

FACING CHALLENGES IN THE JUNGLES

By Alan Doerksen

Reaching out to unreached tribes in the jungles is a high priority of *Paraguay Missionary Churches*, but its missionaries face serious challenges such as deadly diseases, and opposition from rebels.

Juan Cuellar started the first PMC church in 1969, and today, 25 churches remain a part of the mission and nine are independent. About 25 missionaries work with PMC, most of whom are on the field planting new churches, evangelizing and discipling new believers. Cuellar's daughter, Ramona Cuellar de Paredes, has led PMC since the founder's death in 2004.



Juan Cuellar, the late founder of PMC.

Most Paraguayans are bilingual in Spanish and Guaraní. But many of the tribal people cannot read or write. The ministry has started two schools and wants to start more in needy areas. The mission wants to

educate the indigenous people so that they, too, may go out as missionaries among the unreached tribes—such as the Guaraní (the largest tribe), the Sana Paná and the Tayao.

Four of PMC's gospel workers care for churches in jungles that are so dense and isolated, that most native Paraguayans will not venture into them—even other missionaries. PMC is the only evangelical outreach in these jungles.

Once churches are established, workers trust the Lord to provide a meeting place. In rural areas, most congregations build primitive wood and straw structures. PMC wants to provide these buildings with metal roofs to withstand fires and heavy rains.

PMC's missionaries also face some dangers, such as a rebel group at work in the Nu Rugua region. In summer, PMC reported: "Our tribal pastor, Silvino Gonzales, called and informed us that some 'farmers' have tried to take away the well pump and water reservoir that Intercede provided in 2005 for our tribal congregation at Nu Rugua. The tribal congregation cannot meet at their small meeting hall because the so-called 'farmers' are threatening to take away the land from the tribal people. A few years ago these 'farmers' were trained by a guerrilla group and now they are gaining strength, because the newly-elected president of Paraguay has socialist ideas. Our tribal congregation and pastor ask for your prayers."



PMC's leader notes: "Thanks to your contributions, we have been able to start building a wall for the meeting hall at Nu Rugua, buy school supplies for the children, provide food for children, provide support for our gospel workers, buy two sewing machines for tribal women, and buy tracts for evangelization."

PMC missionaries also must combat spiritual forces. "At this time we are evangelizing at new places where there is no witness for the Lord and where witchcraft is rampant," wrote PMC's leader last year. "The Holy Spirit is our shield each moment. Also, we are working among street children and among young people recovering from drug addictions. The Lord has been doing miracles in their lives, which is very encouraging.

"We ask your prayers for our ministry to rescue souls from the devil's hands. We are sharing that Jesus Christ came to deliver them and gave His church the responsibility to carry out the Great Commission and not to be afraid to share the gospel. Despite the many trials that we have faced, our Lord has remained faithful and powerful."



A PMC church service in a village.

Helping the Poor

Many of Paraguay's tribal people are desperately poor. Since the Paraguayan economy is very weak, extreme poverty, sickness and lack of everything are prevalent in a great segment of the population. Therefore, feeding programs for people of all ages are important components of PMC's ministry. The workers of PMC distribute food and clothing to the destitute and share with them the gospel.

Missionaries attempt to meet the needs of their church members on many levels. The people have no doctors or medical services, so PMC missionaries go personally to local clinics and ask for help. They obtain medicines which they use for simple medical care. They learn to deliver babies and help out in emergencies.

The most successful work is among children. They accept the gospel with joy and then share it with their parents. Some of the churches planted by PMC started with work among the children. They began by meeting the basic needs of orphaned and sick children with food, clothing, shoes, and medical care.

The ministry now provides for about 70 children. Some *PMC's missionaries help out poor children such as these.*



have severe health problems due to malnutrition, such as blindness or paralysis. At their headquarters, missionaries provide them with shelter, food, school supplies and Bible-based teaching. "We are happy to serve the Lord by taking care of the less fortunate and vulnerable, such as these children," writes de Paredes.



**Ramona Cuellar,
Director**

Health Challenges

PMC's missionaries face many challenges in their work. Often they are affected by illnesses that debilitate them. For instance, de Paredes has been suffering from an ongoing spinal problem, which causes her considerable pain. In spring 2008, she wrote, "I had a small accident that was used by Satan to try to destroy the work in our ministry. But God always extended His hand toward us, took us ahead, and today we can say Ebenezer—the Lord helped us."

Also in 2008, one of de Paredes' daughters was seriously injured when she was struck by a car. She is at home, recovering, but suffered spine damage that has left her partially paralyzed. Doctors believe that she may walk again, but she needs long-term therapy and treatment. She is also suffering from convulsions due to the damage to her head.

In 2007, several PMC missionaries suffered from dengue fever when there was a major outbreak of that disease in Paraguay. More recently, PMC reported that missionary Paola Leguizamon is interned with tuberculosis, and her sister is suffering from the same sickness. PMC's Oscar Benitez currently has liver cancer.

Medicine and medical treatment are expensive, and PMC missionaries are not covered by government or work health plans, as many Canadians are.

But despite these obstacles, PMC's missionaries are enthusiastic about serving the Lord. "Our missionary work is growing," asserts de Paredes. We believe that the gospel of Jesus will be preached in the most remote places of our country. Please keep me, my family and our gospel workers in your prayers. We pray thanking our Heavenly Father for your generous support and love."

Pray that God will provide PMC's missionaries with whatever they need to face the challenges of their ministry.

For more information and quarterly Field Reports from this ministry, contact Intercede International mentioning this project code: 290PMC.