

Mateo and Mai Lou (Stiles) Garcia

Church Planting Missionaries, Commission to Every Nation

HUASCA DE OCAMPO HIDALGO, MEXICO

Meet Mateo and Mai Lou Garcia, who have spent the last 12 years as church planters among the people of Mexico. "We are a cross-cultural family," Mai Lou says. "Mateo is Mexican from Mexico City. [I am] North American."

Mai Lou has been involved in missions since 1977, when she studied at Bethany College of Missions in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her husband, Mateo, entered the world of missions in 1994, when he concurrently began studies at Instituto Betania in Matehuala, San Luis Potosi, Mexico and also worked in a Matehuala church plant.



After initially working in Puerto Rico, Mai Lou arrived in Mexico in 1990 to minister through Bethany Fellowship Missions. "While I was with Betania," she recalls, "I was a teacher in the [Instituto Betania in Matehuala, San Luis Potosi] teaching the Pastoral Epistles, Galatians and Ephesians. I had hoped to teach Colossians and Philippians but destiny changed that for me and I am now a Pastor's wife and do not have the opportunity to serve in a school setting, though I might do that in the future."

Today, the couple has found a rhythm to their work. Mai Lou spends her days balancing her household duties with opportunities to disciple, perform outreach and take part in Bible studies.

Mateo has bivocational responsibilities as a missionary and business man: he works daily selling

Mateo and Mai Lou Garcia, pictured with their son Jonathan, are church planters working in Huasca de Ocampo Hidalgo, Mexico.

cell phones in the center of Huasca. "This has opened doors for ministry on many occasions," his wife explains.

Mateo also disciples new believers, works in various evangelistic efforts and preaches regularly. "We have our church meetings two times a week," Mai Lou confirms, where she leads worship and occasionally gives the message.

In the near future, she says, they would like to "finish correcting and make available messages about living lives of victory to people in the community." The Garcias also plan to hold a seminar on events of the last days, focussing on the books of Revelation and Daniel. Long-term goals include building a permanent church property.

The Garcia's covet prayers for the spiritual growth of their small congregation, numerical growth for the church, and personally for physical health as well as a strong marriage. They hope to establish a good supportive relationship with a local evangelical pastor. "Another obstacle is the stronghold the Catholic Church has on the community," Mai Lou says. And, like many missionaries around the globe, they are facing a need for increased financial support. ■

COMMISSION MEMBERS • Bishop Rev. Kevin Leibensperger, Chair • Rev. Ralph Owens, Secretary • Mr. Robert Barley • Rev. Leslie Cool, Church Planting Associate • Tasha Byerly • Rev. David Dick • Rev. Jeffrey Martin • Rev. Ramon Mendez • Pam Ream • Mike Snedeker • Rev. B. Bruce Wagner (Delaware Region) • Rev. Gary Brown (Great Lakes Region) • Rev. Frederick Moury (Susquehanna Region) • Rev. Randy Sizemore, Director of Global Ministries

partners 
A PUBLICATION OF THE CHURCH PLANTING COMMISSION
OF THE EVANGELICAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

100 WEST PARK AVE, MYERSTOWN PA 17067 • 717-866-7581
eccenter@eccenter.com • www.eccenter.com

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Organization
BULK RATE
U.S. Postage PAID
Myerstown, PA 17067
Permit No. 8

SPRING 2010

VOLUME 05 • NUMBER 02

partners

THE CHURCH PLANTING NEWSLETTER OF THE EC CHURCH

EC Church Planting: Bearing Witness Around the Globe

by Kolleen Long

Ron and Brenda Anderson

European Director of Field Ministries
and Member Care Coordinator, ECMI
MADRID, SPAIN

Church planting is nothing new to Ron and Brenda Anderson. For the past three decades, the Andersons have worked with church planting efforts in Europe. "I was raised on the mission field of Guatemala," Ron says, "and heard a lot about church growth and church planting sitting at our dinner table!"

After spending a year of pastoral ministry in Iowa, the couple arrived in Spain in 1978. They began working with 15 young believers, forming the only evangelical church in a town of 30,000. They spent six years at this church plant and 12 at the next before accepting the challenge of leading church plant ministries in three countries.

Today, that responsibility has expanded to 18 European countries. "Most of our daily routine is dedicated to leading the missionary team around Europe in areas of member care and field ministries," Ron explains, noting the team includes experienced missionaries and national believers from several different organizations.

"On the side," he adds, "Brenda and I are involved in starting the only evangelical church in our local community of Camarma, a little village just outside of Madrid."

The congregation includes native Spaniards, immigrants from several countries, and missionaries who



Ron Anderson (above), shown teaching at a church plant retreat, has spent 32 years working with church planting in Europe.

Brenda Anderson (far right) works with other church members to prepare food packages for eight Spanish families in need.

(Continued on page 3)

From the desk of David Dick

Vice-President at Large, OMS (One Mission Society)

“The nature and essence of the Great Commission focuses on “making disciples,” and we believe the only Divine means through which God intends to fulfill the Great Commission is through His Church. Therefore, we believe church planting is the very heart of obeying the Great Commission. Working towards establishing a worshipping community of faith (church) in every people (ethnic) group and every language (tongue) is part of fulfilling the Great Commission. Believers joined together by the common bond of Christ’s vicarious death, shed blood, and victorious resurrection for worship, fellowship, mutual edification, evangelism, and service form the foundation for local communities of faith (churches) to best express the Body of Christ to those friends, family, and neighbors within reach of their community, cities, and country. These churches represent the best cultural expression of the Body of Christ, the



love of Christ, and the witness of Christ for every people, tongue and tribe in our world today. Without the church, God is unable to reach out and touch the world, or reveal Himself to the world. The church is His hands, feet, and heart revealing His nature and character to those of His creation who

are yet in bondage to the power of sin, the flesh, and the Devil. Yes, church planting has always been a key factor or element in modern mission work. Of course, there are other aspects of mission work, like education, Bible translation, literacy, and other social and humanitarian efforts, but the heart of missions has always been church planting.

If missions strictly were engaged in social development and humanitarian efforts, people would still be lost in their sins, and the Great Commission would continue to be unfulfilled. Missions will always involve church planting or it will cease to be known as missions.” ■



The Camarma, Spain, church plant began meeting two years ago and currently holds services in a school building.



The **PURPOSE** of the Church Planting Commission of the Evangelical Congregational Church is to know Christ and make Him known.

The **MISSION** of the Church Planting Commission of the Evangelical Congregational Church is to help churches plant healthy churches that proclaim Christ to a hurting world.

The **VISION** of the Church Planting Commission is that the Evangelical Congregational Church becomes a Church Multiplication movement, realized when churches plant healthy churches that plant healthy churches.

Praying for EC International Church Planters

Day of Prayer for Church Planting, the first Sunday of each month

- Ron & Brenda Anderson Ron.Anderson@ecmi.org (Spain)
- BJ & Rachel Whitaker bjwhit14@hotmail.com (Spain)
- David Dick Ddick@omsinternational.org
- Dave & Conce Roof daviroof@aol.com (Brazil)
- Mai Lou & Mateo Gracia deveney59m@yahoo.com (Mexico)
- Tomoyuki & Jessica Abe jn.poirier@yahoo.fr (Japan)



Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

—MATTHEW 28: 18-20

(Continued from page 1)

teach at a local missionary-kid school. The Andersons, who have citizenship in both the United States and Spain, use their past experiences to help them relate to all these cultures. “I am a third-culture kid and adult. Brenda is a third-culture adult,” Ron says. “We actually have a good mix [between] us for what we are doing at the moment.”

The plant is about two years old, and provides opportunities for both Ron and Brenda to use their spiritual gifts in meaningful ways. Ron acts as a leader, helping the congregation in decision-making processes as well as preaching and leading services on occasion. Brenda tackles social min-

istry, from distributing food to needy families to providing visits to those in prison or other difficult circumstances.

Ron strives to help the church relate to the needs of the community. “We are the expression of the Body of Christ in this area and we need to keep that as our central ethos and purpose. We want to resist becoming too organized, too institutionalized, too attractive that we lose the cutting edge of being missional and an expression of the Body of Christ in our community.”

They ask for prayer as the Camarma church searches for the correct structure to adopt. The congregation must take this step before it can legally open a bank account or own

property. However, Ron notes, they must avoid the “straight-jacket of legalism that in the end will destroy the spiritual growth and outreach of the church. We need to organize ourselves in such a way that will encourage the participation of each person according to their motivation and gifting.”

“Our biggest obstacle at the moment is the transient nature of the people we are working with,” Ron says. “That means we need to think of our particular expression of the body of Christ as a place where pilgrims can find spiritual help as they go along their road and where these pilgrims can help new pilgrims find the road.” ■



BJ and Rachel Whitaker

First-year church planters, ECMI

CÓRDOBA, SPAIN

Church planting is a new venture for BJ and Rachel Whitaker. The couple arrived in Cordoba, Spain, 10 months ago and are still gathering the language and cultural credentials they need as church planting missionaries.

This is especially true for BJ, who grew up in rural America and participated in short-term mission experiences in his high-school and college years. His wife is the daughter of Ron and Brenda Anderson (see above) and grew up in the midst of church planting and mission efforts in Spain. BJ also worked as a youth pastor for five years, and Rachel, a social worker, assisted her husband in his ministry.

The Whitakers are now poised to enter mission work in Spain. Once finished with language school, they plan to move to a town in the Córdoba or Castellón provinces and help develop a plant alongside other missionaries and local

Rachel and BJ Whitaker, pictured at the Plaza de las Tendillas in downtown Córdoba, Spain, are new church planting missionaries in Spain.

believers. They are also expecting a daughter in June, and look forward to including her in their work.

“The long term goal for us personally is that we will learn some of the basics of how to do church planting in Spain in the 21st century,” BJ says, “and obviously that people will come to know and be changed by Jesus.”

Several obstacles stand in their way. “First, as a wealthy Western European

country, Spain is increasingly secular and post-modern, where truth is relative,” BJ explains. “Since there is real freedom to believe what you want to, which began only 35 years ago, it seems that people are increasingly believing a little bit of everything or whatever works for them.”

In addition, while the vast majority of Spaniards claim to be Catholic, most have a hard time explaining their faith beyond a general belief in God. “So really they are practical atheists who believe that they are generally good people, whatever that means, who, if heaven exists, might be able to get in,” says BJ. “This has led to a third cultural condition—spiritual apathy—which is very challenging to deal with. Only God can break it, and I’m still not sure how He does that.”

For now, the Whitakers are praying for discernment about where they should move in May to begin their missionary efforts, and for BJ’s ability to learn the language and worldview of Spain. They also covet prayers as they prepare for the arrival of their first child this summer. Those interested can keep current on the Whitaker’s ministry by visiting their blog, www.whitakerwire.blogspot.com. ■