

## **Making a difference; Missionary serves Mapuche Indian people in southern Chile**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

**Quiñe Nahuen, Chile**— “If students don’t finish high school, they go to work and the young girls end up getting married and having babies at age 14 or 15. We want to help break that cycle and the only way to do that is through education.” A/G missionary Donnie Daniels is convinced that providing a high school education along with study of the Bible can make a difference in the lives of Mapuche Indians living in southern Chile. To do that, he is overseeing the construction of a school that will open this coming March.



“We did a study not long ago and found that while there were 540 eligible young people of high school age, only twenty percent were actually enrolled in high school. So, we felt the need to help provide education for young people,” he says.

The members of the indigenous Mapuche Indian group populate a long narrow valley stretching from the resort town of Pucón, near Temuco, to the border with Argentina. Living at an altitude of around 3,000 feet, the Mapuche are descendents of the only tribe in South America not conquered by the Spanish. But now, centuries later, this once proud tribe is fighting social isolation, poverty, employment problems and the isolation brought on not only by their remote territory, but their separation from Chile’s dynamic society and economy.

“The Mapuches have little opportunity to attend high school,” Donnie explains. “There are five elementary schools in the area, but the only high school is some distance. In order to attend, most of them have to live away from home. It is costly—more money than they can afford.” In addition, Donnie finds that many young people who go away to attend high school never return to their community to contribute and work among their own people.

The school that the Waycross, Georgia native is helping to build will be a politechnical institution teaching necessary trades along with the Bible to Mapuche youth. “We are going to teach them in the areas of forestry and forestry management and wood production,” he says. “Hopefully they can produce their own things and have a better income. If we can do that, we can at least get the youth through high school.”

At the foundation of the school’s educational program will be the Bible. “Latin American Child Care (an Assemblies of God program that helps fund schools throughout the region) never builds a school that is not associated with or attached to a church,” Donnie affirms. “So, the emphasis is not only to give them a good education in the secular field, but to give them a good spiritual education. Bible classes and chapel will be required.”

Students who live too far from the school to walk or catch a ride every day will be housed in dormitories on the second floor of the handsome structure that is still under construction. “Here in Chile, all we have are hardwood trees,” he says with a chuckle. “So, this whole school is finished with oak. It will be here for a while.”

Donnie and his wife Debra, see numerous uses for the building. “We have adult education plans. A lot of people who didn’t have the opportunity to attend high school have asked us if they can come,” Donnie says.

Debra, who is from Vidalia, Georgia, sees the couple’s work with visiting medical teams continuing on the school property. “In a 4 ½ day clinic, we normally see around 1,200 patients,” she says. “Out of that, we have the opportunity see 300-500 people come to Christ during the week. It is incredible, I love it.” During the summer months the facility will be used for Christian conferences. Church camping groups already use the property as a base for excursions into the nearby mountains.

Donnie and Debra are also active in helping to build what Donnie calls “the southern most church in the world” in Puerto Williams, in Chile’s rugged Patagonian area. “So, we’re going to the utter-most parts of the world,” he jokes. In addition, they are helping out in the remote town of Puerto Aysen, 600 miles by car and boat south of their home in nearby Temuco. “We recently built a school in Puerto Montt as well,” Donnie says. “The first year we had 250 students, last year we had 455.”

In their work, the Daniels see many miracles. “We were traveling with a work group (from the United States) and stopped by the house of the man who is a witch doctor,” Donnie reflects. “It happened to be on their sacred grounds where they have sacrifices every year. His daughter had visited one of the all-night prayer meetings and really liked what she heard and what she felt. The group and the witch doctor talked, and finally the doctor, his wife and daughter accepted Christ. He offered a piece of land at that site where they have their sacrifices. That’s just like the power of God, to move in and just move the enemy out!”

## SIDEBAR

The Daniels plan to open the school with the beginning of the Chilean school year in March, 2000—if there are enough funds on hand to complete the project. “Right now, we need to raise \$20,000 to finish the school and get it operational,” Donnie says. “This includes furnishings, chairs, desks, and so on.” The Chilean government will supply funds for paying teacher’s salaries and some supplies without restricting Bible teaching or other Christian activities. Chile’s congress recently passed a law giving equal recognition and benefits to Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

While the school plans on hiring teachers from the community, Donnie says that if the Lord calls any missionary to relocate to Chile and teach at the school, they would be welcome.

“Prayer is our first need,” he says. “Prayer makes everything else happen.” In addition, he acknowledges that financial contributions are important. “It is as important as the food it buys, the supplies it buys, the buildings it builds, the churches it builds.” He reflects that it is important to be sure that missionaries have the tools and funds they need to do the job.

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