

REACHING THE WORLD WITH THE GOSPEL

MISSION

JUL-SEP 1995

INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION



REACHING THE WORLD WITH THE GOSPEL MISSION

JUL-SEP 1995

Contents

Weekly Reports

July

1	Leader's Planner.....	3
	We're Going to Kill You! Part 1.....	4
	<i>Inez Perez</i>	
8	We're Going to Kill You! Part 2.....	6
	<i>Inez Perez</i>	
15	Ex-Convict Returns to Prison.....	8
	<i>Richard Barker and Ian Green</i>	
22	From Prison With Hope.....	10
	<i>Errol Mitchell</i>	
29	Minister to the Unwanted.....	12
	<i>Sudlyn Elder and Ian Green</i>	

August

5	Something Beautiful.....	14
	<i>Mohan Sukhdu</i>	
12	Hospital With a Mission.....	16
	<i>Charlotte Ishkanian</i>	
19	A Life Worth Living.....	18
	<i>Jai and Rosemarie Persaud</i>	
26	The Stubborn Sisters.....	20
	<i>Ellen Wood</i>	

September

2	When Evangelism Failed.....	22
	<i>Ivan Omana, Jr.</i>	
9	The Pain That Converted Many.....	24
	<i>Dr. Daniel Gonzalez</i>	
16	Freedom in Christ.....	26
	<i>Peter Rodriguez</i>	
23	Fishermen Become Fishers of Men.....	28
	<i>Nelson Luzardo</i>	
30	Thirteenth Sabbath Program: "The Least of These".....	28
	<i>Charlotte Ishkanian</i>	

MISSION

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Third Quarter 1995
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On the Cover:

Once a lovely man-
sion, the Adventist
clinic/hospital in
Venezuela witnesses
from their cramped
quarters. Part of this
quarter's offering will
help fund a larger
building. Inset:
Praising God on the
steel drums of the
Caribbean.

Leader's Planner

Making Missions Meaningful

▲ Inter-America Territory

This quarter the world church will focus on the Inter-American Division. With a church membership approaching 1.5 million, it has the largest division membership in the world.

The church's phenomenal growth is largely attributable to lay workers who bring in hundreds of new believers each year throughout the division. The stories this quarter feature the contributions of lay workers to the church.

The Inter-American Division encompasses all of Central America, the Caribbean islands, and the five northernmost countries of South America.

▲ Featured Projects

The Thirteenth Sabbath Special Projects this quarter are (1) a prison ministries rehabilitation center in Trinidad, (2) 40 new churches and a 50-bed hospital in Venezuela, and (3) a maternity and child-care wing at Davis Memorial Hospital in Guyana.

▲ Thirteenth Sabbath Program

This quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath program features a skit that focuses on the projects receiving a portion of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. It gives an overview of the projects for this quarter. Reading it early in the quarter will help focus your mind on the projects and needs of the division.

If you know someone who has traveled to or lived in Inter-America, ask if he or she has souvenirs you can borrow for a display. Appropriate items would be maracas (dried gourds used as rhythm instruments), a steel drum called a "pan," and indigenous items such as hats, pottery, postcards, and pictures of the beautiful Caribbean islands.

For More Information

If you have access to a library, look for books on countries of the Inter-American Division, especially Guyana, Trinidad and

Tobago, and Venezuela. Three out-of-print missionary books, *Destination Green Hell* and *Jewels From Green Hell*, by Betty Buhler Cott, and *Jungle Adventurer*, by Eileen Lantry, tell the fascinating story of the Davis Indians of Guyana and Venezuela, how God sent them a dream about a White man carrying a black Book, and the planting of the church among them by O. E. Davis, former president of the Guyana Conference. The Indians took his name in honor of the man who gave his life to teach them about God. Cott's books are the result of years of missionary service among the Davis Indians.

Songs and recipes for foods of the Inter-American Division are featured in the Children's *Mission* quarterly.

Ask a travel agent for brochures that feature Trinidad and Tobago. Venezuela may offer some travel brochures as well.

For information on the featured countries, write to the corresponding tourist offices or embassies in your country. In the United States, write to: The Embassy of Guyana, 2490 Tracy Pl., NW., Washington, D.C., 20008; The Embassy of Trinidad and Tobago, 1708 Massachusetts Ave., NW., 20036; The Embassy of Venezuela, 1099 30th St., NW., 20007.

National Geographic has featured some articles on these countries in recent years. The March 1994 issue contained articles on the culture of Trinidad and the history of Simón Bolívar, liberator of Venezuela; another feature on Venezuela appeared in May 1989. You may find *National Geographic*s at your local library.

Future Thirteenth Sabbath Projects

Fourth quarter 1995 will feature the North American Division. Special projects are health ministry and prison ministry. First quarter 1996 will feature Global Mission projects in Indonesia, Macao, and the Philippines in the Far Eastern Division.



We're Going to Kill You! Part 1

Inez Perez

Damaris Briceno (left) and Inez Perez know God saved their lives that dark night.

July 1

Damaris (Dah-mah-REES) grabbed my hand as we walked up the dark street. "I feel as though something bad is going to happen," she said. We stopped along the road and prayed, then we continued to walk up the unlit road past dark homes, barking dogs, and deep shadows.

We had been warned about the dangers that lurked in this neighborhood after dark. We had heard about gangs that roamed the streets, robbing and sometimes killing passersby who dared to go out. We were just two young teenage girls, alone on a dark street. But we were on God's errand, and we prayed that His angels would protect us as we walked home.

Dangerous Area

Damaris and I were 14 years old. We live in Venezuela and were selling Adventist books and magazines to pay our school tuition. When I arrived at a woman's house for a Bible study appointment at noon, the woman I was to see was not home. But she had left word for me to return that evening about 6:00. Damaris had another appointment that evening, so I went to the Bible study alone.

In the tropics the sun sets early, and darkness follows quickly. The area where the woman lived was not safe after dark, so I planned to have a short study and return another day. But the woman was so interested that we continued studying far later than I had intended. The clock chimed 7:00, 7:30, 8:00, and we were still studying.

A knock on the door interrupted us. It was Damaris. She was worried when I had not arrived home, and had come to look for me. It was raining hard, so we remained with the woman for another half hour until the rain

began to let up. We prayed and prepared to leave. The woman again warned us about the dangerous area, and offered to pray for us as we walked home. We thanked her, then we left.

Part of the road home led through an area that had no street lights. This was where gang fights, robberies, and even murders occurred. We were helpless to defend ourselves, but we claimed God's promise that He would never leave us nor forsake us,* and we trusted Him to protect us. But still we were nervous as we entered the dark section of road. We kept talking to bolster each other's courage.

Suddenly a sense of danger sent a cold chill down my back. Damaris felt it too. Only an occasional light shone through a window to cast deep shadows on trees and bushes.

Then in the distance we saw something move. It appeared to be coming toward us. We made out the forms of several men. As they got closer we saw that they were wearing ski masks over their faces! Damaris clutched my hand in terror. Again we stopped and prayed.

We're Going to Kill You!

When we opened our eyes nine teenage boys surrounded us. "God is with us," Damaris whispered. Then we stood very quiet.

The oldest youth motioned to one of the other boys and said, "Do it!" The boy standing behind us stepped forward. In the corner of my eye I saw the glint of a knife blade in the dim light. He pushed the knife into our faces. "Drop the bag, or we'll kill you," he sneered. I put my book bag on the ground.

I looked at the boy with the knife and said, "God loves you." Startled, he stood still, surprised and confused.

"Get back in line," the leader shouted to the

"I want to kill you, but you keep on talking," the gang leader said, frustrated.

youth. The younger boy fell back in line.

Damaris and I prayed silently that God would work a miracle to save us, then I began to talk to them of Jesus' love. I told them that Jesus left His home in heaven to come to this poor world to die for them.

"Why are you telling us all this?" the leader demanded. "We came to rob you; we did not come for a sermon!"

I answered, "Jesus came to save you and to change you from a sinner to one of His followers. And we must tell you about Him." The leader suddenly pulled a gun from his belt and held it to my head.

"If you keep talking, I'm going to kill you," he growled.

"Even if you kill me, I must tell you that Jesus loves you and wants to change your life," I promised.

"You're crazy," he shouted. "I want to kill you, but you keep on talking!" Then slowly he lowered his gun and stepped back into the circle. "How can Jesus change a life? What can he do for me?" he asked.

"Jesus loves you," I continued, "the same as He loved all those people who hurt Him and crucified Him when He came to this world." I looked around the circle of masked faces. "Jesus loves all of you," I pleaded. They seemed surprised that we did not fear for our lives.

Then the leader asked, "What do you want us to do? How do we change our lives?"

"What are you doing, man?" one youth demanded. "What has happened to you? Why are you changing your tone of voice now? Aren't we going to kill them?"

The leader answered, quietly, "I can't kill these girls. Something strange is happening. I can't resist this feeling."

Quickly I said, "You are feeling God's love. He wants to transform your life." Then Damaris and I told them our names and greeted each one of them.

"God is in this place," I said. "Jesus is calling you to follow Him."

I had been hugging my precious Bible all this time. Now I held it out to the gang leader. Slowly he took it and, after looking at it for several seconds, whispered, "Thank you very much."

"Don't you remember that we came to kill these girls?" one of the gang members demanded.

I turned to that boy and said, "Jesus wants to give you His new life too."

"You're crazy," he spat, then he slapped me across my face, hard. He wanted to remind everyone why they had stopped us. I said quietly, "Jesus loves you, and He will love you no matter what you do, even if you don't believe it."

Damaris spoke then. "God has a purpose for your life."

"I'd like to know what purpose God has for me," the boy challenged.

"Maybe this will help you understand," Damaris said as she gave each boy a magazine she had been holding. Then she said, "God bless you. We're going now."

Instead of trying to stop us, they parted and let us walk through the circle. We heard something behind us and turned to see the boys toss their weapons into the bushes. We waved and said, "Someday we will see you again. The Lord is going to bring us together again."

I did not realize it then, but those words were prophetic.

Appeal

Inez and Damaris are typical of laypeople, young and old, who are taking the gospel throughout Venezuela. One of the Thirteenth Sabbath projects this quarter is to build 40 new churches and complete several others in needy areas of the Venezuela-Antilles Union, where Inez and Damaris live. Next week, learn how God worked another miracle for these girls. ●

Inez Perez is 18 years old and attends the Venezuela Vocational Institute in Nirgua, Venezuela. She would like to become a Bible worker. Damaris Briceno, 19, is studying at a university in Venezuela. She plans to become a teacher.

*Heb. 13:5.



We're Going to Kill You! Part 2

Inez Perez

Damaris Briceno (left) and Inez Perez thank God for letting them see His wondrous works.

July 8

"Do you recognize this Bible?" the young man asked. I caught my breath. It was my Bible—the one I had given to the gang leader when he threatened to kill us.

[The story so far: Inez and Damaris (Dahmah-REES), 14-year-old literature evangelists, were walking home long after dark through a dangerous section of the city. Suddenly a gang of youths surrounded them and threatened to kill them. The girls began to talk of God's love, in spite of a knife and a gun held to their heads. Finally the youths, feeling the power of God's love, let the girls go, unharmed. "Someday the Lord will bring us together again," they said.]

When we arrived home, late and rain-soaked, my mother rushed to meet us. She looked at us and asked, shocked, "Why are you so late? What happened to you?"

We couldn't talk right then. We had to gather our thoughts together. We changed into dry clothes and drank the warm herb tea Mother brought us. Then we began to tell Mother what had happened. "Mother, we saw God perform a miracle tonight," I started. "We met nine young men on the street tonight, and I am sure God transformed their lives."

"What do you mean? Mother asked, concerned. "What happened?"

As we began to tell Mother what had happened we realized just what God had brought us through. We knew that the Holy Spirit had helped us, because we had trusted in God.

"Thank God you are safe! Let's pray for these boys and the seeds God has planted in their hearts."

We continued to sell books and magazines to earn our tuition, and God blessed us with good sales and Bible studies.

Five months later our colporteur leader

asked us to attend a literature evangelist seminar at a tiny church in another town two hours by bus from our home. As we traveled to the little town where the seminar was held, we wondered why we had to leave our work to attend this training seminar. What good would the seminar do us?

My Bible!

When we reached the town we began walking toward the church where the seminar was being held. As we neared the church we noticed a tall young man standing outside, looking toward us. I said to Damaris, "That man looks familiar. I have seen him somewhere, but I do not know where." I could see that he was staring at us. When we were quite close I smiled and greeted him. "Good afternoon. My name is Inez."

"And my name is Damaris," my friend said. The young man smiled and said, "I think we have met before."

"Yes," I said. "You look familiar, but I do not know your name." Then the young man reached under his arm and pulled out a Bible and showed it to me.

"Do you recognize this Bible?" he asked. I caught my breath. It was my old Bible—the Bible I had given to the gang leader that dark night several months earlier when we were surrounded by masked youths with knives and guns who wanted to kill us! I stared in disbelief at the man.

"Do you remember when you gave me that Bible?" he asked. "You said Jesus would change my life. And you were right. From that night Jesus has worked a miracle in my life."

Amazed and silent, we listened as Jose (HOSAY) told us how he had begun to read the

Bible, searching for the peace and security and love that he saw in our lives. We spoke for a few minutes; then the young man said, "Do you want to see the others who were there that night?" Of course we wanted to see them!

We entered the church and found eight young men sitting toward the front on one side. With joy in our hearts and tears in our eyes we greeted the young men. We talked for a few minutes and rejoiced to learn that all nine boys had been baptized. Then we prayed together, thanking God for this wonderful reunion. Imagine our joy when we learned that these young men had heard about this seminar and had prayed that we would be here!

More Surprises

After the seminar the boys invited us to visit their homes a short distance from the church. As we walked I asked Jose, "How was your life before you were converted to Jesus?"

With tears in his eyes Jose told us that he had felt unloved and worthless, unaccepted. This lack of confidence and security helped pull him into a life of crime with a force he could not resist. But, he added with a smile, from the moment he had met us in the street, he realized there was still hope for him. And that night God transformed his life.

The boys' families were waiting for us when we arrived. They greeted us with smiles and hugs. As we talked with their families, we learned that these teenage toughs had returned home that night somehow changed. They no longer spent days harassing their families and nights terrorizing innocent people. Instead they spent hours reading the Bible and the magazines we gave them. They wanted the faith and the strength that enabled us to stand up to them that night.

They found an address in one of the magazines and sent for Bible studies. Together they studied the Bible, accepted its truths, and found the Adventist Church. Just recently they had been baptized. When they learned of the meeting planned for the little church in the next village, they contacted the leader and asked if we would be there. They did not know Damaris' name, but my name was in my Bible. What a wonderful surprise God had in store for us that beautiful day!

These young men have become leaders in

their local church. They hold positions of responsibility in the church and community. As their family members saw the changes in their lives, they began asking questions about the young men's newfound faith. Each of the nine young men has led his family and some friends as well to accept this wonderful faith and be baptized.

How good is our God! He not only saved us from harm on the streets of the city that frightening night, but He saved all nine teenagers who had come to rob us. Then our wonderful God, who loves us so much, allowed us to see the fruits of His salvation firsthand. At present, all nine of the boys plus 52 others have become members of the Adventist Church. The nine boys have gone to other cities in Venezuela to work in evangelism. Imagine, 61 new believers because two timid girls stood up for their faith!

Inez closes her story with this thought:

Where there is faith
there is love,
Where there is love
there is peace,
Where there is peace
there is God,
And where God is,
Nothing is lacking.

Appeal

The work of God is growing rapidly in Venezuela, especially in the outlying villages and the countryside, where most people are poor and live simple lives. Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help to build 40 new churches in the neediest areas of the Venezuela-Antilles Union. Please give generously so that we can continue working and Jesus can come soon. Then we all can see the fruits of our labors for eternity. ●

Inez Perez is 18 years old and attends the Venezuela Vocational Institute, where she earns her high school tuition by working a year, then studying a year. She would like to study psychology and theology and become a Bible worker. Damaris Briceno is studying at a university to become a teacher.

Ex-Convict Returns to Prison



Richard Barker,
ex-convict.

Richard Barker as told to Ian Green

July 15

When he was released from prison he returned to his hometown, not to settle a grudge, but to tell others how they, too, could be truly free.

At an age when most youngsters were dodging balls, Richard Barker was dodging the police. A school dropout by age 9, and wanted by the police by age 14, his life was out of control.

Barker grew up attending church with his Adventist mother and five brothers and sisters. While he was quiet and well behaved at home, he was a different person outside the home—strong-willed and often violent and uncontrolled.

Barker watched as gang members harassed and robbed people on the beaches near where he grew up. He imitated the older toughs and soon gained the reputation as a person to be feared. Once, in an attempt to see who could draw a gun faster, he shot a friend in the foot. He escaped imprisonment when his friend told the police that it was an accident and did not mention Barker's name.

During an argument over a woman, one of Barker's companions burned a man in the face with a cigarette. A fight erupted, and during the melee Richard was shot twice in the chest. But his brush with death did not stop his criminal activities.

Meeting in Cell 13

In his 20s Barker was arrested and convicted of armed robbery and was sentenced to 13 years at a maximum security prison in Trinidad. As he sat restlessly in cell number 13 awaiting sentencing, he heard a voice say, "Richard Barker, change your life and repent!" Barker recognized the voice of the Lord. He fell to his knees and asked God for a spirit of repentance and forgiveness. God answered his prayer, and his life underwent immediate transformation.

He reacted to his conversion with the same zeal with which he approached everything in his life. Barker was respected as a leader and ruthless gangster. The other prisoners expected him to smuggle drugs and contraband into the prison. But when they asked him "How are you movin' now?" and he answered "I'm movin' with Jesus," they thought he had gone mad.

But Barker sensed that God had a mission for him in prison. He began telling prisoners that God had spoken to him, and had told him to repent. He invited them to follow God as well. They realized he was serious, and marveled at the change they saw in this former hardened criminal.

Imprisoned in Prison

Soon Barker had organized a group of inmates who wanted to study the Bible. This surprised the prison authorities, and they watched him carefully, wondering what plan he was hatching under the guise of studying the Bible.

Barker remembered his Adventist upbringing, and began keeping the Sabbath. He encouraged members of his Bible study group to do the same. This caused some problems with prison authorities because the prisoners had not requested permission to be absent from work on Saturdays. The guards locked Barker up four times for refusing to work on the Sabbath. They still suspected that he was hiding behind the Bible, perhaps trying to make a jail break.

Barker's mother had been praying for her wayward son for years. Barker recalls, "I got away from her preaching and her religious friends, but I couldn't get away from her prayers. When I told her of my encounter with

Jesus and asked her for my Bible and my songbook, she gladly brought them to me.”

New Direction

Then Barker had an encounter that changed his life again. One day when Barker’s mother came to visit him, she met another Adventist woman, Mildred Jones, on whom God had placed a special burden for prisoners. Barker’s mother introduced Mildred Jones to her son, and the two soon began working together for prisoners. He worked from inside the prison and Mrs. Jones worked on the outside to establish a prison ministries program. They got an Adventist chaplain assigned to minister to the prisoners.

When prison authorities realized that Barker had indeed met Jesus, they began working with him to provide for the spiritual needs of the prisoners. They arranged for an Adventist chaplain to conduct Bible studies inside the prison, and eventually to baptize prisoners. Barker also helped organize sports events in the prison.

Word of Barker’s conversion spread throughout his hometown, and when he was released from prison, he returned, not as a feared criminal, but as a welcome member of the community. A banner strung across the street read “Barker is coming home.” That evening he opened a six-week evangelistic series organized by his mother and Mildred Jones before he was released from prison. The meetings were crowded as Barker preached each night about how God can make everyone truly free. There was no question of the new direction Richard’s life had taken.

Back in Prison

However, Barker could not forget the men he had left behind in prison. He knew that many prisoners were eager to learn more about Jesus. Although the law in Trinidad forbids ex-convicts to visit prisoners in jail, prison authorities issued a special pass allowing Barker to visit prisoners at any time for counseling.

Barker also visits families of prisoners to help reconcile a prisoner and his family. When a prisoner is released, he helps ease the transition to outside life. He has met with the minister of national security and the police commissioner to discuss issues such as prison reform, the effectiveness of the prison ministry pro-

gram, and other problems facing prisoners and the prison system.

When Barker first sought spiritual guidance, no Adventist minister was assigned to any of the prisons as a chaplain. But Mildred Jones, Richard Barker, and laypersons across Trinidad began campaigning for an Adventist prison ministries program. Today the Adventist Church is in the forefront of prison ministries work in Trinidad and Tobago. The results have been astounding. In the past four years more than 400 prisoners have been baptized through the Adventist Church’s prison ministry program, 266 in 1992 and 1993 alone.

Barker has led a number of prisoners to Christ, but his work is not just among prisoners. He recalls that he once tried to kill a prison officer. Now that officer is a brother in Christ. Richard Barker is a lay evangelist who makes an impact wherever he preaches. He has a burden for those who, like himself, started out on the wrong road and ended up in prison. This four-time layman of the year wants to be known only as a follower of Christ, who cared enough about a wayward child to enter a cell in the depths of a prison to call him to repentance.

Appeal

Many of the prisoners who have been baptized into the church lack job skills to help them survive after they are released. The chances that they will remain out of prison are slim unless they can get work and provide for their families.

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help establish a rehabilitation center that will teach ex-prisoners the skills they need to successfully adjust to life outside the prison. There they can learn a trade and relationship-building skills needed to become a contributing member of society. Please be generous today and on Thirteenth Sabbath so that the hundreds of new brothers and sisters in Christ who are in prison can look forward to becoming welcome, contributing members of society when they are released. ●

Ian Green is director of communication in the South Caribbean Conference. Richard Barker works full-time in prison ministries work in Trinidad.



From Prison With Hope

◀ An Interview with Errol Mitchell, president of the South Caribbean Conference.

July 22

[Select two people to present this story. The person portraying Elder Mitchell should be familiar with the script so he does not have to read it.]

Narrator: Trinidad and Tobago are two tiny dots of green in the Caribbean Sea. The church is active here, and represents about one person in 30.

But declining prices for crude oil have led to problems in this island paradise: unemployment, inflation, and a rise in drug use and alcoholism. Crime has risen sharply, and prisons are overwhelmed and overcrowded. The government can barely feed and house the prison population, and has no money to offer job training or rehabilitation to prisoners. This situation has opened a unique opportunity for the church.

Elder Errol Mitchell, president of the South Caribbean Conference, tells us about the church's role in prison ministries, and what the church can do to extend that work.

Mitchell: Until about 15 years ago the Adventist Church had no organized prison ministry in Trinidad, only a few courageous laypersons who visited prisoners on their own. But God blessed, and the work grew. The ministry has exploded beyond our most optimistic dreams. Today the Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago leads the work in prison ministry. Some 400 prisoners have been baptized into the Adventist Church, 266 of these in 1992 and 1993 alone. Many more prisoners have completed Bible studies and await baptism. These are earnest men and women who love Jesus and enjoy worship and Christian fellowship inside the prisons. They look for-

ward to continuing that fellowship with believers when they leave prison.

Narrator: Is it an easy transition from prison life to society once a prisoner becomes a Christian?

Mitchell: Prisoners face a tough hurdle when they are released from prison, and try to integrate into society. Often families want nothing to do with them, society doesn't trust them, and even church members sometimes are reluctant to believe that a prisoner can truly be changed, even if he has become a Christian. Therefore, prisoners must prove themselves to society before society will accept them. But if no one accepts them, how can they prove themselves? How can they learn a trade or get a job? Without help and encouragement, they soon will meet their old friends and fall back into crime.

Narrator: What can the church do to help solve this problem?

Mitchell: Adventist church leaders, the government, and prison authorities agree that Trinidad needs a rehabilitation program that will teach an ex-prisoner skills in an occupation—farming, auto mechanics, welding, or whatever—and certify him in a skill so he can earn money. But even more important, he needs help to gain self-respect and learn coping skills before he goes out into society, where he might meet rejection.

But the government has no money for a project like this. Just maintaining existing prisons has stretched the system to the limit. The government is looking to the Adventist Church because of our work in prison ministries.

"I am not an Adventist, but I have seen what you are doing for the prisoners. I want to get involved in your prison ministry program."

We have developed plans for a program that meets these needs. It would be far more than a halfway house program, because we will focus on firmly establishing these men and women in the church while we train them for successful reentry into society.

Narrator: The program sounds good, Pastor Mitchell, but how will you implement it?

Mitchell: We will establish the rehabilitation center on 50 acres of land the church already owns. A farm on the land will help provide food for participants and help fund the program while it teaches gardening skills and allows workers to earn some money for tools they'll need after they leave the center.

When an ex-prisoner has gained confidence and a skill, when he has settled himself into a home and life outside of prison, then we can say to an employer, this man has proved himself. He will make a good worker.

Narrator: What do you anticipate needing for this center?

Mitchell: We will need a chapel and some temporary housing for ex-prisoners while they seek more permanent housing. We will set up training centers in auto mechanics, road work, masonry, and carpentry, so that men can choose a skill they want to pursue the rest of their lives.

Narrator: How will the church pay for this center?

Mitchell: We are asking believers around the world to give a generous offering on the Thirteenth Sabbath this quarter to help us set up the center. In addition, we will invite businesspeople to provide funding through a non-profit foundation for the ongoing funding of the center.

Narrator: Obviously this program cannot meet the needs of every prisoner in Trinidad. How will prisoners be selected for this program?

Mitchell: The program will be open to any prisoner scheduled for release who is willing

to abide by the strict rules and who shows a willingness to really work and study. A prisoner must meet certain criteria to qualify for the program. We will accept non-Adventists into the program, but they must have the attitude and willingness to make the most of the opportunity.

Narrator: What benefits can the church expect to gain from this program?

Mitchell: This program meets a real need in Trinidad and Tobago. It will give the church an opportunity to reach thousands of people in the business community that it normally would not have access to. In addition, it will allow us to contact families and friends of ex-prisoners, to invite them to examine our program and to form a support group for their family member or friend.

Our church is being seen not only as people who care about doctrines, but as people who care for people and the problems that plague our nation.

The government is giving us their full support. The commissioner of prisons recently said to us, "We like what you are doing in the prisons. When these men leave prison, we don't want them to return. If we can rehabilitate them in a program such as you outline, we won't have to deal with them a second and a third time."

The superintendent of prisons recently told me, "Pastor, I am not an Adventist. But I have seen what your church can do for the men in prison. I am retiring soon, and I want to get involved in your prison ministry program."

The prime minister saw an interview on television in which two ex-prisoners told how they found Christ in prison, and what they are doing now that they are free. He called the two men into his office to learn what can change a hard-core prisoner into a responsible, respected citizen. These men were able to testify of God's miraculous working in their lives.

You see, this program has put us in touch with people that we could not reach any other way, people in high positions in the government and in society, and hurting families of prisoners. We are learning that we can reach the rich by caring for the poor. ●



*Mildred Jones and
Baby Rachel*

Minister to the Unwanted

Sudlyn Elder and Ian Green

July 29

Good morning," the slim, energetic grandmother smiled as she bustled into the South Caribbean Conference office in Trinidad. "I'm on my way to the hospital to have a baby."

"A baby!" I exclaimed, looking at the 60-year-old woman before me. Mildred Jones noted the shock on my face and explained.

"One of the women from the prison is having a baby, and I have promised her I would take it. The mother is a teenager in prison on a murder charge. Nobody in her family wants the baby. I have some clothes and diapers and bottles," she said, "but I need formula and toiletries. Can you help me?" With a promise that Community Services would do what they could, Mrs. Jones hurried off to run errands for the other children she cared for.

A few days later Mrs. Jones called to report that her new baby was healthy and the cutest little girl she had ever seen. She sometimes brought Baby Rachel to the office, and, like a proud grandmother, related the child's progress—cooing, then creeping, then standing, and walking. It was easy to catch her enthusiasm.

When Mrs. Jones did not come by the office for several weeks, we wondered if everything was OK. Finally she stopped by on her way to check on the birth registration of one boy and vaccination records for another child so she could register them in school. I marveled at this woman who could retire but is raising almost single-handedly as many as 10 children at a time, all of whom have special needs.

"We have missed you," I greeted her.

"I have been busy locating a home for two teenagers. But I think they are settled now," she responded. "Their mother is in prison for

murdering her husband, so the children are virtually orphans. I could not take the teenagers with all the children I have, so I spent the past weeks arranging a home for them."

I inquired about the other children in her care. "That is why I came," she said. "I have a problem with Paul."

"I thought Paul went to live with his mother," I said.

"Yes, she took him when she was released from prison. But he didn't know her, and they had problems adjusting, so she brought him back to me. Now she is back in prison. It will be a long sentence this time, I'm sure."

"I took Paul to the government hospital for hearing tests. The doctor says his hearing is degenerating rapidly, and I should get him to a specialist right away. But the government specialists can't see him for nine months, and a private specialist costs so much for just one visit, and I do not have the money." Again I assured Mrs. Jones I would try to help her.

Just as she was ready to leave, she turned to me and said, "By the way, I'm expecting another baby."

"Sister Jones!" I cried. "What will you do?"

"God will provide," she smiled. And she left.

Vision of Ministry

Mildred Jones, mother, grandmother, busy worker for God, did not ask for her job as caretaker of abandoned children. Her first love and great burden is for the prisoners of Trinidad.

She relates how, while fasting and praying one day in the woods, God told her to go visit two prisoners whose names she recognized. One was awaiting execution, and the other serving a life sentence. She resisted the voice,

but every time she began to read her Bible or tried to pray, she heard the command, "Go visit these men."

Finally she could ignore the command no longer. She took a bus to the prison and walked up to the prison gates. "OK, Lord. I'm here," she prayed. "But I don't know what to say. How can I tell the guard that a voice told me to come visit these two men?" Her hands trembled and her knees shook, but she claimed God's promise: "Open your mouth, and I'll fill it with words."

The guard ushered her into the prison, where she learned that she could not see the men that day but could write to them. She left the prison and immediately wrote to each man, telling them that God loves them.

The man on death row wrote back immediately, happy that someone cared for him. She began visiting him.

The other prisoner, a hardened criminal, at first refused to answer her letters. But eventually he wrote to her. When she went to the prison to visit him, others in the waiting room learned that she had come to see this man who had committed a horrendous crime. Nervous, she sought comfort in her Bible. When the guard called her, she carried her Bible to the visiting area. As she entered the visiting area, the man she came to see suddenly shouted, "I know you! I saw you in a dream 10 years ago! You wore the same blue dress and held a Bible in your hand just as you do now. God has sent you to help me!"

As she left that day the guard told her, "This man is the hardest case we have. Please, do something to help him." Mrs. Jones was amazed. She realized then that God was working through her.

Thus began the SDA prison ministry work in Trinidad. Mildred Jones became the prisoners' advocate, encouraging them, communicating with their families, writing letters to the authorities on their behalf, and helping them reenter society when they were released. She even shared her home with ex-prisoners until they could find work and living quarters.

She worked with prisoners five years before she saw the fruits of her efforts in the baptism of the first convert. Since then 400 others have accepted Jesus as Lord and joined the church. Many have been released and have become responsible members of society.

Once someone asked her how she could love these men, some of whom had committed unspeakable crimes. She answered simply, "I take the man, subtract Satan, and add Jesus. Then I see him as Christ's possession, and relate to him as a man standing with Jesus." Her vision of men and women standing with Jesus has inspired other men and women in Trinidad to enter the prison ministry work, and today, groups of Adventist believers go to the prisons every Sabbath to conduct spirited worship services, and return during the week for Bible study sessions that are bearing fruits daily for Christ.

The Least of These

In the past few years God has turned her attention to caring for homeless children, some of whom were born to mothers while in prison. Other children have a mother dying of AIDS, or parents who are victims of drugs, alcohol, or mental illness. In many cases relatives abandoned these little ones, and their only hope is a caring person like Mildred Jones.

Mildred Jones, mother, grandmother, busy worker for God, is doing what she can to help "the least of these" in the field God has appointed to her.

A portion of the offering this quarter will go to help build a rehabilitation center for prisoners upon their release. Such a facility will help assure that children like Rachel and Paul will not lose their mothers or their fathers a second time because they committed another crime. Give generously to missions today—and especially on Thirteenth Sabbath. ●



Sudlyn Elder (left) is director of Sabbath School and community services, and Ian Green is director of education in the South Caribbean Conference.



Something Beautiful

◀ Mohan Sukhdu (Su-dio)

August 5

More than anything I wanted to give God something special. But I was painfully aware of my lack of education and training.

When I met Jesus He changed my life in wonderful ways. I wanted to show my gratitude to God by making my life something beautiful for Him. But what did I have to give the King of kings?

I grew up in a Hindu family. My grandfather was a Hindu priest, and Father wanted his sons to learn the Hindi language and the Hindu culture so we could understand the religious festivals.

Then my oldest sister married an Adventist. My sister, a faithful and dutiful wife, attended the Adventist church with her husband. In time she embraced Adventism.

Our older sister had a great influence on us. When she encouraged us to attend church, we began to attend the Adventist church. When I was 9 years old, my sister invited us to evangelistic meetings at the Adventist church. I liked the meetings and decided to join this church, even though I did not know too much about Christianity. My mother did not mind that I had become a Christian, but my father was angry that I had chosen to leave my Hindu heritage.

Then my father found work in a town far from our home, and our family moved. The new town had no Adventist church. I was approaching my teen years, and the influence of the young people was not conducive to Christian growth. Soon my interest in church was replaced by teenage pastimes. Four years later we returned to my hometown, where I could again attend church, but by then the fire of faith had nearly died.

When the Adventist church held another evangelistic series, my sister wanted us to attend. I went out of respect for my sister, but the wonderful messages rekindled the spark of faith still left in my heart. However, I had made a mess of my life after my first baptism

and didn't want to make that mistake again. So when the pastor asked me about baptism, I made excuses.

Finally I decided to try religion again. My sister, 15, and I, 14, were baptized, but Father vigorously opposed us and made it difficult for us to keep our faith. Father's brothers and sisters constantly reminded him that we had brought disgrace on them when we became Christians. That made it difficult for us.

We were afraid of Father and stayed away from the house on Sabbath so Father could not make us work on the holy day. He would need wood for the stove or the floors would need scrubbing. He didn't do this on other days, just on Sabbath. This persecution drove me to God. I spent many hours reading my Bible.

Father began to drink, and often got drunk. That was not a nice experience. Then he became ill and was unable to work, so I had to quit school and support the family. I was disappointed that I could not continue my education.

I wanted to serve God and the church, but without a proper education I was painfully aware that I could not read or speak as well as other people. I seldom spoke out in Sabbath School or AY programs, but I listened carefully in church to how the preacher put his ideas together. I began to feel that God wanted me to preach. But how could I preach if I couldn't even get up front at my own Sabbath School? I asked God to help me.

I tried to write a sermon, but I couldn't put the words and the ideas together. I was hesitant to ask for help from the preacher; perhaps he would not take me seriously. But I continued studying, sure that someday God would find a way to use me. And as I studied, the Bible became clearer for me.

One day an elder asked me to lead song service at Wednesday night prayer meeting. I was so nervous! I practiced all week. But from that night on, I continued leading song services, gaining confidence that I really could give God something beautiful. Soon I began to lead song service for Sabbath School, AY, Sunday services. If this was what God wanted me to do, I would do my best. Thus God helped me gain courage and develop my talent.

Then one day I was asked to help with an evangelistic meeting. I was eager for the chance, and learned everything I could about holding evangelistic meetings. Then in 1990 my church invited me to attend a lay preacher's seminar and workshop. There I learned how to speak in public, how to prepare sermons, and follow up interests. I wanted to hold an evangelistic series, and with God's guidance and the support of my church, I announced meetings in my home church. I

carefully wrote each sermon and practiced long hours to get it just right. Imagine my joy when 26 persons took their stand and were baptized following this first effort! God had given me courage and skills to give back to Him far more than I ever dreamed possible.

God has continued to bless, and I have held an evangelistic series each year since then. So far 80 people have been baptized as a result of these meetings. We established a new company with 22 newly baptized believers. Praise God!

Because of my Hindu background, I have a special burden for Hindus. Their strong family structure makes them hard to convert, but so far five have been baptized. We can win them through love and understanding.

I encourage other young Christians to give God their best. If God has first place in our lives, then all other things will come to us (see Matt. 6:33). ●

Mohan Sukhdu is a supervisor in a mill in Purika, Guyana. He is an active lay worker in

Thirteenth Sabbath Program

(continued from page 30)

roof for their simple little church.

These congregations are growing rapidly because lay workers are busy bringing people into the church. In the four years that I have worked in this district, more than 200 have been baptized, most brought in by laypersons. The district baptismal goal this year is 45, but by June we already had baptized 79.

At a recent union-wide meeting, pastors were asked to list the congregations they served that do not have a church or that meet in substandard buildings. The union president said more than 200 congregations in the Venezuela-Antilles Union need church homes. One pastor brought a picture of a church made entirely of corrugated zinc roofing material, with only a door and one small window. On a hot day the building can exceed 100°F (38°C) halfway through the service. But the members cannot afford anything better. We need churches in Venezuela. But people do not have money to build them. Inflation has made our bolivar worth less than a penny, and many people do not have money for food. I dream

of seeing simple houses of God throughout Venezuela, like beams of light to the surrounding communities.

Narrator: Thank you, Brother Jose, for your appeal. Would you like someone in Venezuela to worship in an oven while you sit comfortably in church today? Give generously, so that believers may have the tools they need to reach those whom Jesus called "the least of these my brethren" and tell them of our Lord's soon return.

Prayer:



In this zinc church, built in a squatters' village in Venezuela, 70 believers meet weekly to worship.



Ester Premdas-Quashie, hospital administrator, in the pediatrics ward of Davis Memorial Hospital.

Hospital With a Mission

Charlotte Ishkanian

August 12

"We do what we have to with what we have," she explains. "We could perform emergency surgery in the parking lot if we had to."

The young woman stood at the admission desk gently patting the tiny yellow-wrapped bundle on her shoulder as she answered the nurse's questions. Marie's face reflected her anxiety. A tiny wail came from under the blanket. Instinctively Marie rocked to comfort the baby's fevered cries. The child had malaria, a victim of the malaria-infected mosquitoes that infest the swamps near her village.

The nurse took the infant's temperature and wrote some notes on the baby's chart. Then she directed Marie to a seat in the hall. The doctor would see her as soon as possible. As the weak cries of the infant faded into troubled sleep, Marie relaxed as well. She rested her back against the wall and closed her eyes.

The young mother had the short, stocky build, the black eyes and hair typical of the native Indians from the highlands of Guyana. She had made the tedious two-day trip into Georgetown from her village when her baby became sick. Basic medical care is available in larger villages and outposts along the river roadways of Guyana, but for urgent medical care people must walk or find a boat traveling the river highway toward Georgetown, the capital and major city in Guyana.

The doctor approached, looked at the baby, then directed Marie to the examining room. She laid the tiny infant on the wooden examining table. The doctor recognized the symptoms of malaria—fever, lethargy, weakness. He instructed the nurse to begin an IV to pump fluids and healing quinine into the baby's system. He wrote some notes on the chart and handed it to the nurse. He assured Marie that with treatment her son could be on his way home in a week or so. Marie smiled

uncertainly and followed the nurse down the corridor lined with people waiting to see the doctor.

Hospital With a Mission

Davis Memorial Hospital is a mission hospital in every sense. Named after Elder O. E. Davis, once president of the Guyana Field, and namesake of the Davis Indians of Guyana and Venezuela, this small whitewashed hospital reaches out to the larger community to heal, to teach, and to evangelize. In 1993 this 54-bed institution admitted about 1,100 patients; its three outpatient clinics served nearly 4,000 patients.

In a nation where the overall quality of medical care is declining because of severe economic problems, Davis Memorial's reputation for quality and caring has earned the respect of government officials and patients alike. Much of this good reputation comes from the quality maternity and child care provided by the hospital, in spite of a chronic shortage of supplies and antiquated equipment.

Hospital administrator Mrs. Esther Premdas-Quashie walks the halls of the hospital greeting patients, encouraging staff members, and praising those who share her missionary vision and work under less than ideal conditions.

The first-floor halls are lined with clinic patients waiting patiently for medical care. Some women are obviously pregnant; others wait to see the dentist; still others hold restless children while they wait to see the pediatrician. They understand the delay, for they saw Marie's worried face when she brought her baby to the pediatrician for examination. They are in no hurry; they know that once her

little son is cared for, the doctor will tend to them. His hours are as long as the line outside his door.

Chaplain Joyce Carmichael greets waiting outpatients with a warm smile and hello before she slips into a patient's room to have prayer with her before surgery. The chaplain keeps the sweet spirit of Christ alive in the halls and rooms of patients by playing recorded Christian music over the public address system, visiting and praying with patients, and giving Bible studies to those who request them. Many patients, including some Hindus and Muslims, have accepted Jesus as their Saviour through her ministry.

Vision

But the hospital staff wants to do even more for the people of Guyana. They want to reach out beyond the community into outlying areas where medical help is not readily available. Already the hospital's staff members hold clinics to treat women and children who need maternity care. They hold classes to educate women in proper prenatal and postnatal care; they teach proper hygiene and good nutrition so children stay healthier longer; they teach young people about the dangers of drugs—alcohol, tobacco, hard drugs.

Dr. Oswaldo Lara, medical director of Davis Memorial Hospital speaks earnestly of the need for a maternal and child-care wing at Davis Memorial Hospital. The present labor and delivery suite shares space with the surgical suite; maternity patients stay in rooms adjacent to general medical patients. This situation does not provide patients sufficient privacy, and increases the risk of cross infection from general medical patients or their visitors. Next door in the nursery, tiny bundles lie in yellow-painted wooden bassinets, built for the hospital years ago.

As we enter the pediatric ward, just down the hall, Marie looks up from her vigil beside her son's crib and smiles wearily. We speak quietly to avoid waking the baby. Five yellow-painted wooden cribs fill the room. Mrs. Premdas-Quashie speaks hopefully of replacing this wooden furniture with more sanitary metal furniture from a hospital in South America. "We are grateful for every donation we receive. Even when we must pay the expensive shipping costs, it is cheaper to get

used equipment if it is in good shape. Our handyman is marvelous at repairing things," she smiles.

"We need to separate the pediatric cases from the maternity/newborn section," she continues. "The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help us build the new maternal/child-care wing onto this hospital. It will almost double the size of the hospital and will allow us more space to provide better care for every aspect of our medical work. Just think of the help we can offer people then!"

Mrs. Premdas-Quashie is a woman with vision and drive. While deploring present conditions, she is tireless in working to better the hospital, and abounds with praise for the staff who work to fulfill their mission every day. "We do what we have to with what we have," she explains. "We could perform emergency surgery in the parking lot if we had to."

Back on the first floor, the obstetric clinic has seen its last patient for the day. We step into the examining room—only slightly larger than a closet. It holds the most rudimentary wooden examining table. There is barely room for a doctor and a nurse to move around. Much of the room's light is provided by a screened window. When the window is open to let in light, there is no privacy for the patient.

Appeal

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help build the dreamed-about, prayed-for maternity and child-care wing onto Davis Memorial Hospital. Money from the offering will help extend the service and influence of this missionary hospital through a model clinic in a nearby East Indian area that at present is not served by any hospital or medical clinic in the area. Already staff members volunteer to attend to the needs of patients in this area. They have begun teaching healthful living to residents who attended the clinic, and to students in the nearby schools. Staff members are doing the work of Christ under daunting circumstances. Let's support them with our prayers and with our offerings. ●

Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of Mission.





A Life Worth Living

Jai and Rosemarie Persaud

Jai and Rosemarie Persaud and their four children: Jonathan, 14; Diane, 12; Elizabeth, 10; and Cassandra, 5.

August 19

*His drinking
was destroying
their home. If
he did not stop,
she would
leave him.*

Rosemarie fought against the smoke as she raced into her home to find her children. A whimper and a cry led her to them. She grabbed them and fought her way to the door, blinded by the smoke and the searing heat. Later, recovering from her burns and injuries, Rosemarie realized she and her children could have died in the fire that destroyed her home. God had spared her life, and she vowed to raise her little ones to know Him.

Rosemarie had grown up in a Protestant home and married Jai (JI), a Hindu. Rosemarie attended church regularly, but Jai preferred to spend his weekends drinking with friends.

Spiritual Journey

Rosemarie owned a Christian book entitled *Our Day in the Light of Prophecy*. One day as she did her housework, she picked up the book; it flipped open to a section on the Sabbath. Rosemarie had seen her neighbors leave for church on Saturday morning. She wondered why some Christians keep Sunday, and others keep Saturday. She began reading, and came away convinced that Saturday was the Sabbath. She talked to her Adventist neighbor about her discovery. Her neighbor told her about their church and gave her some books to read. She read them eagerly and decided to keep the next Sabbath.

On Friday Rosemarie did her marketing and cleaned the house, then on Sabbath she stayed at home and read her Bible. She knew she would be welcome at her neighbor's church, but felt uncomfortable going because she did not have proper clothing to wear. That week she decided that lack of clothes should not keep her from attending church. The next Sabbath morning she dressed her children in

their best and took them to the Adventist church.

The next day Rosemarie gathered the Sunday School supplies that belonged to her former church and took them to a friend who attended there. "Please take these to church," she said. "I am going to the Adventist church now."

"You'll not last long," Rosemarie's friend counseled. "Their beliefs are a burden."

"God has told me this is right, and I *will* be faithful," Rosemarie replied.

Divided Family

Jai did not care whether his wife and children attended church on Sabbath, but he objected when she prepared food on Friday to serve on Sabbath. Like most East Indian men, he expected meals to be freshly cooked. He also loved fish without scales, so Rosemarie prepared her husband the fish he loved and prepared food for herself and the children separately.

Jai realized that his wife was trying to please him, so he agreed to let her cook on Friday for Sabbath. He allowed her to have family worship, but he did not join them. He asked only that he be left alone to enjoy his rum and cigarettes.

Jai noticed other changes in Rosemarie. Before, when they argued and he used indecent language, she often answered with similar language. Sometimes he picked a fight just to make her angry, but now she answered him softly and patiently.

Work was hard to find in Guyana, so the family moved to neighboring Suriname. Rosemarie found the Adventist church near their new home, and many new Adventist friends.

One Sunday Jai had been drinking heavily. He began yelling at Rosemarie and tried to choke her. Somehow she escaped his grasp and quieted him, and soon he fell asleep. She ran to a neighbor's house and told them what happened. The neighbor invited her and the children to stay there that night. The next day they went with Rosemarie to speak with Jai. She told him that his drinking was destroying their home, and she wanted him to stop or she would leave him. He agreed to quit drinking; it is easy to repent when one has a hangover. After that Jai did not drink as much, but he still had a few beers on the weekend. He even began to attend church occasionally.

Facing Eternity

Rosemarie invited her husband to attend evangelistic meetings in the church. He went the last week of meetings. The speaker's topic that night was "If Jesus comes tomorrow, what will happen to you?" During the sermon Jai realized that if Jesus came soon, he would be 'lost. As the meeting closed, the speaker invited those who wanted to be baptized "next month" or "next year" to sign a paper. Jai thought, *What if Jesus comes before I am baptized? I will be lost, separated from my family forever.* He signed the paper, asking to be baptized as soon as possible. As Jai signed the paper, Rosemarie whispered a prayer of thanks.

Jai's decision for baptism was more out of fear of death than love of Christ. But as he became acquainted with Jesus, he fell in love with Him. Jai saw people doing things that he did not understand. Why did Adventists stop working on Sabbath? Wasn't it enough to attend church? A Bible answer was all he needed, and he quickly obeyed.

But the devil wasn't going to let Jai go so easily. Jai was working for a woman who took drugs and worshiped the devil. When he went to get his pay, she pulled out a gun and shot at him through the window. Jai realized that the devil was using her to try to destroy him. He jumped on his motorbike and raced home.

When he arrived home he sank down into a chair and wept. He needed that money (about US\$325) for his family. Rosemarie assured him that Jesus would provide their needs if they trusted Him. They prayed and asked God to provide their needs. Through this experience Jai realized how God wants us to rely on Him.

New Temptations

Not long after this the family returned to Guyana. When news of their arrival reached Jai's old friends, they came by to welcome him back and invite him to go drinking. When Jai told them he no longer drank, his old friends drifted away. "I thought I had real friends here," Jai said. "But they were only liquor friends." At first it was hard to watch them go, but God has blessed in many other ways.

Jai is growing in Christ. "I feel good being an Adventist," he testifies. "I realize that if I had continued living the old way I probably would be dead now. I thank God for saving me from myself."

Jai is an elder in training in his church, and when the congregation decided to build a new church, they asked Jai to be the contractor. He enjoys the challenge of building for God.

"Giving my life to God is the best thing I could have done," Jai smiles. "Just knowing I'm on God's side makes me secure."

Jai is concerned for his brothers and sister, who are still Hindus. One brother has a Christian wife; the rest are committed Hindus. Jai talks to them about God and about their health—especially their smoking and drinking.

"Sometimes my brothers and sister come to visit while we are having our devotions," Jai said. "They are impressed when the children sing and say their memory verses. I want them to have the happiness, the peace, the security that we have found in Christ Jesus." ●

Jai and Rosemarie Persaud (Per-SAUD) live in Stewartville, Guyana.



Guyanese refresher: A teenager uses his cutlass to cut the top off a coconut. The water inside is a popular drink.



The Stubborn Sisters

Ellen Wood*

A typical Guyanese home built off the ground. The area under the house is called the "bottomhouse."

August 26

As Ellen and Dorothy walked along the dusty road from the bus stop to their parents' home, they wondered what would happen to them when their parents learned that the girls had changed religions. Their family had always been close. Would their parents still welcome them home?

Ellen and Dorothy were the eldest of six children from a strict Methodist home. They did not go to movies or to dances with other young people, but they did not care. They enjoyed spending free time together with their family.

When Ellen was 17 and Dorothy was 18 their father sent them to live with his brother Thomas in Georgetown, where they could learn the practical skills needed to prepare them for marriage.

Devil Worship

Uncle Thomas was willing to keep the sisters, but he expected the girls to attend church with him as long as they lived in his home. But the girls felt uncomfortable going to his church because Uncle Thomas had strange ideas about religion. He did not believe that Jesus was God. He thought Jesus was just a good man. Sometimes during services in Uncle Thomas's church someone would beat drums while worshipers danced themselves into a frenzy, trying to "call up a spirit." If a spirit entered a dancer, it might give that dancer a message or speak through him or her. Then the worshipers would talk in gibberish or do whatever the spirit told them to do. The girls recognized this as a form of devil worship, and they did not like it. They had been taught to follow Jesus Christ, and they felt out of place in these services.

One day their cousin Daniel came to visit. The girls liked Daniel; he was different. He was kind, and his language was not full of profanity; he did not drink or smoke like other boys. Daniel invited the girls to some evangelistic meetings at the Adventist church. They decided to go, and enjoyed the meetings.

The girls attended another series of meetings held by Daniel's minister some distance from where they lived. Every night for three weeks they walked to the meetings. The preacher spoke with such beauty and appeal; Dorothy and Ellen decided to be baptized. But they did not tell their uncle.

As long as they attended their uncle's church, he did not care that they attended evangelistic meetings, but after their baptism they did not want to attend his church anymore. He became angry and refused to let them attend the evangelistic meetings.

"Go Home"

The girls went to their room and prayed together about the situation. They wanted to go to church, but they did not dare defy their uncle. One day he came into their room and told them to pack up their things and go home. They had finished their courses, and he did not want them in his home now that they were Adventists.

The girls did not know what their parents would say about their new religion, but they were determined to remain faithful to Jesus no matter what. There were no Adventists in their area, and the nearest church was too far to walk. The girls did not know where they would worship on Sabbath.

Their family was glad to see the girls, but when Mother and Dad saw that this new reli-

Their father tossed their clothes out a window. "Go away!" he cried. "Just go away!"

gion would cause problems, they began to resent the girls' new faith. The girls politely refused to eat unclean foods, but Father refused to allow them to prepare their own food. The girls worked hard around the home, but things just got worse.

Every day the girls worshiped together. One day Father found them reading their Bibles. He snatched the Bibles and all other religious material he could find, and hid them. He wanted to break them of their stubborn habits. On Sabbath he made the girls clean house and prepare food.

Prisoners at Home

Father refused to allow the girls to contact their cousin, but their younger sister secretly mailed their letters to Daniel. Father read the letters the girls received to decide if they should have them. They were virtual prisoners in their parents' home.

Most houses along the seacoast of Guyana are built well off the ground on stilts. One day Father told the girls that if they would not forsake their foolish religion, they would have to sleep on the concrete slab under the house. For 10 nights they slept outside with no pillow or blanket. When Father eventually allowed the girls to sleep inside, where they would be safe from roaming animals, he took away their mattresses. Often the girls went hungry for days at a time because they would not eat the unclean foods their mother prepared. But they still would not forsake their faith.

Daniel had told the church about the sisters' plight. An elder from Georgetown and two pastors from the nearest churches went to visit the girls and saw the situation. The elder promised to find a place for the sisters to stay.

During all this time the girls could not attend an Adventist church or even read their Bibles, but they prayed together and comforted each other. Their conviction that they were doing God's will by keeping the Sabbath brought them strength.

One day when Mother went to a funeral and Father was at work, the girls decided to leave home. They grabbed a few clothes and started walking toward town. But a cousin saw them and raced to tell their mother. Mother and Father found the girls before they got to town, and brought the girls back home.

New Life

Father looked at them a long time. He had tried everything he knew to convince them against this new religion, and nothing had worked. His quiet, obedient girls had grown stubborn and steadfast. "OK," he said. "If you want to go, you may go."

The girls told their family goodbye and left for Georgetown. When they arrived they learned that the church elder had found a home for them. The people had no children of their own, and provided for the girls as if they were their own daughters.

Dorothy and Ellen enrolled in classes to prepare for careers. While they were studying they held two neighborhood evangelistic campaigns in the "bottomhouse," the open space beneath people's homes. They asked neighbors for permission to use their "bottomhouse" for meetings, and then filled the area with benches and invited neighbors to attend the meetings. Dorothy preached, and Ellen, the quieter one, helped in other ways. During the two campaigns 24 people were baptized.

The girls' younger sister, Joy, came to town to work for a lawyer. She moved in with Dorothy and Ellen. During one of the evangelistic meetings, Joy came into the church too.

The sisters go home to visit their parents on holidays. When their father realized that the sisters would not give up their faith, he again treated them with respect and love. Ellen says, "Father did not hate us; he simply thought that we were making a mistake, and wanted the best for us."

It was not easy for the girls to stand firm, but they would do it again. "My faith is very precious to me," Ellen says. "I am a Sabbath School superintendent in our church. When I meet people who are having problems, I tell them my story. I hope it helps them to know they are not alone in their struggles." ●

** Ellen Wood is a pseudonym. She and her sister have asked us to change their names in order to protect their relationship with their parents. Ellen and Joy live in Georgetown, Guyana, where they are studying for their careers. Dorothy is studying in Jamaica.*



Many churches in Venezuela meet in remodeled houses and buildings.

When Evangelism Failed

Ivan Omana, Jr.

September 2

Pastor, the mayor of Santa Rosa wants to talk to you!" Brother Barbosa, an elderly layman from our tiny church in Santa Rosa, spoke excitedly. "He wants to see you in his office tomorrow morning, first thing!"

"What does the mayor want with me?" I questioned. I couldn't think of any reason he would have to speak with me, and frankly, I was worried. The next day Brother Barbosa and I went to the mayor's office. The mayor was busy, so I left my card and told the receptionist she could reach me at home. Before I reached my house the mayor had called three times! Now I was really concerned! What could be so important?

I called the mayor immediately. "I really need to talk to you," he said. "Can you come to my office at 7:30 tomorrow morning?" I knew the mayor's office didn't open until 9:00. This must be urgent! All afternoon I wondered what the mayor, a strong Catholic, would want with me, a simple Adventist pastor.

Difficult District

Barquisimeto (Bar-key-see-MET-o), Venezuela, is a stronghold of Catholicism. The city has its own patron saint, whom believers say first appeared in the poor barrio called Santa Rosa, and that she returns on January 14 to heal the faithful. Over 2 million people come to Barquisimeto to join the parade in her honor.

Amid this strong Catholic community five faithful Adventists meet in a small home church. When I became the district pastor, I began work to build up this tiny congregation. We distributed invitations to a health screening program. But on opening night only one non-Adventist came.

I visited people who had received invitations to the health screening and learned that their priest had warned them that if they came to the Adventist meetings, he would not allow them into the church to see the patron saint's statue.

I talked to as many people as I could about the Bible and God's will for their lives, and about their health concerns. That night eight people attended the meeting. I was encouraged! The next day I visited more homes, and that night even more people came to our meeting. I felt we were making progress!

Toward the end of the week, as I was preaching, a car stopped in front of the church. It was the local priest! He opened the car doors and turned his radio on—loud. Then he invited people on the street to dance. The noise disrupted our meetings. We couldn't continue, so we had prayer and went home. The people were angry at the priest for the disruption.

I wondered if the priest's presence would cause people to stay away from our meetings. The next time we met, on Sunday night, 12 new people, mostly Catholics, came to the meeting. They had been invited by people who had been attending!

But after two weeks of meetings no one responded to a call to dedicate their life to Christ and be baptized. I was disappointed at the results of so much work.

Please Help Us

And now Brother Barbosa reported that the mayor wanted to see me early in the morning. I prayed a lot that afternoon. The next morning I arrived at the mayor's office just before 7:30; he was already there. With many prayers tumbling in my heart, I asked him what I

What did the Catholic mayor want with the Adventist pastor that was so urgent he could not wait until the office opened?

"I need to talk to you," he said. "I have been studying the Bible with Brother Barbosa." The mayor nodded at my companion, who hadn't told me that he was studying with the mayor! "I have been to your hospital. I know that Adventists help people, and I need your help. The other religious groups in Santa Rosa aren't interested in helping, so I come to you Adventists." Now I was really curious about what he wanted.

"We have many poor people in Santa Rosa," he explained. "They need clothing, medical care, medicines, and other things, but they cannot pay for them. I would like you Adventists to help us provide these things for the people."

He pulled out a map of Santa Rosa and traced a road that runs through the village. "Will you sponsor a 10-kilometer [6-mile] run, a mini-marathon in Santa Rosa?" Curious, I asked him how a marathon could help the people with their needs.

"I hope that a marathon will call people's attention to a health-screening program using doctors from the Adventist hospital. Can you do it?"

Accepting the Challenge

So this was what the mayor wanted! We would gladly work with him. The mayor offered all the help we needed to organize the run and hold the health screening. Then he asked me to follow up with a one-week series of health lectures—exactly what I had tried to do earlier but with little success!

Working with the mayor, we laid plans for the marathon and health fair. We advertised on radio, TV, and in the newspaper. Adventist businesses provided T-shirts for the runners, the health screening volunteers, and those who helped with the run; and the Adventist Book Center provided medals for winners. The hospital paid for the health screening and supplies.

On the day of the race 40 doctors, medical technicians, nurses, and assistants came from across the city to Santa Rosa for the health screening. Pathfinders helped judge races, distribute prizes, assist the medical team, and give encouragement. The mayor was amazed at the cooperation he received from the Adventists in Barquisimeto. He did not know that Adventists sponsor such programs regularly.

The race started at 7:00 that morning, and

by 9:00 we began medical screening. Within one hour we had registered 750 people who wanted medical attention, all we could handle in one day. We had to turn away 700 more patients for lack of personnel. Our pediatrician alone saw 128 children. The little Santa Rosa church, all five members, fed the medical staff and volunteers.

Toward the end of the day I noticed an old woman sitting on the curb nearby. I asked her if she needed something. She rose slowly to her feet and looked into my eyes. "I am going to report you to the television station!" she said. I wondered if we had upset her. Perhaps she was one of the persons who had not been able to see a doctor. Then she explained, "No one has ever done something like this for our community. And the TV station should know."

That night, though exhausted from the day's exciting work, I began my health lecture series. We discussed proper nutrition, smoking, drinking, and other health concerns. Then we ended with a short devotional on the love of God, including Bible promises and commands.

Several people from the health lectures requested Bible studies. I am studying with the mayor and the president of the city council and members of their families.

Appeal

God opened a way through the health work of our little hospital in Barquisimeto for us to do what we had not been able to do through direct evangelism. For its size, this hospital has had a great impact upon this city. We look forward to the day when our new Adventist hospital is built and we will be able to serve many more people. This Thirteenth Sabbath help us support our witness and outreach through this hospital when you give your offerings. ●

Ivan Omana, Jr., is a pastor in Barquisimeto, Venezuela.



A dental technician calms a child who has never seen a dentist before.



The proposed Barquisimeto Adventist Clinic/Hospital.

The Pain That Converted Many

Dr. Daniel Gonzalez

September 9

Nievas Barrios closed her eyes against the morning sun that glared through the bus windows. Intense pain shot through her head and face. She had been to doctor after doctor, but none could tell her what caused the pain. She was on her way to one more doctor when the bus stopped beside the tiny Adventist clinic in Barquisimeto, Venezuela. She felt compelled to see if someone there could help her. By the time she had entered the clinic she was crying.

The nurse on duty asked what her problem was, then directed her to Dr. Cruz Gonzalez. Nievas immediately felt at ease with this woman and described her symptoms: excruciating pain in her eye, her ear, her jaw. The doctor listened carefully, then ordered an X-ray. She discovered a cyst pushing on the nerves in Nievas' lower jaw. Dr. Gonzalez explained that if the cyst were not removed, it could eventually paralyze that side of her face. But minor surgery could be performed immediately, under a local anesthetic, to remove the cyst and end the pain. Nievas could not believe that a simple operation could end her suffering. Dr. Gonzalez performed the surgery, and soon Nievas was ready to go home.

But Dr. Gonzalez sensed something else was burdening this woman, and tenderly offered to listen. Nievas revealed that her husband was in a psychiatric hospital and her four children blamed her for their father's illness. One son had even tried to kill himself. Before Nievas left the clinic that day Dr. Gonzalez prayed with her and offered to visit her family and study the Bible with them so they could find peace. Nievas was grateful and was eager to study with her new friend.

When Dr. Gonzalez arrived at the woman's

house a few days later, she learned that besides caring for her own children, Nievas ran a kindergarten for 60 children, caring for these children while she was in such intense pain. At first Nievas' children joined the Bible study unwillingly. But when the pastor came and showed slides of Bible themes, the children became more interested.

Nievas asked if someone would come and tell Bible stories to the children in the day-care center. When Dr. Gonzalez and the pastor's wife arrived, they found 60 children seated on a dirt floor in a large room, eager to hear a Bible story.

Soon Nievas invited the children's parents to evening meetings. Between 60 and 90 parents came three times a week during two months of meetings. Many parents were baptized, along with Nievas and her oldest son. Then recently Nievas' younger son and family were baptized. A new church was organized in Nievas' neighborhood as the result of one woman's contact with the Adventist clinic in Barquisimeto.

Mission

The Adventist clinic is located in a large refurbished house. An outpatient clinic occupies the main floor, complete with a laboratory, dentists, and X-ray area. The second floor accommodates a 10-bed inpatient hospital. The clinic is well known throughout the area it serves. It takes its role in mission work seriously.

Every citizen of Venezuela is entitled to free medical care at a government hospital, but patients often must wait months to see a doctor, and many patients cannot or will not wait that long for care. They then seek out a

private clinic where they receive immediate care. The Adventist clinic/hospital in Barquisimeto offers excellent physicians, caring staff, and quality care at an affordable price. But the hospital's goal is to treat more than a patient's physical needs. Staff members keep in touch with patients and try to nurture their interest in spiritual matters.

Clinic in Valencia

Often staff members volunteer their day off to hold free clinics in cities and villages where residents do not have access to medical care. The local church or school provides a building to house the one-day clinic and advertises the clinic via radio, television, and posters. Often 300 to 500 people show up to receive free medical care.

At one such clinic doctors, nurses, lab technicians, dentists, dental assistants, and other volunteers rode a bus to the clinic location. The weather was stormy, and some worried that fewer people would come and that the most needy would miss the free clinic. But when the staff arrived, more than 600 people were awaiting medical attention—in the rain.

The chairs were all taken, the aisles were packed with people waiting patiently for medical help. Local church members had arranged desks to form examining tables and pushed student chairs against the wall for the dental clinic. Every staff member knew his or her place, and each one quickly set to work directing people, registering patients, taking medical histories, and treating patients.

In the dental clinic, often the busiest room in the clinic, mothers with young children line up for dental exams. Most of the children are frightened. They have never visited a dentist before, and the toothaches in their mouths tell them that the dentist will have to pull a tooth. But the dental assistant bends down to the children's eye level and talks to them about the pain in their mouths and how, when the tooth is gone, they will not hurt anymore. Eventually the children agree to endure the needle jab that will deaden their jaw and allow the dentist to pull the offending tooth painlessly.

In other clinics children see the pediatrician, adults have their eyes examined by an ophthalmologist, and pregnant women consult with the obstetrician. And in one room, at the end of a long hall, some volunteers are even

giving free haircuts to children as grateful mothers look on. Everything is done with a sense of ministry, a heart full of caring. And people feel that tender caring as their needs are met.

Six hours later the once-crowded hall is nearly deserted. Weary medical staff members pack up their equipment, stopping occasionally as someone who was treated during the day returns to say "Thank you; God bless you." The people in this city know Adventists now; and perhaps they also know Jesus better, too, for these men and women are the hands and feet of Jesus.

Before leaving, the medical staff and the local church members gather in the now-empty hall to pray for those who came for help that day, that they might also receive the spiritual help they need.

The Need

The Adventist hospital's facilities are extremely cramped. Imagine a 10-bed hospital serving more than 900 inpatients a year. The outpatient clinics served more than 13,000 patients and provided nearly 70,000 services ranging from X-ray and lab work to dentistry, ophthalmology, and emergency room care in one year.

The hospital plans to build a 50-bed facility on its current property so that it can provide medical care and spiritual care for all who need it. This would expand the witness and the influence of the Barquisimeto Adventist Clinic.

Doctors and staff members are excited about expanding the hospital. Doctors—even non-Adventist doctors who serve on call—have agreed to contribute 20 percent of their income to help fund this building project. Other staff members have made pledges of similar amounts.

Our gifts on September 30 will help make a dream come true at Barquisimeto, Venezuela, as we support this medical ministry. Plan to give generously on Thirteenth Sabbath. ●

Dr. Cruz Betancourt de Gonzalez is a dentist and odontologist. She is in charge of the dental department at the Adventist clinic in Barquisimeto. Dr. Daniel Gonzalez is the medical director of the Barquisimeto Adventist Clinic.



Freedom in Christ

◀ Peter Rodriguez

September 16

I lay in my prison cell, shivering and sweating through drug withdrawal, afraid of sleep and the nightmares it brought. I was just 16, and afraid to die. "O God! Help me," I cried. "What's going to happen to me?"

My mother, a faithful Catholic, sent us to church and raised us to be good. But when I was only 11 years old, she died. I was devastated. My father, an alcoholic, was unable to face his responsibilities and left home. My oldest brother, Curtis, took over the family. He got us ready for school and helped us cope with Mother's absence. But life was hard.

My other brothers and sisters banded together and obeyed Curtis, but I rebelled. When Curtis tried to force me to obey, I ran away and lived with various friends. My friends, mostly older than I, drank and partied, so I started hanging out with them in clubs, drinking, smoking, and gambling.

Deadly Business

One day my friends decided to grow marijuana. We used the money we got from selling the marijuana to gamble, drink, and smoke. At first I did these things because my "friends" did them, but by the time I was 13 I had become addicted. Drugs and alcohol warped my thinking. The difference between right and wrong faded. When we were hungry we stole what we wanted to eat. We thought we were having a good time and getting away with something.

I didn't want to wait three months for the marijuana to grow, so I went to work on a chicken farm where I could earn money every week. But soon I realized that my wages would not buy my drugs.

My boss was gone all day, leaving me alone with 15,000 chickens. I began to sell his chick-

ens to friends and pocket the money. I recorded the chickens I sold as having died from the heat, a common occurrence in the tropics.

Then a man came to work on the owner's yard and noticed me selling chickens to someone. He told the owner, who asked me about it. I made an excuse, rushed to town, returned the money to the man who had bought the chickens, and told him to pay it to the owner. The next day, fearing I had been found out, I left the chicken farm and did not return.

Prison

Now I didn't have a regular job. I paid for drugs by stealing anything I could sell. One day I gave a friend some jewelry to sell. He was arrested for selling stolen jewelry. He told the police that I had given him the jewelry, and they arrested me. I was sentenced to three years at the youth training center. I was 16 years old and in prison. I wanted to die.

I had a terrible time adjusting to prison, and withdrawing from drugs made me crazy. I had a nervous breakdown and was sent to a mental hospital, where they put me on a lot of medication.

One day, back at the detention center, I was lying in my cell thinking. I wanted to be free. A voice inside me said, "There are two freedoms—freedom from sin and freedom from prison." I decided that since I couldn't be free from prison, I would try freedom from sin.

I remembered something I had heard during a religious meeting held by the prison ministries team. Usually I sat in the back and tried to ignore the speakers. But they were talking about the second coming of Jesus. This troubled me. I was thinking about that message one day, and a voice said to me, "Confess your

*"Though my
father and
mother forsake
me, the Lord
will receive
me" (Ps. 27:10,
NIV).**

sins." Right there in my cell I dropped to my knees and asked God to have mercy on me. I didn't know how to pray, I just called out.

I rose from my knees and found the New Testament that every inmate receives. I opened it to the book of John and began reading. I read in John 5:24 that whoever believes in God, who sent Jesus, will be passed from death to life. I wanted to have this life. In my heart I asked God for this life and to help me understand the Bible.

The language of the Bible bothered me, and once a voice said, "You're not used to the *thees* and *thous* of the Bible. Forget it." I put the Bible down. Then I realized that two different voices had spoken to me, and the second voice was not God. I found a modern English Bible and started reading it. I decided to go to school and learn to read better so I could understand even more.

I also decided to attend the religious services on Saturday afternoon. I knew the prison ministries team members were Adventists, and I did not know what "Adventist" meant. But I knew that attending the services and reading the Bible gave me peace and drew me closer to God.

Freedom

One day a former convict named Richard Barker testified how God had rescued him from sin. This touched me deeply. When he called for a commitment to Jesus, I stood up. I was 17 years old and still in prison, but I had found happiness and fulfillment in Christ. I felt free—a freedom I had never known before.

People began noticing changes in me. Officers watched me change from a depressed, surly, uncooperative person to a happier, responsible one. The infirmary officer, who was still giving me medication for the breakdown, noticed the changes. I wanted to quit taking the medicine, but the medical officer said I would have a relapse. I prayed about it, and God overruled. I have had no more problems. Eventually the officer trusted me, a former drug addict, to work in the dispensary and take medications to other inmates.

Fellow inmates began to come to me to talk about their problems and loneliness. Some of them had no friends or family to visit them. I was put in charge of the chapel, and escorted the prison ministries team from the gate to the

chapel for services.

Finally the day came when I left the Youth Training Center. The staff held a surprise party for me. Inmates cried when I left; staff members shook my hand. I left the training center ready and eager to follow Jesus.

As soon as possible I was baptized. I stayed with a man I called Uncle Bill, a member of the prison ministries team. Uncle Bill helped me find a job and counseled me. He's my mentor. Now I help young men just like Uncle Bill helped me. I tell young people that it is better to find Jesus before they get into trouble. It may appear that they are succeeding, getting away with something, but without Jesus they will eventually fail.

Once, after Mother died, I wanted to get high on marijuana. I had no paper to wrap the marijuana in, so I tore a page from her Bible to make a wrapper for the marijuana. I tell people I had smoked God's Word to get high, but now I get high from reading God's Word and heeding the Holy Spirit's words.

Appeal

I found Christ through the work of prison ministries in Trinidad. Now I want to become a pastor and help others find real freedom in Jesus too. Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help us provide a rehabilitation center where ex-prisoners who have found God's love while in prison can gain the confidence and skills they need to enter society as responsible, witnessing Christians. Please give to missions today and on Thirteenth Sabbath. ●

Peter Rodriguez works as an upholsterer in Trinidad and is active in the church's prison ministry.

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Fishermen Become Fishers of Men

Nelson Luzardo

The new Maraca Island church will be built on pilings, over the waters of Lake Maracaibo.

September 23

When I was baptized four years ago, I wanted to do something special for the Lord. I asked God to open the way for me. Then I met Jose Uriana (Ho-SAY UR-ee-AN-ah), a university student from Maraca (Mah-RAH-cah), a tiny island in Lake Maracaibo (Mah-rah-KI-bo), on the northwest tip of Venezuela. I had heard of this island, which is inhabited by poor fishermen.

Jose had become a Christian too, and wanted to begin Bible studies on Maraca, but no one seemed interested. Perhaps, Jose thought, they knew him too well and did not feel he had anything to offer them. Would I come and study with these people?

The following Sunday morning Jose and I rented a small fishing boat to take us to the island. The sea was rough during the 25-minute ride across the lake to the island. As we approached, I noticed that many of the houses were built on stilts over the lake. Fishing boats lined the dock.

Jose knew most of the people on the island and invited them to the school for a meeting. Meanwhile I prayed that God would open their hearts to come and learn. About 30 came to the meeting to hear about how Jesus came to save us. At the end of the meeting we invited the people back the next Sunday to study with us.

Then we walked to the boat dock for our return trip across Lake Maracaibo. The next Sunday 30 people joined us at the island school for a good Bible study.

We returned to the island every week. We took doctors to the island to hold a free clinic for the islanders, because they had no regular medical care. The people were impressed that we cared for them and wanted to help them.

Following the doctors' visits attendance at the Bible studies increased from 30 to 50.

Soon four women were ready for baptism. Most of the island's population came to watch the baptism on the shore of the lake. They had seen the priest baptize babies, but they had never seen an adult baptized. Others wanted to be baptized, but they had some problems to work through first. Some men had two wives; others were struggling with alcohol and tobacco.

Most of the families on the island have many young children. The four women who joined the church brought their 25 children with them. My wife helped set up classes for children and young people in the teacher's house while the adults continued meeting in the school.

Tragedy

One Sunday night about a month after the baptism, a young woman rushed into a meeting with a message from the island. The infant son of Iris, one of our new believers, had drowned. Could I come to the island and hold the funeral? I could not go, but Jose went in my place and stayed with the people several days.

I feared that this tragedy would destroy the faith of these new believers. They were such babes in Christ. What would become of our work on the island?

It wasn't until the following Sabbath that I could travel to the island. When I arrived, Jose met me and told me that the bereaved mother had said, "I know I will not see my son again until Jesus comes, but when He comes He will give me back my son." Instead of a dying faith, her faith seemed to bloom under this tragedy.

Would these deaths destroy the faith of the new believers on the island?

Jose had more good news for me. Iris' husband, her father, and sister-in-law all wanted to be baptized. They had been attending the meetings, but had not yet made their decision to follow Christ.

A literature evangelist held evangelistic meetings on the island. Following these meetings 13 more people were ready for baptism. Among these were some of the husbands and fathers of our first believers. They had seen what Christ can do for them, how He can free them from their destructive habits and give them new lives.

One man, Antonio, had been studying the Bible and had decided to be baptized following the evangelistic meetings. He had kidney problems, and was suffering a lot. But during the meetings his condition worsened, and he died before he could be baptized.

The priest who works with these islanders became angry when he learned that Protestants had invaded his territory. He predicted that bad things would befall the people if they accepted a new religion. When Iris's baby drowned and Antonio died, I wondered if the people would remember the priest's words and fear leaving the Catholic Church. Instead several people, including Antonio's wife and daughter, took their stand to be baptized.

When the priest saw the work we were doing by educating the people and bringing doctors to treat them, he said it was OK for the Adventists to be there, but he did not approve of other Protestant churches because they were not helping the people like the Adventists were.

Changing Lives and Lifestyle

Accepting the Adventist faith has brought changes to the islanders' lives. The men are shrimp fishermen, but when they joined the church we taught them not to eat the shrimp. Some questioned if it was OK to catch shrimp if they did not eat it. To tell them no would rob them of their livelihood. As they can, they are broadening their occupations, becoming carpenters or doing other work that does not conflict with their beliefs.

Because of the prevalence of common-law marriages, we had to instruct these families to choose to marry each other before they could be baptized. Some men had two common-law wives and had to choose which woman to

marry. The other wife went to live with her former husband's father, who would support her according to the custom on the island. On one high day we held a multiple wedding in which seven couples were married and then baptized the same day.

The island school has only four grades, and many of the students cannot read or write well. My wife encourages the children to strive for a better education. We take some of the teenagers across the lake to Maracaibo so they can see the occupations that are open to them if they complete their education. This helps them look beyond the narrow life on their island.

Fishers of Men

We formed a company with a membership of about 30 vibrant members. These people, who have so little, formed a Dorcas group to help the poorest people on the island with food and clothes, especially during the months when fishing is especially bad.

These fishermen are now fishing for men. Together we have begun working for Christ on a nearby island. Already two people have been baptized and 20 more are preparing for baptism.

The schoolteacher's superiors forbade the believers to use the school for meetings. We are now crowding into a home each Sabbath for worship while the islanders are building a church over the waters of Lake Maracaibo. The pilings that will support the church must be sunk four or five feet into the sand, down to bedrock. About 100 holes have been dug for the pilings that will support the 31' x 58' (9m. x 18m.) building. (See accompanying picture.)

Until three years ago I had never thought much about the people who live on the islands in Lake Maracaibo, but God has given me a burning desire to work on every island, and make more of these fishermen into fishers of men. ●



Nelson Luzardo is the manager of a company that sells industrial equipment in Maracaibo, Venezuela. Jose Uriana is studying political science at a university in Maracaibo and is a local elder of his church.



September 30

THIRTEENTH SABBATH PROGRAM

"The Least of These"

Program

Congregational Song	"Give of Your Best to the Master" (<i>The SDA Hymnal</i> , No. 572).
Welcome	Superintendent
Scripture	Matt. 25:34-40
Prayer	Participant
Skit	Narrator, young prisoner, mother with a baby or young child, a pastor.
Offering (Special music)	"Far Beyond the Sun" ("Mas Allá del Sol")
Closing Song	"I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go" (<i>SDA Hymnal</i> , No. 573)
Closing Prayer	Superintendent

(NOTE: The offertory song is the theme song of the Inter-American Division. It appears in Spanish-language Adventist hymnals and is available upon request from this office.

If you have people in your congregation from Inter-America, ask them to dress in costume. Ask one or more to offer prayer or take part in the skit.

Cast: A prisoner (dressed in solid-color—blue, orange, khaki—shirt and pants of cheap material), a mother and baby or young daughter, a pastor or layperson, a narrator to introduce skit and offering projects for the quarter.

Scene: Set up several chairs in two rows on one side of the platform to resemble a meeting hall. Skit members arrive and sit in chairs during congregational song, and join in singing.

Narrator [to Sabbath School audience, then to members on platform]: Welcome to Sabbath School. Today is Thirteenth Sabbath, and we will have a testimony time. We have many people who want to tell what the Lord has done in their lives. [Turning toward participants on platform:] Who will be first?

Prisoner [stands, approaches microphone]: My name is Keith Stewart. And God saved me from a life of hell. I used cocaine for many years. It was a nightmare. Sometimes I would hallucinate and see things that were not there. Other times I thought I was invincible, and I took chances that should have killed me. But God saved me and brought me out of this terrible darkness into His marvelous light.

I supported my cocaine habit by stealing and selling whatever I could. I also worked for the Mafia as a keeper of arms and ammunition. Once I was in a car with some Mafia men, and the police stopped us. I jumped out of the car and started to run, and the police fired at me. But God saved me. He knew that someday I would accept His love, so He did not allow me to die without Him.

When I was in the depths of despair God saved me, and since then I have dedicated my energy to help save other addicts from the hell they live in. Working with addicts has helped me understand how far God had to reach down to pick me up from the mud of life. It is wonderful to watch others accept God's love and become whole in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before God saved me I guarded a drug den in exchange for drugs and a little money. I carried a gun but never used it. One night, just



Keith Stewart

efore I was to go on guard duty, another guard, high on drugs, killed a man who had come to buy cocaine—killed him with the same gun I carried when I was on duty. Now this man is in prison awaiting execution. I have visited him and told him I have accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour. I pray that he will accept Jesus before he is executed.

Part of the mission offering today will go to build a prison ministries rehabilitation center in Trinidad. This facility will help thousands of people like me who have found Christ while on drugs or in prison, and who need help in reestablishing themselves as responsible men and women in the community. Please pray for the prisoners and former addicts who have found Christ and who need this rehabilitation facility, and please give generously to help with the prison ministries work in Trinidad today.

Narrator: Thank you, Brother Stewart. I see another hand here.

Woman with little girl: My name is Mariela, but my story is about my daughter, Milagro. Milagro means “miracle,” and God gave me a miracle when she was born.

For many years I tried to have a baby, but could not conceive. Then I became pregnant. I wanted the best care, since I had waited so long to have a child. The government hospitals in Venezuela do not have modern equipment and often are short of supplies. I decided to go to a private clinic, but most clinics are very expensive. Then I found the Adventist Clinic in Barquisimeto. It is small, but I knew immediately that I could not find better care anywhere. The doctor examined me and said my baby looked healthy, but was in an unusual position, and I would have to deliver by cesarean section. But he was so kind that I was not afraid. When the time arrived for the baby to be born, the surgery staff prayed with me before they operated. When the doctor made the incision into my abdomen, he found the baby had grown outside the womb, in the abdominal cavity! This is very rare, and 95 percent of such pregnancies end in a miscarriage or stillbirth. But my baby was alive.

Quickly the doctor examined the baby. She was perfect! Then they turned their attention to me. The placenta was attached to the large intestines, and removing it could cause severe

bleeding. The staff prayed and the doctor worked feverishly to save my life. As the doctor examined the placenta it separated easily from the intestines. The doctors thanked God for saving me and my little girl.

When I learned of my miracle baby, I named her *Milagro*, “miracle.” God gave me a real miracle that day.

I was not an Adventist, but my neighbor invited me to worship God with her on Sabbath. So Milagro and I go to the Adventist church and thank Him for His love. And I often visit the hospital to thank the doctor and nurses for showing me through their love what Jesus is like.

Narrator: The Davis Memorial Hospital in Guyana will receive money from the offering today to help build a maternity and child-care wing, and the Adventist Hospital of Venezuela, needs a larger building. Both hospitals have an active medical ministry in the cities and in the surrounding poverty-stricken areas that desperately need medical care. Both hospitals have been instrumental in winning many people to the Lord.

We have time for one more testimony. Jose, I see you are eager to tell us how God has blessed you. Jose is a pastor working in a poor barrio in Venezuela.

Jose: I have worked in Bella Vista district in Venezuela for four years now. I am happy to see the work growing so rapidly. In my district we have established five Adventist churches. We started with a group of believers who met in a room at the clinic. Then we grew too large to fit, so we met in the courtyard under a zinc roof. The group grew, and formed another congregation. Then we received word that our courtyard church would have to find another place to meet. We pooled our resources and bought a simple house that we remodeled to make a sanctuary.

One of my other churches bought two adjoining houses that we will remodel into a church. Another group has bought a house to meet in, and every week the members pray that it will not rain on Sabbath, because the roof leaks so badly that it rains more inside than outside! Their courage is good, and they long for the day when they will have a proper

(continued on page 15)



Baby Milagro and her mother visit Dr. Lizazaburo, who saved their lives.

Inter-American Division

Thirteenth Sabbath Projects

Venezuela-Antilles Union

- ① 50 bed hospital in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, 40 churches

Caribbean Union

- ② Prison ministries rehabilitation center in Trinidad and Tobago
- ③ Maternity/child-care center at Davis Memorial Hospital, Georgetown, Guyana

Unions	Churches	Membership
Division	1	98
Antillian	662	117,699
Caribbean	445	131,921
Central American	801	258,071
Colombian	500	125,943
Cuban	114	12,411
French Antilles-Guiana	104	23,543
Haitian	245	168,530
North Mexican	358	90,493
South Mexican	873	317,519
Venezuela-Antilles	255	64,653
West Indies	563	174,899
Totals	4,921	1,485,780

North America

Gulf of Mexico

Bahamas

Atlantic Ocean

Cuba

Dominican Republic

Puerto Rico

Virgin Islands

Jamaica

Haiti

Belize

Honduras

Caribbean Sea

Guatemala

El Salvador

Nicaragua

Panama

Costa Rica

Aruba, Curacao, & Bonaire

Guadeloupe

Martinique

St. Vincent

Grenada

Antigua

Dominica

Barbados

Trinidad and Tobago

Venezuela

Colombia

Guyana

Suriname

French Guiana

South America

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