

Huacshapata: The village of good soil

By Gina Grate Pottenger on September 12, 2013, courtesy of [Engage Magazine](#)



At more than 7,000 feet in elevation, Arequipa is the second largest city in Peru. Nestled into an arid, dusty mountainside even higher above the city, lies the village of Huacshapata. This is its story.

When Rachel Kuhn, a recruiter with [Extreme Nazarene Ministries](#), first visited the village, the Umacollo Church of the Nazarene in Arequipa

had already started ministry in Huacshapata, where the challenges were significant: No electricity, no running water, no public education for the children. It was a community of poor squatters – people who had left rural areas to be close to the city in hopes of finding jobs and a better life for their families. A graveyard filled with tiny plots testified to the great lack of quality health care, especially for the children of Huacshapata, Kuhn said.

The church had put up a hurriedly and poorly constructed building on land that belonged to a school and began ministering to the people.

When the pastor of the church died, his widow, Pastora Susanna Del Aguila, continued the weekly ministry focused on the village children, providing the only nutritious meal the children likely received. She cooked in large cauldrons over an open fire, because there was no running water or electricity, Kuhn said.

Extreme Nazarene Ministries, the church planting missions ministry operating in South America which launched widespread church planting efforts in Arequipa in 2010, targeted the village for a church planting team to come in 2011. Kuhn went with the team to scope out the situation there. What she saw was discouraging.

“There was a huge metal pot over an open fire filled with potatoes and carrots and a little bit of chicken,” Kuhn said. “This little girl is carrying a little bowl with a lid and she takes it and Pastora Susanna fills up the bowl and she goes and sits in the church and eats half of the food and says I’ll take the rest home to my family. She’s 3-4 years old.

“I got in the taxi to go back down (the mountain) and said, ‘It’s too much, God. There’s too many kids without parents; too much death and poverty; there’s no water; not enough housing; no education. I just don’t know how we are supposed to meet all of these needs. It’s overwhelming.’

“God very, very specifically said to me, ‘Rachel, this dry dusty mountain desert dirt is good soil and the seeds that are planted here are going to produce a crop that’s 100 times more than what’s been planted.’”

The ministry sent Vanessa Ayersman and Wendy Véliz Lequernaque, the former an American from the Boston area and the latter a Peruvian, as missionaries to Huacshapata.



Based in Arequipa, Vanessa and Wendy rode several buses once or twice a week to spend time with the children and youth of the village. Their objective was to evangelize and start small groups. As a white North American, Vanessa would attract positive attention to the pair and draw people out; Wendy, with her Peruvian cultural background and language, would build a bridge between the cultures; both would conduct outreach ministries, spend time building relationships with the people and support Pastora Susanna’s existing ministry to the village children.

Every Saturday morning, the three women conducted Bible lessons that focused on grammar. They also held vacation Bible school, which drew about 25 children.

Four to five teens had been helping Pastora Susanna with the children, so Wendy and Vanessa began taking the teens off separately for a youth time. The teens and children in Huacshapata face challenges of domestic abuse, alcoholic parents, and seeing things that children shouldn’t see at home, so Vanessa and Wendy tried to give them positive examples of families through movies and conversation.

“In that time we had about 16 regular teens that showed up every week and about 30 when we did a big event that would pull in friends,” Vanessa said.

They also raised the funds to take four of the teens to a Christian camp five hours south of Arequipa. The camp was attended by youth from surrounding countries. It was the first time for these teens to leave the village.

Yovanna was one of the teens who went to the camp.

“That’s where she really opened up about the things she’d experienced and the questions she had and the guilty burden she’d carried for years,” Vanessa said. “[We] had an altar call and 30 kids came up. They had tender hearts.”



The two women hosted a Quincinera party for four of the teen girls who were turning 15. In Latin cultures, a girl's 15th birthday is a pivotal moment in her life and is often celebrated with a white or fancy dress and a big party. But many poor families cannot afford this. So Wendy and Vanessa found dresses for the girls, did their makeup and hair, and found

sponsors to host the event.

"We threw this big party and had like 100 people or more packed into that little church," Vanessa said.

In the midst of this ministry to the youth, the school on whose land the church had been constructed decided to build a school there, and so the church needed to vacate the property. A short-term [Work & Witness](#) team came and in two weeks they put up a proper chapel for the community using foam blocks – a development in construction that allows an unskilled team to build a solid, inexpensive building in record time.

After two years, it was time for Wendy and Vanessa to go home. But God had done many things for the people of Huacshapata in that time. Kuhn was able to witness the transformation when she returned in November of 2011.



"During that time a school did develop so the children were able to attend school. Huacshapata got power and running water during that time," Kuhn said. "We got to visit the church and this community. They were doing a big event with teens that night and so we go in to this event and there are almost 100 children and teens ...they have packed

out this church. It was absolutely amazing to watch how that promise God had made me in my heart – that this is good soil and I’m going to do amazing things here – was able to come to fruition, that God was doing through His people.”