in Guatemala. He told me that he was Roman Catholic but had doubts about his faith.

"I invited him to my house and two hours later he accepted Jesus Christ," he said. "Today, in his town, there is an evangelical church and a growing number of Christians."

Villatoro says that someone from Radio Impacto visits that town every eight to 10 days to provide training and discipleship and help the new church grow.

Radio Impacto is on the second floor of the Guatemalan church's new building. The bare walls of the control room and studio reflect the station's austerity, but

the on-the-air enthusiasm witnesses to the fervor of staff members to reach Mexico for Christ.

Largely a self-developed ministry, the radio station reflects a church that bustles with activity. The station was started about five years ago by Ronaldo Orellana, a local businessman and a member of Villatoro's church.

While a live program involving greetings and announcements for Mexican listeners is under way in the studio, 100 women have gathered in the church's old worship center for an afternoon meeting. And, their efforts are almost drowned out by hundreds of teenagers in the adjoining school also operated by the congregation.



The station is supported by the church's 400 members who also provide some volunteer help on and off the air.

Each week the church offers three worship services and has 225 participants in a women's Bible study, 100 teenagers involved in youth ministries, 100 men meeting

for prayer and a number of daughter churches springing up throughout Mexico and Guatemala.

Villatoro says that 30 percent of Guatemala is considered to be evangelical but in his town, the number reaches 35 percent of the population. In contrast, the evangelical population in Chiapas is about 19 percent.

He is grateful for the help provided to his station by HCJB Global Voice engineer Steve Sutherland from Quito. The missionary has visited the station three times in the last two years to help improve the technical quality of the signal.

The station also uses several hours of programming, including special releases for women, men and children from ALAS-HCJB, the mission's Christian Spanish programming satellite network with about 90 affiliates across Latin America. In addition, HCJB Global Voice's radio development ministry recently provided a training workshop for Radio Impacto's staff.

Despite all of the work involved with serving an active church, operating a school and running a missionary radio station, Villatoro isn't done yet.

“We need to increase our transmitter power,” he said. “We moved the antenna to a higher mountain a year ago, but now we need to go up to at least 3,000 watts so that we can put a better signal into Mexico and reach farther into the country.”

The pastor indicated that the station is heard well in large cities such as Tuxtla Gutiérrez, but there are pockets of Chiapas where the signal is spotty. “We need a new transmitter and we need some remote control equipment,” he explained.

Through Bible studies, music, on-air telephone conversations and other programs, the team at Radio Impacto is addressing serious problems among the Mexican audience. Drug addiction and the growing influence of gangs among youth are two concerns that drive many programming decisions.

But primarily, as Villatoro stands in front of his hillside church gazing across the border into neighboring Mexico, he dreams of reaching farther into Mexico to bring others to Christ through his church’s ministry via radio.

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