

MISSIONS

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS A CORE VALUE OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN VISALIA

[An interview with Mark Vanciel]

Q: Describe how your ministry got started, how it originated, how long it's been going and how it developed over the past years.

Ten years ago, August 2003, I was minding my own business, sitting in my own living room, politely listening to a fellow named John Kirk, talk about some work he had done in Guatemala, and how a lady from First Pres, named Bonnie Olivera, had told him about a missionary in Guatemala named Carolyn Coil, who was from Visalia, and who had a children's ministry program down there and needed some help. John made contact with Carolyn and found out she needed to have a water cistern built in a small mountain community so that her helpers could store water for use in the dry season. John said it would cost about \$250.00 to buy the materials needed to build the cistern, so under the prodding and direction of Bruce Potter, our covenant group raised that amount of money that night, and I thought cool, I will make a donation and that will be that. Well, God had some other plans. As the

meeting was breaking up, God tapped me on the shoulder and said, "I want you to go with John next month to build that cistern". I thought yeah, right, I don't have the money for a plane ticket, I can't get the time off from work, and I don't even know where Guatemala is.

The next day I went to work, and feeling guilty, I asked my boss if he would let me have a week off even if it was short notice, to take a trip. He asked what kind of trip and I told him a mission trip to Guatemala to build a water cistern. My boss stood up from behind his desk and not only said yes, but pulled out his wallet and gave me \$100.00. By the time it came for me to leave, the people I work with had given to me the exact amount of money I needed to pay for the trip. So, four of us went to Guatemala to build the cistern. Besides John and I, there was Rick Bagley and a guy named Lyle Babcock a friend of John's from down in Porterville. We built the cistern, and had such a wonderful time doing so. We returned six months later to do some other work that needed to be done.

At that point I was feeling guilty because we were having so much fun. So when our two Missions Elders Todd Slinde and Carolyn Foxe came to us and offered us some of the money raised through the "Touch the Future" campaign, for Mission work in Guatemala, I thought great, now we can share this fun with others in the church, and I won't feel so guilty.

On one of our earlier trips we had made contact with a group of 32 churches that had purchased a piece of property they were developing as a youth camp in the mountains near Lake Atitlan. They had asked for some help developing the camp, so with the blessing of our Session, and the infusion of the "Touch the Future" cash, we were able to send our first large team to Guatemala in January '05. We started by working on a house at the camp that the resident missionaries, Johnny and Maria Coker, would be living in. It took us a few trips, but after we got that squared away we continued by working on a garage and storage structure.



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The lack of clean drinking water was an issue at the camp, so in October 2007, my wife Sally and I, along with Mike Grassel, Mike Sandberg and Sam Gilman, as well as Sam's brother-in-law, David Prewitt, who attended church in Hanford, enrolled in a Clean Water Filter Installation Training program put on by the Living Waters for the World organization, in Oxford Mississippi. The following month we returned to Guatemala and installed a Clean Water System at the youth camp. At the dedication of the system, the pastors of the churches that owned the camp each came and begged us to install a system in each of their churches so their children would not die for lack of clean water to drink.

Since then 21 teams from First Pres have traveled to Guatemala and have installed 16 other Clean Water systems in that country. Additionally we have installed 4 clean water systems in Ecuador, 2 in Haiti, and 1 in Columbia. To further this work, First Pres joined with four other Visalia Area churches in July, 2012 to found Living Water World Missions, a 501C3 non-profit corporation that exists to share the love of God in the context of addressing the desperate water issues around the world while installing clean water systems that can generate up to 300 gallons of clean, safe water per hour. Starting in December 2012, Living Water World Missions has sent teams into the field once each month to do this work, and we have plans to install additional systems each month for the rest of this year.

Q: What have been the benefits of your ministry to others?

So far we have sent over 200 different team members, from 30 different churches, including churches in seven other states, to minister to more than 10,000 people in four different countries. In doing so we trained "teams" from five other North American churches to install water systems on their own. They in turn have installed additional systems not only in Guatemala, but also in Ecuador, Mexico, and Laos. In Guatemala, the systems we have installed have produced over 1 million gallons of Clean Drinking Water distributed through 5 gallon bottles. That is 200,000 5-gallon bottles. According to the World Health Organization the average family in the developing world will use approximately 15 gallons of Clean Water per week. So we have supplied Clean Water to approximately 13,000 families in Guatemala.

Q: How has this ministry lived out our core value of "Sharing the Good News?" stated above?

Being a follower of Christ doesn't just mean having your own spiritual burden lifted from your shoulders by Christ. It means actively seeking out those who need help, and shouldering their burdens with them. Service to others is a critical part of the Christian faith. When we sacrifice our own comfort, and our own needs for others, we are remembering who we are, and to whom we belong. Over one billion people in this world lack access to clean safe drinking water, and billions more have "access" to buy water, but they don't have the money to pay for it. It is hard to buy bottled water when you live on less than \$2 a day. As a result, those people drink dirty contaminated water. And the parents give that same contaminated water to their children, not because they want to, but because they have no other options. As a result, most of them live their lives in a constant state of sickness.

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More than 1.5 million children under the age of 5 will die this year from drinking dirty water. That's one child every 8 seconds, more than will die this year of HIV/AIDS combined. That's the equivalent of 32 Boeing jumbo jets crashing into the earth, each day, with no survivors. In Guatemala, a recent census revealed that, in the Sololá district, where we are working, 50% of all children under the age of 12 are suffering from a water-borne disease, 77 percent of the households are living below the poverty line, and 85 percent of the people do not have access to a clean water supply. We are working to change that. Our mission is to empower local ministry partners to bring physical, social and spiritual transformation to poor communities by providing sustainable, safe water solutions. Our vision is to see safe water provided in the name of Jesus in every poor community we can access.

All of us really do need clean water, but, we also need something far more profound. Whether we realize it or not, we all are longing for an intimate relationship with God, for a sense of dignity, for community and belonging, and for the ability to use our God given gifts to grow the God's Kingdom. This is a tremendous opportunity for us to share hope and glory of Christ. Come and join us, you won't be disappointed.

In Christ's name,

Mark Vanciel