

At 100 and 99, South Texas couple still committed to serving God

October 30, 2008

MINERAL—Surviving a century is a rare accomplishment, but Catarino Romero and his wife of 78 years, Margarita, have done something far more significant than survive. They have thrived, living lives of service and significance.

Romero came to the United States with his family in 1914 at age 5. His family first settled in Laredo but soon moved on to Robstown, Beeville and Normanna.

Along the way, he and Margarita married. Finally, they settled more than 70 years ago in Mineral, northwest of Beeville.

After working for a landowner there several years and saving all they could, the Romeros bought 80 acres,

Catarino Romero, age 100, and his wife of 78 years, Margarita, continue to serve at Primera Iglesia Bautista in Mineral.

“First of all, we had to clear the land,” he recalled. “Then we planted cotton and broom corn.” Later, they also brought a small herd of cattle to the ranch.

The Romero family’s focus began to change a few years later due to the efforts of a woman remembered only as “Mrs. Cook.”

“In 1947, a lady by the name of Mrs. Cook at Mineral Baptist Church—she was a kind of missionary for this area—and the children began to participate in the ministries of the church,” Romero said.

A couple of years later, Sostenes Martinez, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista in Beeville, and Milton Leach, associational missionary, held a revival in Mineral to kick off a ministry to Hispanics.

While Mrs. Cook continued to work with the children, a group from Primera Iglesia in Beeville came to Mineral and held afternoon services.

The Romeros and their two oldest children, Mary and Mike, made professions of faith in Christ. Leach baptized all four one November day in a stock tank just south of where the Romeros still live.

“We became involved immediately, because the pastor took us under his wing and disciplined us,” Romero recalled.

Soon, the new converts from Mineral and a few from Pawnee came together to form their own church, Primera Iglesia Bautista in Mineral, where the Romeros still serve.

Very early in the life of the church, which started with 29 charter members, Romero was one of three deacons. And in 1964, the church licensed him to the ministry because he filled the pulpit so many times when a pastor was not available.

Still a deacon at 100

Even though he is 100 years old, Romero still sees his role as a deacon as an important responsibility.

“It’s important to be a deacon, because when you lack leadership as we did often over the years, he sees to the needs of the church and meets those needs. He helps shepherd the church. The deacon doesn’t always supply

and fill in when there is no pastor, but he makes sure someone does," he said.

Mrs. Romero, at age 99, has slowed down a bit, but she still is involved in Woman's Missionary Union activities, and for many years was a WMU leader not only in her church, but also in the association as well, where she served as treasurer.

"It was important, because the women encouraged and saw that the church was active in missions and in every other way," she said. "They made sure the church was informed and active."

"Her testimony and faithfulness were a testimony to the younger women in WMU," her daughter, Frances Guajardo, said.

Her parents' example is the reason so many of the 11 children in the family have stayed involved in the work of the church, she noted.

"I think that has come about because it didn't matter if you weren't ready or didn't have your shoes on yet, when it was time to go, they were out the door, and you were going. We saw how important Christ and the church were in their lives," she said.

A family in ministry

Many of the Romero children have had been leaders in their churches, serving as music directors, deacons and other positions. Frances is married to Alcides Guajardo, whom she served alongside as a home missionary. He also is the current pastor of her parents' church, Primera Iglesia Bautista in Mineral, and was the president of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas.

Their daughter, Pauline Gonzalez, preschool director at Primera Iglesia in Corpus Christi more than 20 years, served as president of the Hispanic

senior adult organization in Texas. Another daughter, Anita, is married to a Baptist University of the Americas professor.

“This little church never grew a whole lot, but it contributed sons and daughters who served all across Texas, other states and around the world,” Alcides Guajardo pointed out.

“Even though we live out here in the woods, our sons and daughters have gone all over to be an influence and witness,” Romero agreed.

While the Romeros are not as active as they once were, they still feel they have something to contribute to their congregation.

“At first, we were good examples. Today, we continue to be examples. But we also are a reminder to others of what God can do because of what he has done in our lives,” Romero said.

His ministry still extends beyond being an example, however. Each week a van picks up the Romeros, and they travel to a senior-adult center where he leads Bible studies. He also uses the time in the van to witness to his captive audience about the blessings of God in his life and in the life of his family.

One of the greatest blessings, he said, is his wife, with whom he celebrated a 78th wedding anniversary in September.

“I am very thankful to the Lord for the many years he has provided for me a companion and the mother of my children,” Romero said.

His children were watching that example as well. The Romeros have attended the 50th wedding anniversary celebrations of three of their children.

“We have been blessed, because God shared his gospel and his Son with our family and has given us a place to live and an opportunity to serve

him," Romero said.