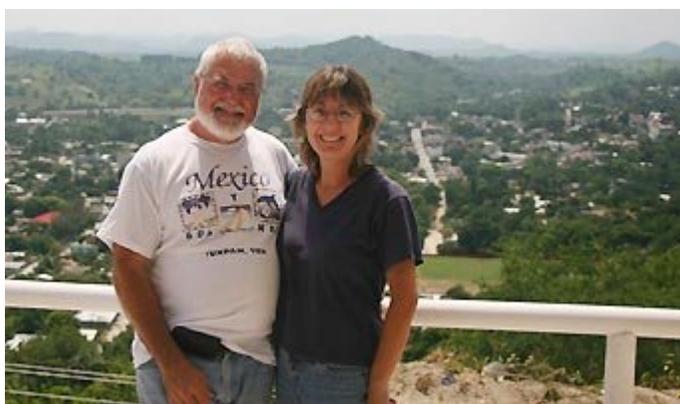


# Houston couple feels at home ministering in Mexico

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TUXPAN, Mexico—Although Dan and Jolene Tucker were commissioned for service in Tuxpan, Mexico, relatively recently as Cooperative Baptist Fellowship field workers, they are no strangers to their mission field.

Through a relationship between their home church of San Jacinto Baptist in Deer Park and Iglesia Bautista Bethel in Tuxpan, the Tuckers have been taking annual mission trips to the Mexican state of Veracruz since 1994.



Dan and Jolene Tucker of Deer Park feel at home in Tuxpan, Mexico, after making annual mission trips there with their home church since 1994.

They never envisioned permanently relocating to Mexico, but after much prayer, Tucker accepted the call to become pastor of Iglesia Bautista Bethel last year.

Around Easter, the couple packed their belongings into a 6-foot-by-12-foot trailer, drove to Mexico and moved into their new home—an apartment above the church.

The Tuckers insist their days are so filled with plans for church building renovations, improvements to the children's and youth ministries, and outreach projects—not to mention sermon writing, sermon translation and Spanish lessons—they hardly have time to feel homesick.

“Having strong ties and relationships with the people here has made our transition easy,” Mrs. Tucker said. “Tuxpan has been our second home for quite awhile.”

Lacking the crime of Mexico's larger cities, Tuxpan is a family-oriented community, with many children and teenagers, the Tuckers noted.

The people of Tuxpan are thirsting for God's word, Tucker added, and his congregation of about 100 people has a heart hungering for missions. The church's motto is “transforming lives.”

After years of learning from and serving side-by-side with American teams from San Jacinto Baptist, the members of Iglesia Bautista Bethel want to get to work in the world discipling others.

“They are ready to be goers and givers,” Mrs. Tucker said.

The church recently approved a five-year plan that would plant three new churches and start a school for children.



Recognizing children make up roughly half of Mexico's population, mission workers Dan and Jolene Tucker of Deer Park plan many activities for Tuxpan's young people. (CBF Photos/Courtesy of the Tucker family)

“It’s a little bit overwhelming,” Tucker admitted. “We need pastors for the mission churches and suitable plots of land for the church buildings. We also have teaching needs, as far as bringing teachers in for the school and creating the curriculum. We cannot do it ourselves, but we can do it with the people God sends.”

Since roughly half of Mexico’s population is under age 18, the Tuckers plan many activities and outings for Tuxpan’s young people.

In April, they held a Bible study and served cake to children on Día del Niño. In May, Mrs. Tucker took 10 youth on a three-day, out-of-town retreat, and the Tuckers planned a day of Bible study and chaperoned fun on the beach for mission children who rarely get to go to the beach. During the summer, they helped their church’s youth praise team plan a community concert with games, music and preaching by a guest speaker.

Over two weeks, the church also held four Vacation Bible Schools. In the first week, 220 children attended programs held at three locations in Veracruz, and 90 percent of the participants were non-members.

One of the VBS locations was in a small community where there had been no Bible school for three years.

“At the end of the week, they pressured us, ‘When are you coming back?’” Tucker said. “The adults would come to the VBS and sit in the back. The first night, we had 40 children. The next, we had 72 children and 30 adults. The response was overwhelming. We told them we’d come back and do a backyard Bible club for the kids and a worship service for the adults on the first Saturday of every month.”

The Tuckers also have discovered the people’s eagerness to learn English.

“Everywhere we go in town, people ask us about English classes. It is connected with economics. If you know English, you are much more

marketable,” Tucker said.

“We have heard that a worker can increase his pay by 30 percent if he can speak English.”

Iglesia Bautista Bethel started English-as-a-Second Language classes in the spring, mostly with church members as students, but members hope to turn the course into an outreach vehicle.

With so much going on, the Tuckers welcome church mission groups, families and individuals who want to minister alongside them in Tuxpan.

“What’s really cool about us being here is that anybody can come participate in ministry with us anytime,” Tucker said.

“We are open year-round to hosting people for a variety of missions opportunities, including medical work, construction work and teaching. Now that we’re here full-time, we’re better able to connect people in the United States with our group here and plug people in to whatever their passions are.”

“It’s not touristy, and it’s not glamorous, but we’ve got a pretty river and beach, and it’s close enough to the United States that people can come,” Mrs. Tucker added.

“The relationships that are formed here—it’s unexplainable. Everyone who comes says, ‘Man, I’m coming back.’ Christian growth is happening all over Mexico, as well as in the Tuxpan teams and American teams. Lives are being changed on both sides of the border.”