

**Working in the enemy's territory;
Missionary reaches out to Spanish youth**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg
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Villanueva de la Sirena, Spain (LAMNS)—One driving toward this small town in Spain's scenic Extremadura province could be excused if they thought they were in Indiana or Iowa. Fields of tasseled corn stretch to the horizon, apple orchards line the roads, and tomato-laden plants fill fields in between.

Later, the scene changes as one comes upon vast fields of rice while hills in the distance are dotted with medieval castles.

It is in the middle of this beautiful territory that Dayana Elasmár, a missionary with the Latin America Mission, serves a growing church in the agricultural town of Villanueva de la Sirena.

"We are living a very key moment right now," Dayana says, explaining her ministry. "When we do evangelism in a public place, the people stand and listen. Seven years ago when I was here you could say you were from an evangelical church and they would take off, they didn't want to hear it. Now, there is a hunger in their hearts and there is a need."



Dayana has been in Spain for over a year, adjusting to life in a small town after growing up in Miami and Orlando. "Many times a missionary is put to work immediately, but there is a whole adaptation process that is so important," she explains. "If that process is not pulled through in the correct manner, you are going to burn out."

While she has helped with Sunday school, led praise and worship, and has been involved with evangelism and a drama team, she has spent a good deal of time focusing on adaptation to a new town and a new church. "I came here from a church of 2,000 members in Orlando and changing to a church of 25 members is a major change!" she says. "This year, I've done some evangelism and I have been trying to find ways to get into the community by taking courses and getting to know people."

In the process, Dayana says that she has also discovered some things about herself. "I was born in Colombia and my hometown is Miami," she explains. "I find a richness in it, and I see the blend of cultures that is in me. I have discovered how American I am and how Latin I am. Now I'm hugging this Spanish culture as well and I love it."

Another discovery has been the difference between serving the Lord in the U.S. or Latin America and serving Him in Spain. "Ministry here in Spain is different," she reflects. "The closest thing I can compare it to is working with Muslims" she says, referring to the social and personal struggles that a Muslim has to confront when embracing Jesus Christ as their Lord.

While many Spaniards are open, Dayana has discovered that "Ministry is not like working in the United States where people often accept Christ as their savior and move on, go to church and are discipled. Here, accepting Christ requires being rejected from your church and your community. People find themselves in a very strong struggle against their family, their community, their friends, everything around them. Having them come to church and congregate is very difficult. It is a price they have to pay and many of them are not willing to pay it."

“So, you find the phenomenon that people might accept the Lord, but for them to persevere is very difficult.”

The result is that most Spanish evangelical churches are quite small. “Growth here in Spain is not what we are used to expecting in South America or Central America or North America,” she explains. “A church with 200-300 members is considered a very large church. An average church here would have between 50 and 100 members and that is getting toward being considered a large church.”

Dayana, who attended Valencia Community College and International Seminary in Plymouth, Florida, says that while churches back home might be disappointed in those types of statistics, in Spain there is no pressure for a 30 or 40 member church to grow. “If somebody has a calling to serve as a missionary in Spain, it’s important that they inform their home churches about the type of work that is done here and the speed of growth. That’s why I compared the speed (of conversion) to work with Muslims, which is very slow”

To minister effectively in Spain, Dayana says that one must build relationships and friendships. “It’s going to take years of friendship before you can even share the gospel,” she says. “It’s going to take living day in and day out and sharing with people where you might not talk about Christ every day. You need to find those key moments where they are going through a struggle and you can take advantage of that moment to share the gospel with them.”

Dayana, who grew up in Miami’s La Catedral del Pueblo church and considers Iglesia El Calvario Assemblies of God church in Orlando as her home congregation, says that her strongest gift is helping. “I came here to work in the church and support the local ministry,” she explains. The Spanish church, Iglesia Evangelica, also an Assemblies church, already has a mission vision and has established a mission point in another city and is viewing six other locations to establish a mission presence.

“I have a strong burden for the youth,” says Dayana. “God has spoken to me about plans he has for me with the youth.” She says that being from the United States, and especially with a background in Miami, draws curious young people to her and opens them up to her influence.

To reach them, Dayana plans on attending a driving school—a step mandatory for her to receive a Spanish drivers license. While studying there, she hopes to make contact with local young people and to win their confidence.

She also plans on working with teenagers who gather regularly in open fields to listen to music and to drink. “We want to reach out to those places,” she says. “But, that’s going into the enemy’s territory, so we are praying. When you go into the enemy’s territory, you have to have the conviction that God wants you there.

The Latin America Mission works in partnership with churches and Christian agencies throughout Latin America and supports missionaries and projects in many Latin countries as well as in Spain. LAM is seeking to place new missionaries throughout the region. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami, FL 33152, by e-mail at info@lam.org, or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission’s web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>. LAM’s Canadian office is at 3075 Ridgeway Drive, Unit 14, Mississauga, ON L5L 5M6.

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