



PURSECUTED AND VICTORIOUS

April 26 | Augustin Cruz is a farmer and lay worker in northern Oaxaca State, Mexico.

Ask a man to present this first-person report.

Hang them! Hang the heretics!” the angry mob shouted.

I looked at the mob—my neighbors and friends. *How could they do this?* I wondered as rough hands shoved me toward the makeshift gallows. My neighbor stumbled toward me. Someone slipped nooses over our heads, and another shouted, “Now will you repent and return to the church in the village?”

“No!” I said, and the noose was drawn about my neck. I prayed for my wife who was waiting alone at home, for my neighbor who stood next to me, and for the others who had listened to my testimony and wanted to follow Jesus.

Journey of Faith

My journey of faith began months earlier on a bus in southern Mexico. The man sitting next to me talked about God and the Bible. He saw my interest and urged me to buy a Bible and read it for myself. So I did. By the time I returned to my village, I was eager to share my growing faith with others.

The man on the bus had invited me

to visit his church, which worshipped on *Sabado* [SAH-bah-doh], not Sunday. So on Sabado, my wife and I walked two hours to the next village to visit this church. We liked it and decided to return the next week. Before we left, the church members gave me eight Bibles to share.

That week I gave out the Bibles and told my friends that God was doing amazing things in my life. I invited them to read the Bible with me. The next Sabado two families—14 adults and children—walked to the Adventist

FAST FACTS

- The church in Oaxaca State, Mexico, is growing rapidly. One out of every 24 people is a Seventh-day Adventist.
- Persecution is not uncommon in parts of southern Mexico. In the state of Chiapas, to the east of Oaxaca, hundreds of Seventh-day Adventists have had to flee their homes because they refused to give up their faith. Some have even been martyred.

church in the next village.

A church lay leader offered to come to my house and study the Bible with us so we didn't have to walk so far. We gladly agreed, for it meant more people could hear this wonderful message! I invited everyone to come to my home and worship. Quickly the group grew to 15 people. My house was full!

Trouble in the Village

The village leaders heard about the Bible study group that met at my home, and they did not like it. They accused us of making trouble in the village. We went to the village leaders and explained what we were doing, but the leaders refused to stop the threats. The mayor called a meeting of the entire village the next day. We arrived to find an angry mob.

“Arrest them!” they shouted. The lay workers were chased from town, and two of us were told they would hang us unless we renounced our faith. We refused, and they tied nooses around us. I prayed for my family and the new believers as the nooses were tightened.

Suddenly the villagers cut the ropes that held us. They let my friend go, but they beat me and ordered me to pray to a saint. I refused, and someone beat me. Then the mob took me to the village authorities, who questioned me again. I refused to deny Christ, and eventually they let me go.

Escape by Night

As I hurried home I noticed some villagers followed me with machetes. They planned to kill me. I ducked behind some tall bushes and ran home, where the two lay leaders waited.

“Come and live in our town while we work something out with the village leaders,” they urged. We gathered some

clothes, rounded up our animals, and slipped away to the neighboring village. We were welcomed in that village where almost half the people are Adventists. The villagers gave us a house to share while we waited for church leaders to work out a solution with our village leaders. At night we sneaked back home to harvest our crops so we would have food.

We attended church several times a week and learned so much about God and the Bible. Soon my wife and I were baptized.

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as the nooses were tightened.

God's Hand Rules

At last the authorities reached an agreement with our village leaders. We returned home free to worship and share our faith with others. We began visiting our neighbors and families, and soon our group grew far too big to fit into our small house. The village authorities gave us land on which to build a church, and the conference helped us buy cement blocks. We continued sharing our faith, and when the church was completed we had 80 members.

We continued sharing our faith, and three years later the church had grown to 200 members. And today, in a region of about 2,000 people, the church has more than 300 members and as many as 900 who attend Sabbath School.

Praise God for turning a hanging into a huge praise service for His love and mercy. He is always with us, and we can do anything through Christ, who gives us the strength.

Part of our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help build churches in central Mexico. 🌍