

PURE RELIGION

To Build a House in Ecuador

“In case you do not know where Otavalo is,” President Gordon B. Hinckley said in the April 1998 general conference, “you go to Quito, then you drive up across the equator and come to villages in the highlands of the great mountains of Ecuador, and there are these peaceful and wonderful people” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 115; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 87).

Among these people lived a man named Ricardo, who was not so peaceful or wonderful and who hated the Church. In fact he hated everything about the Church: its members, its doctrines—everything it stood for. Whenever the members of the Church wanted to build a new meetinghouse, Ricardo opposed it. When graffiti appeared on Church property, it was rumored Ricardo had taken part in it. No one knew why Ricardo hated the Church. All they knew was that anytime opposition or persecution arose, Ricardo was at the foundation of it.

One day, an earthquake hit the Otavalo area and Ricardo’s home was destroyed with many others. He had no place to stay, nowhere to live. He appealed for help first here, then there. He appealed to the city, then to the churches. But Otavalo is a humble community, and few had the resources to do anything. Although some wanted to help, it was a case of too many needs and too little resources.

And so it happened that late in October, Ricardo did something he thought he would never do—he knocked on the door of Rafael

Campo, the high priest group leader of the Peguche Ward of the Otavalo Ecuador Imbabura Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“There is something I would like to talk with you about,” he started. “It’s just that my house fell down, and I don’t have the money to fix it. I know we haven’t seen eye to eye in the past and that I have no right to ask anything of you, but the fact remains, I have no house for my family, and I wondered if there was some small way your Church could help?”

Brother Campo had joined the Church 30 years earlier. He was the first to be baptized in all of Otavalo. He had personally witnessed Ricardo’s often vindictive words and actions toward the Church. Numerous thoughts passed through Brother Campo’s mind that day. But ultimately, the words that struck him with the greatest power were those of the Savior, “But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39).

“We have been teaching this for 30 years,” he told himself. “Perhaps it is time to practice what we have been taught.” Later, when Brother Campo explained the situation to his son-in-law and bishop of the ward, Mario German Cacuango, Bishop Cacuango felt the same way.

The next Sunday, during a combined high priest and elders quorum meeting, the bishop and the high priest group leader explained the situation to the brethren of the priesthood.



“We all know this man,” the bishop said. “We all know what has happened in the past. But the man does not have a home and he has come to us seeking help.”

The bishop passed around a list and asked the brethren who desired to help to indicate what they were willing to donate. There were 23 men in the meeting that day. And when the list had finished circulating, 23 names appeared on the list.

One offered to bring five pounds of nails. One said he had some framing wood. Another said he could bring 50 cement blocks. Another offered sand, another labor. Like the widow whom Christ immortalized 2,000 years ago, they did not offer of their abundance, but of their want—they threw their symbolic mites into the treasury and laid upon the altar of sacrifice a humble offering to help a family in need.

After reviewing the list, Bishop Cacuango proposed that the brethren of the priesthood meet at 7:00 a.m. the next morning to help build this man a new house.

When Brother Campo returned to Ricardo and told him what the members of the Church were willing to do, Ricardo’s heart melted. He

fell upon the shoulder of Brother Campo and wept openly, apologizing profusely for the way he had mistreated the Church and its members.

Brother Campo wept as well.

On Monday, November 6, 2000, the combined priesthood quorums of the Peguche Ward of the Otavalo Ecuador Imbabura Stake assembled at 7:00 a.m. and built a modest but sturdy home for a man who only a few days before had been their greatest enemy.

By the time they finished, they had not only built a house, but in the process they had erected a bridge of understanding that may never erode . . . a bridge of service, compassion, and forgiveness.

The example of the faithful brethren of Otavalo—with a simple eloquence that transcends language, culture, and time—epitomizes one of the most difficult of all of the Savior’s teachings, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:44–45).