

A Testing of Faith in



Les Sowiak proclaiming Jesus at the fair.

Pastor Dan Crespo, CC Flower City, New York, had traveled to Puerto Rico as part of a three-man team seeking God's direction for a church plant there. Although this protectorate island of the United States was his parents' homeland, it held no special appeal for him. He grew up in America and, as a pastor, was blessed with a thriving church that began as a church plant out of CC Westside in the Rochester area,

which itself had been an outreach from CC Finger Lakes. His pastors, Henry Tomasso (CC Westside) and Bil Gallatin (CC Finger Lakes), had encouraged Dan to join them on this fact-finding, prayer-led odyssey. All had felt God leading them to begin a work in Puerto Rico. Now all felt that God was calling Dan to leave New York and minister to the people of this island country.

Story and photos by Tom Price

"If you will still abide in this land, then I will build you and not pull you down, and I will plant you and not pluck you up..." Jer. 42:10



PUERTO RICO



Pastor Dan Crespo (left), Pastor Tony Falcione of CC Finger Lakes (right), & Pastor Lloyd Pulley of CC Old Bridge (middle), hosting a Question & Answers session at the Spiritual Warfare Conference.

Shaken and upset, Dan Crespo slipped behind the wheel of the rental car. He was in no mood to appreciate the beauty of Puerto Rico as the ocean glistened an aqua-blue behind him and the mountains loomed dark green ahead in the distance. He was struggling with the revelation that he was the one to begin a church here. Everything, including Scripture, seemed to be pointing to that conclusion.

Dan flipped on the radio and heard a Spanish-speaking minister teaching on Genesis 22 and Matthew 6. His two mentor pastors from New York, Henry Tomasso and Bil Gallatin, had just shared those same Scripture verses a few minutes earlier!



Puerto Rico honors their dual citizenship by displaying the Puerto Rican and U.S. flags.

“Abraham proved that he loved God and was willing to obey him, no matter the costs,” the preacher said. “And God shows in Matthew 6 that He even cares for the birds of the air, so why should we worry about our daily lives, as long as we are in His will?”

Then the preacher on the airwaves abruptly stopped his lesson. He stated he felt God leading him to give a message to a specific person listening in right then, “This message is from the Lord, so listen carefully. There is a pastor driving in a car right now, and God is telling you to leave your country and do what He has called you to do.”

“At that very moment the Holy Spirit came upon me,” Dan exclaimed. “I began weeping, and my heart felt like it was going to burst. I asked the Lord to please stop because I couldn’t receive any more.”

Dan pulled the car to a stop and quieted himself. He then felt the power to do as God had instructed.

A few hours later, Dan called home and shared what had happened with his wife, Lynda. At a women’s prayer meeting that same day she had felt God confirming their upcoming move. She had opened her Bible during the meeting to *Isaiah 42:9, 10*:

Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise FROM the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof.

In amazement and fear, Lynda knew it was the Lord. “I had always said that God wouldn’t call me to be a missionary, but the Lord had a different idea,” said Lynda.

Pastor Henry Tomasso was concerned at first, but he soon felt that the Scriptures confirmed Dan and Lynda’s decision. “It became an amazing witness to me; their step of faith and love of Jesus Christ,” he said.

“The thought of leaving our church in Rochester at first seemed out of the question,” recalled Dan. “Our church was growing dramatically; we were ready to go to three services. I had an assistant pastor and two secretaries. We had outreaches to the community. Everything seemed perfect.” Yet, he was



Nick Crespo (worship leader), Lynda Crespo & Amy Edwards lead the saints in worship at CCPR.



One of the waterfalls at the National rainforest “El Yunque.”



began to cry as I read it. It was telling me my exact situation. The article ended with *Jeremiah 29:11: 'For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.'* At that point, my heart was changed, and I knew I had to go to Puerto Rico.⁵

Eventually all of the Crespo children joined their parents.

Seeing the Fruit

The first breakthrough came when Dan's Bible studies were broadcast on a Christian radio station in San Juan. Within a year, he began to witness an incredible transformation in the ministry that God had entrusted to him.

Young missionaries came from near and far to join the staff. Carla Flood, a student from the CC Bible College in Millstatt, Austria, felt led to move to Puerto Rico to assist in the work as a secretary and leader for the children's ministry. Soon a strong core of believers began to attend.

The most remarkable blessing has been the transformation Dan witnessed in his family. Dan's son, Nick, joined the ministry staff as worship leader. He also took over the young adults and junior high ministry and evangelical outreaches to the community. His alternative rock band, "Abide," started reaching the teenagers on the island. Karlee became the bookstore manager and an assistant in the front office. Lynda home schools their three younger children: Gina, Jeremiah, and Sarah.

"Back in America, my children were immersed in the culture with their friends," he said. "Without the influences from back home, the ministry quickly became a family affair."

"Visitors said they were drawn to the church after witnessing the love all five of my children had for the Lord and their eagerness to serve Him. We realized that this had never really occurred when I was pastoring back in America."

"For the first time all the children began to earnestly seek the Lord and depend on Him rather than on the things of this world," said Dan. "We became so close, as we had never been before."

This past May, teams from CC Old Bridge, New Jersey, and CC Finger Lakes, New York, journeyed to Puerto Rico. The missionaries helped spread the Gospel at a countrywide fair in San Juan. They also assisted in work on the church building.

Three successive years of growth combined with a friendly congregation belie the difficulties that Dan and his family endured in the beginning. The Crespos took a monumental step of faith to begin CC Puerto



Karlee Crespo (left) and Reilly Gonzalez (right) making balloon animals at the fair.

Below: Les Sowiak praying with people at the fair.



convinced that he and his family needed to heed God's direction. Dan turned CC Flower City over to the assistant pastor. The Crespos gave him their rented home, two cars, furniture, and even their cat. Each family member was allowed to save three boxes of material goods.

Count It All Joy When Trials....

Dan moved to Puerto Rico one month later and stayed with relatives. Lynda joined him

next, and the children remained in the States with their aunt to finish school. He had only visited Puerto Rico twice and was not familiar with the culture on the island. He was forced to go back into the construction business to supplement the support for his family. He realized later that it was the fastest way for him to get to know the island and the people – by doing business with the natives.

During a night of despair, Dan felt the Lord speaking to his heart: ***"If ye will still abide in this land, then will I build you, and not***

pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up..." *Jeremiah 42:10*
 "The first year was like digging in the earth and pulling boulders out," said Dan. "There didn't seem to be any fruit from our labors, only hard work."

Then the trials began back in America. Their eldest son, Nick, was attending Bible College in Murrieta but was walking a perilous path. His teachers suggested that he take off a semester until he could conquer the temptations that were interfering with his

studies. Their daughter, Karlee, was associating with a questionable crowd and balked at the notion of moving to Puerto Rico. She refused to cooperate with her aunt and contemplated running away.

"The Lord broke me one night when I was feeling sorry for myself," said Karlee. "While I was out of the room, my aunt placed a Bible on my bed. When I sat down, it opened to an inserted article called, 'Why Do Things Have to Change Just When You Think You Have Them All Figured Out?' I

Chad Clagett, from the Bible College at Calvary Chapel Finger Lakes, shares the Gospel.



Rico, and God has visibly and abundantly honored their obedience. "God has blessed us beyond our wildest dreams," concluded Pastor Dan.

Pastor Dan desires to develop donated land to house a Bible College and short-term missionaries from Calvary Chapels in America who have a heart to advance the Gospel in Puerto Rico. He also believes

that God will allow a Bible-teaching radio station on the island in His timing. While many Puerto Ricans have a knowledge of Christianity and a sincere love for the Lord, they desperately need to hear the Gospel taught in grace and love. ☞



Top: Carla Flood "Church Secretary" ministering to the little lambs at the fair.

Above: "Happy 40th Birthday Pastor Dan!"

The Young adults group from CCPR continue to prepare their hearts for the work at the fair.

Michelle (left) & Lesandra Juarbe (right) fellowship on a Friday evening at the "Clay Cup" coffee house, a ministry of Calvary Chapel of PR.



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Below: The Crespo family
 Top row: Karlee (18), Jeremiah (13), Nick (21)
 Bottom Row (left to right): Gina (15), Sarah (11), Lynda (40), Dan (40)



Above: Team from Calvary Chapel Finger Lakes, NY.



Left: Team from Calvary Chapel Old Bridge, NJ.