

Pioneer
In
Guatemala

The Personal History of
John Forres O'Donnal

Including the history of
THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
in Guatemala

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This was reaffirmed later by President David O. McKay, when he declared, emphatically, "God will hold us responsible if we fail."

These affirmations clarify without a doubt what our duty is toward the Lamanite people. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, in revelation, we are assured the gospel is to be preached throughout the world:

For it will come to pass in that day, that every man shall hear of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language, through those who are ordained unto this power, by the administration of the Comforter, shed upon them for the revelation of Jesus Christ. (D&C 90:11)

I firmly believe that we should no longer deny to the Lamanites their promised blessings, full rights, and opportunities to receive them. Great are the promised blessings of the Lord to the Lamanites; and only we have the keys, rights and power to grant and confer these spiritual blessings upon them.

TRANSLATION WORK--INDIAN LANGUAGES

With all that was transpiring in the mission, by September 1976 I was feeling the pressure, but the Lord is always there to give us the support we need. At this time he sent us Brother Eb Davis, ex-mission president in the Pacific Islands, and at that time Area Manager of Distribution and Translation of Latin American Indian Languages. He had learned of our efforts and had come to offer his assistance. I outlined for him what we hoped to accomplish and our dire need for simplification and translation of materials, especially in the four major Mayan languages: *Quiché*, *Cakchiquel*, *Ke'kchi* and *Mam*. He was already engaged in working with Mayan for the Yucatan Peninsula and Northern Guatemala, and with *Cuna* in San Blas, *Quichua* in Octovallo and Chimborazo, *Quechua* in Bolivia, Ayacucho and Cuzco, and *Aymara*, *Guarani* and *Araucano* in South America.

Brother Davis and I outlined our basic need for curriculum materials correlated to the simplified plan we were devising. These included the following:

1. A Gospel Principles Manual
2. Priesthood Manual
3. Women's Manual
4. Children's Manual
5. Book of Mormon Stories
6. Simplified Missionary Discussions
7. Simplified organizational guidebooks for families, groups, small branches and Priesthood leaders.

At that time I did not know that Elders LeGrand Richards and Boyd K. Packer with a committee, had launched a program for simplification of church organization for emerging and developing areas, five years earlier. It was being used in the South Dakota Rapid City Mission, and the Arizona Holbrook Mission. However, to my knowledge, none of the basic simplified curriculum materials had been written. On his subsequent visit, Brother Davis was accompanied by Brother Josiah Douglas, writer for the curriculum department. The three of us met in the *Quiché* Indian town of Momostenango, where we outlined the basic materials we needed. Brother Douglas understood our desires and told us he would return to Salt Lake City and work on their preparation. These were approved, and a schedule for preparation of manuscripts was established. The *Gospel Principles* Manual was published in English in August 1977, and the other manuals were published in January and February 1978. We then had to await the translation of these materials into Spanish and the four Indian languages. These were available prior to our release from the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission.

Three exceptionally dedicated elders who had learned to speak *Cakchiquel* well, had been chosen to start simplifying and translating the discussions which were too lengthy and complicated for teaching the Indians. They were also asked to prepare guidebooks, and to initiate a language training course for missionaries learning to speak the Indian languages, beginning with *Cakchiquel*. These missionaries, Elder David Frischknecht, Elder Gary Larsen and Elder Larry Richmond, were nearing the end of their mission, so I requested their term be extended. The simplification, translation and training progressed without delay but these elders needed assistance in typing the translations. With Elder Randall Ellsworth doing the typing, translations progressed even faster

than we had hoped. Elder Frischknecht's mission was extended to December 16, 1976, so he could finish translations of the simplified discussions and other materials.

LANGUAGE TRAINING--INDIAN LANGUAGES

When Elder Spencer W. Kimball was given the responsibility of supervising all the missions in South America, before departing to visit that continent in October 1965, he called on President David O. McKay to discuss his vision for the Indians of South America. Of this visit he wrote:

He was ready and very gracious.... I took my large map of South America and laid it out on the table....and told him of the millions of Indians [on] the Altiplano of the Andes range. He asked me, "Millions?" And I said, "Yes, President McKay, there are millions and they are pure-blood Indians who speak different Indian tongues and dialects.... I explained to him that we now have linguists in the Church [who can teach the missionaries the Indian languages so] that they could hear the Gospel, every man in his own tongue....I said to him, President McKay,...I think the time of the Lamanite has come for them to hear the Gospel." And he said, "Yes, it is time and they must hear it and you are the one of the Twelve who has the vision of it.... You have my blessing." (Emphasis added)

(Spencer W. Kimball, p. 361)

As mentioned earlier, it was also one of my goals when I was called as mission president that the gospel be taught to the Indians in their own language. The language training in the *Cakchiquel* language initiated by Robert B. Arnold was resumed and intensified in August 1976 in Patzicia, Chimaltenango--*Quiché* in September, 1976 in Momostenango, Totonicapan--*Ke'kchi* in December 1977 in San Pedro Carchá, Alta Verapaz--and *Mam* in January 1978 in Todos Los Santos, Huehuetenango.

Only after prayerful consideration and receiving inspiration, were dedicated elders and sister missionaries selected for this program. They needed to have learned Spanish well and been in the mission at least six months. Spanish-speaking missionaries were also selected. We were then beginning to receive native missionaries from these areas who were paired off with those learning the language. In a report I submitted in

November 1976, I innocently mentioned that our local Missionary Training Center was going forward and showing excellent results, as such it was. But it seemed that with every project we initiated, we encountered much opposition from some in Salt Lake City. Such was the case with our language training program. Eyebrows were raised in the Missionary Department and in Provo, and questions were asked. I explained that what we were doing was with the approval of the Area Executive Administrators, but without specific approval of the Missionary Department, fearing that if I requested authorization there would be a long delay. I knew what we were doing was right.

As the Missionary Training Center had been established in Provo for the training of missionaries and for teaching them the different languages in a most efficient and supervised way, many believed that this was the only place where the language training should be carried out. So on December 10, we received a visit from the president of the Provo MTC, who had come to observe what we were doing. I took him to Patzicia where our training was being conducted. The missionaries being trained were instructed in the classroom throughout the day, then in the evening they were paired off with missionaries who could speak the language or with native missionaries, for experience in teaching and conversing with the Indians in their language. He offered suggestions for improving our teaching, and was most favorably impressed, and expressed approval of our program, and congratulated us on our success. After a short period of only six weeks these missionaries were ready and could speak the language well enough to be assigned to regular proselyting.

After the MTC president returned to Provo, we received information exactly opposite of what he had expressed to us in Guatemala--that we should not continue training, but this would be carried out at the Provo MTC. We continued training, however, offering our reasons for doing so and requesting we be permitted to continue. Elder William R. Bradford, the Area Executive Administrator at the time, supported us, using his influence in an attempt to keep our program alive. But after a few months the final word came that we should discontinue the program and that training in the four languages would be done in the Provo MTC.

Our original trainers, Elders Frischknecht, Richmond and Larsen, finished their missions and returned to their homes. All of the

missionaries trained in the Indian languages were convinced the training could best be accomplished in the mission, and among themselves determined they would not assist in the training in the Provo MTC. All but Randall Ellsworth turned down offers to do so. The MTC then extended a contract on August 15, 1977, to a Cakchiquel man who also spoke some *Quiché*, and was a member of a Protestant church, arranged immigration to the United States for him, and gave him charge of teaching at the MTC. The Provo MTC started teaching *Cakchiquel* on January 15, 1978. We then received our first groups of elders who had received one month Spanish instruction and two months *Cakchiquel* instructions, but could not communicate in either language. Fifty percent of these missionaries, after six months in the mission became very disheartened; which meant that ten months after entering the Provo MTC they still were not effective missionaries and were discouraged. Most had to be taken out of the Indian program.

I then learned through our former missionaries attending Brigham Young University, that this teacher, in his training was teaching Protestant doctrine, and that he had made inappropriate remarks and improper advances to several of the sister missionaries. Elder Bradford, being advised of the situation, immediately conveyed this to the Missionary Department. This situation was confirmed and the teacher was dismissed, which made necessary the payment of his full contract and passage back to Guatemala.

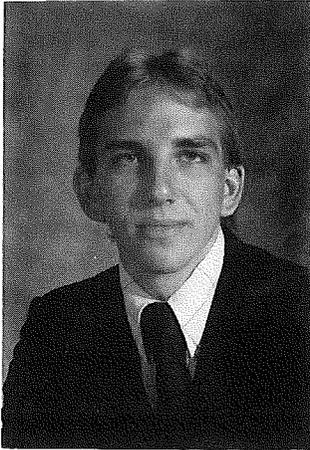
LATIN ORIENTATION CENTER

The majority of the missionaries serving in the Guatemala Guatemala City Mission were Anglo-American who had received training in the Missionary Training Center in Provo prior to arriving in the mission. However, the ever-increasing number of local, Latin-American missionaries did not have the opportunity to attend the MTC. To assist them in this respect, on June 27, 1977, we started a two-week training period as each group of Latin missionaries arrived in the mission. We called it the Latin Orientation Center. It was discontinued when we were called to open the new mission in Quetzaltenango.

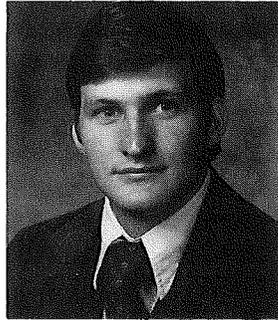
Taking The Gospel To The Lamanites

Taking the gospel to the Indians in the mountains of Guatemala required a change in dress standards. It was necessary for the missionaries to wear heavy clothing, work-type shoes and trousers, and to use sleeping bags. Some areas were from two to six hours walking distance from a town. Some of the small chapels were constructed in these areas. I often thought of the possibility of a serious illness or accident, but this never happened. In my opinion, the missionaries in our mission were the healthiest and happiest in the Church. With few exceptions, missionaries requested an extension to their missions. Only where this was considered of interest to the mission were these petitions granted.

In the four years following our release there were near one hundred small chapels built in the rural areas. This construction is an on-going program as the Church expands in Guatemala.



Elder David Frischknecht



Elder Gary W. Larsen

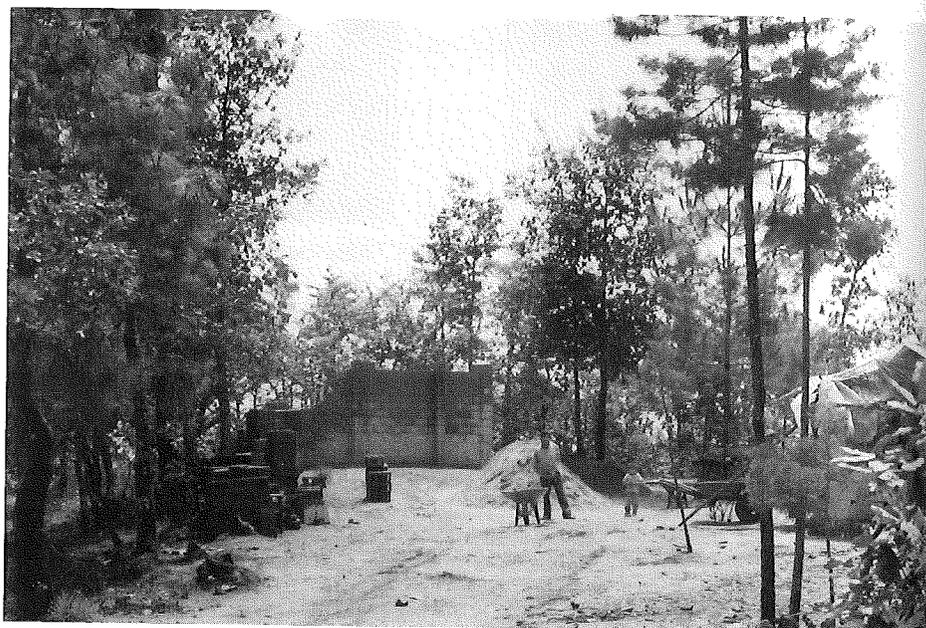


Elder Larry Richmond

Pioneer In Guatemala



*Language Orientation Center (LOC) in Guatemala City
First Missionary Training Center outside of Provo, Utah*

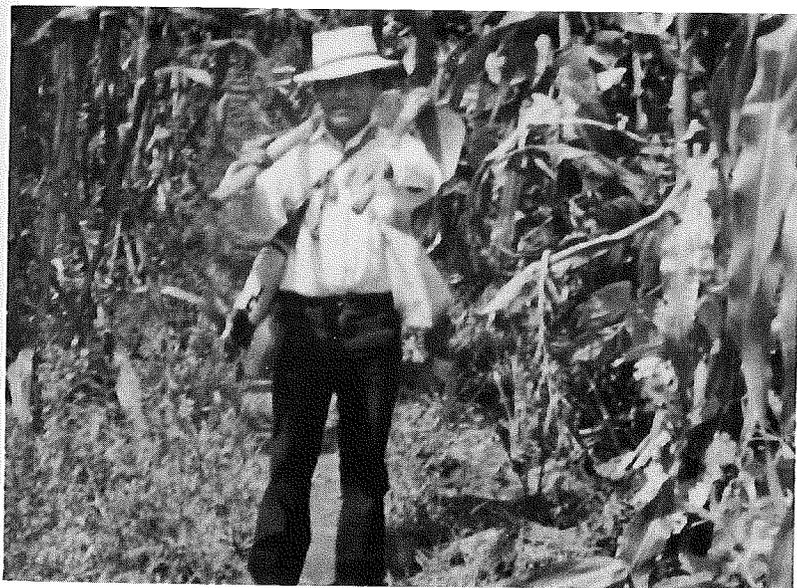


Small chapel built in Santa Ana, Momostenango, Guatemala – 1978

Taking The Gospel To The Lamanites

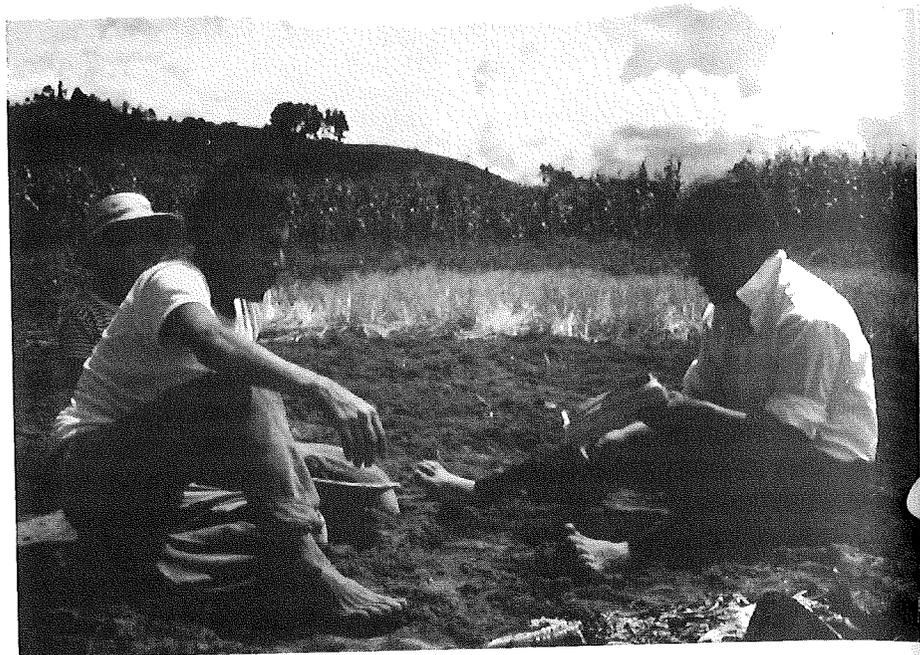


Native Cakchiquel Indian missionaries taking the gospel to their own people



*Native Cakchiquel Indian missionary in corn field
taking the gospel where the people are*

Pioneer In Guatemala



Native Cakchiquel Indian missionaries teaching the people in the fields



Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission Presidency with their families walking in to visit Nimsituj, Totonicapán Group

Taking The Gospel To The Lamanites



Greeting native members in the mountains of Guatemala



Lean-to where missionaries lived in Nimsituj, Totonicapán, in October 1976

Pioneer In Guatemala



First baptisms in Canquixajá, Totonicapán--October 24, 1976



Canquixajá, Totonicapán Branch



President and Sister O'Donnal with Elder William R. Bradford, his wife and daughter, and missionaries, walking into the Ke 'kcht Indian area of Tanchi, Alta Verapaz



*School children—some members and future members—
at rural Ke 'kcht Indian area of Tanchi, Alta Verapaz*

Pioneer In Guatemala



*Branch in La Grandeza, San Marcos
Building they were meeting in when a chapel was promised to them*



Branch in Comalapa

irrigation project among the Indians in the highlands. He served with me until September 1978 when he returned to Logan, Utah. Brother Herman Gustavo Lang was then called and set apart as my second counselor on September 10, 1978; and with President Pérez he served until we completed our mission.

Almost without realizing how our efforts were being guided, many of the projects in which we were engaged in the Guatemala City Mission--simplification of the discussions, translations, intensified training in the Indian languages, taking the gospel to the people, construction of small chapels, etc.--were actually setting the groundwork for the opening of this new Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission.

Brother Eb Davis continued his frequent visits to Guatemala to offer much appreciated suggestions for improving our training programs and bringing us up to date on the progress of translations and printing. David Frischknecht, Larry Richmond and Julio Salazar, continued with translations and preparation of guidebooks, discussions, tracts and flip charts. In early August 1977, Larry Richmond, our former missionary, returned to complete the translation of the simplified discussions into the Indian languages, and to take photographs of local Indians and places to replace the Anglo flip-charts accompanying the discussions. David Tuttle with Bruce Lake continued with the *Quiché* literary program. Elder John Bringham continued his work on translating and typing the discussions in *Ke'kchi*. Dean Black spent considerable time in Guatemala preparing tapes in the Indian languages for rural radio programs. The elders in the mission assisted in evaluating these programs.

With approval from Elder Bradford, the mission presidency scheduled a mission-wide celebration for Thanksgiving Day, that fell on November 24. All the missionaries in the mission gathered in Quetzaltenango. The weather was beautiful and outdoor games were programmed and held on the city fair grounds. Elder Bradford and I participated in a softball game. A great time was had by all. A big Thanksgiving dinner, with turkey and all the trimmings prepared under the supervision of Carmen and Sister Embry, was held later in the stake center.

We held a very spiritual mission conference the following morning, with Elder Bradford presiding. After the conference the missionaries returned to their areas. The next day we drove to Cobán

in the *Mam* language. The members were promised great things would happen in this area if they were obedient.

It was also very gratifying to me, before our release, to receive the following letter from Max L. Pinegar, President of the Missionary Training Center in Provo.

June 12, 1979

Dear President O'Donnal:

The Missionary training Center is currently developing a culture text for Guatemala Indians. Since this material will be used at the MTC in the training of missionaries assigned to Guatemala, we felt that you would have an interest in the contents of the book. We also felt that your experience with actual conditions in the field would enable you to make valuable suggestions.

*A trial copy of **Culture for Missionaries: Guatemala Indians**, is being sent to you under separate cover. We would appreciate it if you would review the material and give us your personal critique. Any comments concerning either strengths or weaknesses of the text that you care to make will be helpful to us.*

Since the final copy is to be sent to Correlation within the next couple of months, we will need to have your input within 30 to 60 days, in order to incorporate your suggestions into the material.

Thank you for your time and attention to these important matters.

Sincerely, Your brother,

*Missionary Training Center
Max L. Pinegar,
Mission President.*

On the last day of our mission I had final interviews with five great Latin-American missionaries who had all worked on the program to construct homes for the members who had lost theirs during the earthquake. I had worked with these elders for three years.

Our release from the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission became effective July 1, 1979; and on that date we turned the mission over to our successors President Richard D. Allred and his wife Gayle. With an abiding satisfaction we returned to our home