

TRANSFORMED

by Biblical Discipleship



Men at U-Turn For Christ in Nairobi, Kenya, tend their vegetable garden. To instill responsibility and decrease costs so the ministry can serve more people, the ranch's approximately 35 participants grow much of their own produce.

Story by Debra Smith
Photos by Ed Compean, unless otherwise noted

U-TURN FOR CHRIST KENYA | PHILIPPINES | MEXICO

U-Turn For Christ ranches in Kenya and Mexico have helped hundreds of former addicts discover freedom in Christ. U-Turn For Christ churches and a School of Ministry in the Philippines train ranch graduates for worldwide ministry and missions.

Pastor Duncan's fatigued body was lit only by starlight. For 2½ hours he dug, praying for strength to continue flinging shovelfuls of dirt into the chilly Nairobi air. Finally at midnight, with aching arms, he stopped. He would return the next night to finish.

Duncan Muya, 26, pastors U-Turn For Christ Kenya. He was digging to demonstrate to the men he oversees that the discipline they receive for wrongdoing—digging and refilling a 5-by-5-foot hole—is something no one is above doing. “At U-Turn, we lead by example,” explained Duncan. “I wanted to show that I’m not any better than they are. No matter where you are in your walk with the Lord, or what ministry position you have, God is still at work in your life. No one is perfect.” The hole was Duncan’s seventh; he dug six as a U-Turn participant in Perris, CA, in 2004 and 2005.

U-Turn For Christ began in Perris in 1993. After being freed by God from their own drug and alcohol addictions, Gerry and Peggy Brown started the ministry to share Christ’s liberty. Today, U-Turn comprises 16 ranches in the U.S., Kenya, and Mexico. Many are led by former participants who know personally the struggle of addiction. Four locations include women’s ranches; others plan to open such. Five Calvary Chapel churches in the Philippines are also part of the U-Turn family of ministries.

Aiming to restore lives and equip participants to serve the Lord, the ranches promote dependence on God—rather than substances.

Personal discipleship and intense Bible study form the core of the program. Ranch schedules include morning and evening personal time with God, daily chores and group Bible study, and community service. During the minimum residential stay of two months, constant supervision provides accountability. In a second phase that is optional but strongly encouraged, participants live off-site and work part-time while continuing to receive spiritual support through daily Bible studies, personal discipleship, and accountability to authority. This stage lasts six months to two years. Serving others, rather than being served, is emphasized throughout.



Pastor Duncan Muya of U-Turn For Christ Kenya

Kenya/Philippines/Mexico

Holes for Grace

U-Turn ranches prohibit smoking, fighting, cussing, sexual immorality, alcohol, and drugs. During the ministry’s early days as Gerry Brown sought a redemptive discipline procedure, explained Duncan, Gerry felt God gave him an analogy. One day in prayer, “He realized a 5-by-5-foot hole is big enough to cover a human,” Duncan said. “So digging a hole can picture burying the old man.”

Therefore we were buried with Him [Jesus]... knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him ... that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

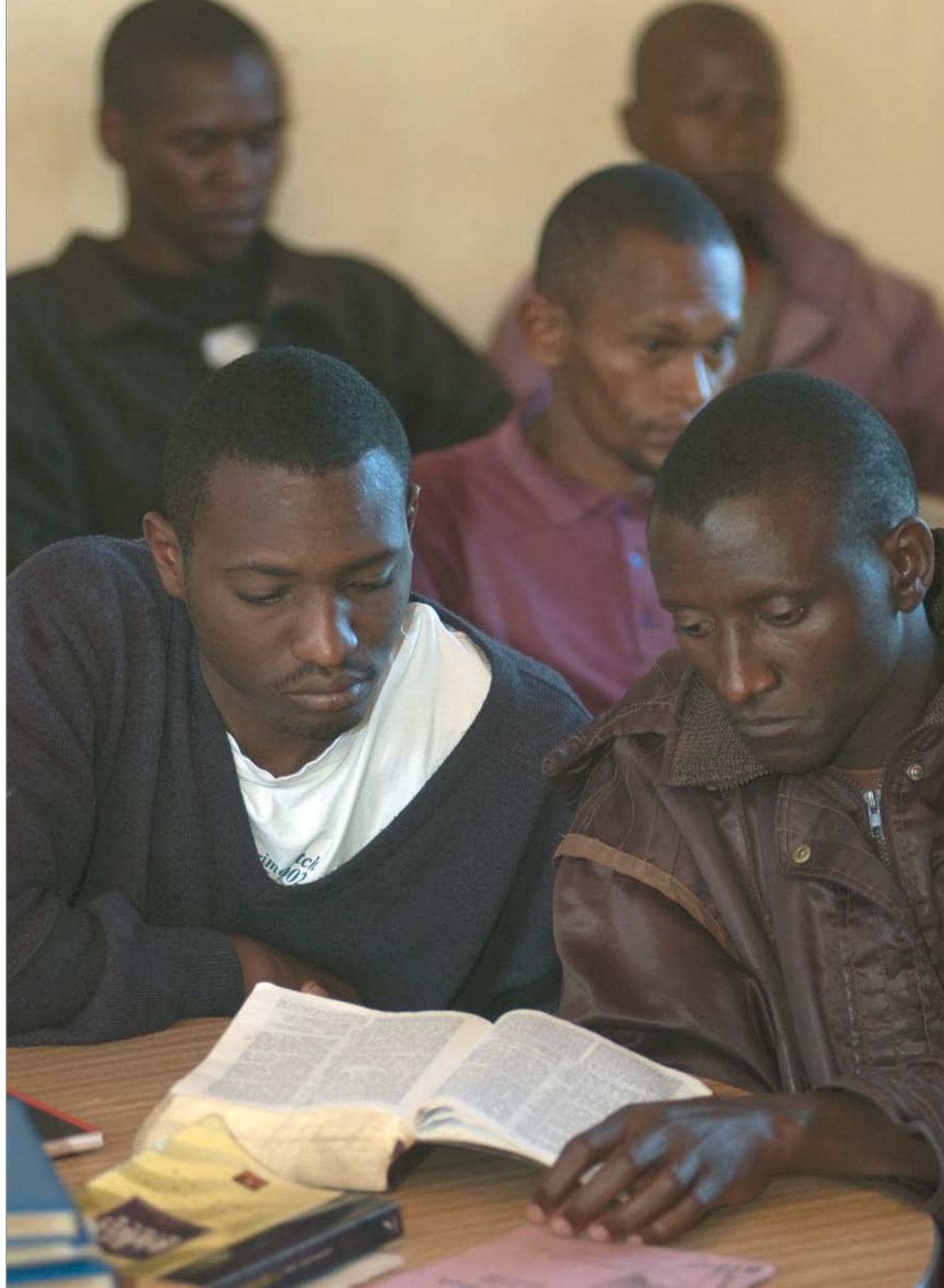
Romans 6:4-6



After tending the livestock and garden, a U-Turn participant carries water for a quick shower before afternoon chapel.



A man at U-Turn For Christ Kenya reads his Bible in his dormitory. Talking in the bedrooms is prohibited in order to allow rest and quiet moments with God.



Studying God's Word together daily at U-Turn For Christ helps unite men from many of Kenya's 40 or more tribes.

"It's about repentance and restoration," said Duncan. Reflecting on his own entry into the program, Duncan added, "U-Turn men are tough. We've been in prison; the streets have built us tough. But the hole breaks you. As you're digging, you go through stages. At first you're angry because you feel you don't deserve it. But God meets you at that hole and starts working on anger and issues from your past. By the time you're re-filling it, you've been broken." During the process, he explained, "The overseers walk around and make sure everyone knows why they're digging. They pray with participants and offer any counsel or guidance needed." While a hole usually takes three or four days, a week is allowed, "So you can just sit in your hole and pray some nights if you want."

Contraband cigarettes led to Duncan's first hole, six years ago in Perris. "The Lord convicted me for having them," he remembered. "God was working in my heart, and I knew I was doing wrong. Plus, I figured it was just a matter of time till I got caught." Duncan surrendered his cigarettes to his program director, Alex Young, and was shocked at being assigned a hole. "Doesn't confession count for something?" he complained. "Yes," Alex replied, "but forgiven sin still brings consequences." And, Duncan recalled, "God did a great work in my life while digging that hole. I had expected to be graced out for confessing, so as I began I kept thinking, *I shouldn't have to do this*. But as I dug, God humbled me. I realized they were right—I shouldn't have disobeyed in the first place. I needed to accept the consequences of my actions."

Restoration and Reconciliation in Kenya

"Alcohol is devastating this nation," Duncan said. "People are using strong, highly addictive brews; the problem is sweeping around Africa. We offer God-based, affordable help."

Albert, Duncan's assistant overseer at U-Turn Kenya, graduated from the program in March 2009. For more than a decade, "I was always drunk, 24 hours a day," Albert recalled. "People nicknamed me DDO—Daily Drinking Officer." A 44-year-old husband and father whose alcoholism estranged him from his family, Albert serves at U-Turn For Christ while seeking to reconcile with his loved ones. "I have seen the hand of God here," said Albert. "He has restored my life. Now I want to let others know that no matter what you have done, God can change you."



Patricia Fleegeer prays for women at a U-Turn For Christ church in Borongan, Philippines. U-Turn ranch participants assist local churches when they visit.

Photo courtesy of U-Turn For Christ

In combating addiction, U-Turn has also brought about racial reconciliation, Duncan said: "At the beginning, the Lord showed me that the wall of separation between tribes would be a huge challenge. He directed me to build a policy of unity," Duncan explained. "For example, only the inter-tribal languages of English and Swahili are allowed, so no one fears gossip they can't understand. We have had men who don't want to accept one another because they're from different tribes. But we have seen the Lord unite people."

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation. Ephesians 2:14

Training World-Changers in the Philippines

The wind blew and waves crashed intrusively into the small coconut-wood boat as James Garwood, a graduate of the U-Turn ranch in Camino, CA, traveled with Pastor Deion Pellejera to preach Christ on remote Filipino islands. Deion, a Filipino teacher at U-Turn Philippines' School of Ministry, often took students such as James on his weekend Bible-teaching and evangelism trips.

"All of a sudden," recalled James, "the boat jerked as the engine muttered its last breath. Pastor Deion asked me, 'How many times have you been shipwrecked?'" Rain and salt stung the men's eyes as the violent sea drove them away from shore. James thought of his camera and California driver's license before thinking, *Material stuff is rubbish anyway*. Deion advised him, "Just hold on—to Jesus, not just the boat—and pray. I don't think we will die; but if we do, we can race each other to heaven," the pastor added, chuckling.

James was comforted by Deion's calm trust in God, though the vessel's lumber continued creaking in the hostile waters. Above the noise of the sea and the storm, however, Deion discerned an approaching voice. "A fishing boat had spotted our lantern," James recalled, "and he towed us to the spot we had aimed for all along!" Though James was late returning for School of Ministry (SOM) class, he felt the experience well worthwhile: "I learned a lot in those hours—much more than in many days of theological studies."

Today James and his Thai wife, Bua, are missionaries among persecuted ethnic groups in the dense jungles of Thailand and Burma. In 2003 when James was addicted to drugs and



In partnership with U-Turn Philippines, Gary Malone of CC Romoland, CA, shares God's Word with schoolchildren.

Photo courtesy of U-Turn For Christ



Loming Guerrero, left, helps a woman select reading glasses at a Philippine U-Turn For Christ church outreach.

Photo courtesy of U-Turn For Christ

At U-Turn Philippines, James was equipped by ministering cross-culturally and learning, through the example of experienced pastors such as Deion, to die to his flesh rather than live for himself. “A variety of people taught us,” said James. “Pastors Ron Brown and Deion were the two men God used most to mold me—Ron through his diligence studying the Word, Deion by his joy and love for Christ. He was always preaching the Word, always learning to live the Gospel of truth.”

Ron Brown pastors the U-Turn For Christ church in Calbayog City, Philippines, and leads the SOM. Brother of U-Turn founder Gerry Brown, Ron moved to the Philippines in 2000 and soon married Marites, a Filipino. The fellowship was begun by U-Turn leaders and participants who frequented Calbayog City on ministry trips.



Ron Brown

Today, the original church has planted four more U-Turn/CC fellowships in outlying areas. Locations where Philippines SOM graduates currently serve include Hawaii, Mexico, and the U.S.

Deliverance from Drugs in Mexico

Angel Baez, a 2003 graduate of U-Turn Perris, now pastors a U-Turn ranch and two Calvary fellowships on Mexico’s Baja California peninsula, near the city of Ensenada. Days before Angel’s first Sunday

revving his car engine on a cliff edge at Four Mile Beach in Santa Cruz, CA, his mother called him, realized his desperation, and directed him to U-Turn. After ten weeks at the ranch, James traveled with other participants and leaders to the Philippines for a two-week outreach. At trip’s end, James’ pastor, Joe Tuccinardi from U-Turn Camino, and Gerry Brown approached him about remaining at the Philippines SOM to be trained for ministry. “I was ecstatic,” recalled James, “and thus began six months of intense biblical training.”

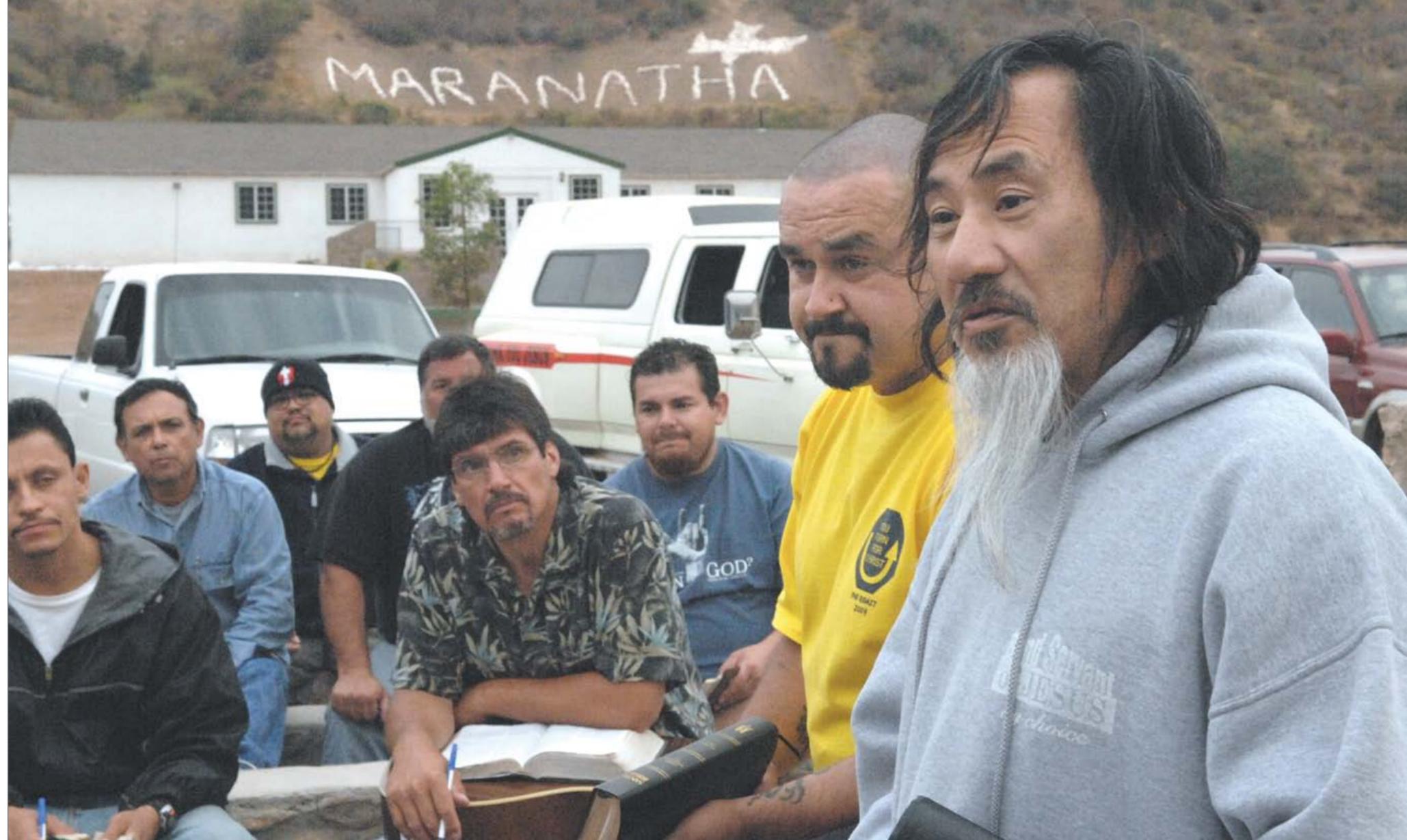


James Garwood



U-Turn For Christ pastors enjoy a morning Bible study led by the ministry’s founder, Pastor Gerry Brown, at the annual U-Turn pastors retreat in Ensenada, Mexico.

Photo by Jason Joseph



Pastor Angel Baez of U-Turn Mexico translates as Pastor John Reno, right, teaches ranch participants. The ministry proclaims Maranatha, meaning Come Lord Jesus, from the mountain behind the ranch.

Participants painted and carried up rocks to create the formation, which can be seen from a great distance. Photo by Jason Joseph

as a church-planting pastor in 2006, “I listened to a sermon about a man in Africa who felt called to preach the Gospel,” Angel recalled. “He would show up and do Bible studies—to an empty park. Before he knew it, people started talking about the crazy guy who preaches to no one. So they started coming to see!” That Sunday upon walking into the newly-constructed church building where he was beginning a fellowship, “There was not a single soul,” Angel said. “I had stacked three milk crates for a pulpit and put out a few chairs. They were empty. I waited till the start time, then 15 more minutes, then 30. I kept thinking, *Of course there’s nobody here. Who would come to hear you preach? You need to split.*” However, Angel continued, “God had given me that testimony because He knew what

was coming. I needed to be faithful.” Angel preached to an empty building—and the next Sunday, people came. The church has since grown to about 200.

Shortly after planting CC El Rancho, Angel also began pastoring the U-Turn For Christ ranch in Ensenada. The program currently serves about 30 men, and Angel and his recent bride, Arely, are praying about beginning a women’s ranch.

Jose “Pepe” Morales came to U-Turn because he wanted to gain weight. “I was doing all kinds of drugs,” he remembered. “Crystal meth, ecstasy, LSD, marijuana, mushrooms, etc. ... I was that kind of guy my whole life. My mother told me about U-Turn, but I didn’t want to hear about God.”

When Pepe was considered for an attractive southern Mexico tourism job in 2007, the only impediment was his size. Pepe reluctantly decided to attend U-Turn, but still—“I didn’t want to know anything about Jesus,” he said. “I just went because I was so skinny.”

During his first week, Pepe was expelled for violating U-Turn regulations. “So I was crying,” he remembered. “My pride was hurt. But I was wearing dark glasses so no one could see my eyes.” Before departing, Pepe crossed paths with Pastor Angel. “He started talking to me about my behavior,” Pepe recalled, “and then he said, ‘If you’re ready to try again, go back.’” Pepe did. “I said I would only stay for two months,” he added, “but that’s when the Lord touched me.” After the initial phase, he committed to another

six months. At their completion, Pepe desired to go into ministry; but knowing of no available opportunities, he searched for a job in Ensenada. The ranch’s assistant pastor, however, soon transitioned to another location—and Angel asked Pepe to fill that position. He also now leads CC Maneadero near Ensenada. “At the beginning, I didn’t want to be a pastor,” Pepe commented. “I didn’t even want to be a Christian—but God had different plans for me.”

U-Turn For Christ
www.urnforchrist.com
info@urnforchrist.com
 951-943-7097