

## **USILA:**

### **THE CHURCH THAT FAITH BUILT**

#### **Dedication**

To the leaders of this great church who had the faith to believe God answers prayer that goes far beyond what most of us can believe. I want to thank them for letting me have a small part in seeing their prayers answered.

To Pastor Tom Manz of Cornerstone Church in Blue Springs, MO and in memory of Pastor Don Duncan of Tree of Life Church in New Braunfels, TX who heard from God and made the prayers of men hundreds of miles away come to fruition. Because of these men hearing and obeying God over 25 church buildings have been built during the last fifteen years.

To Jeff Steen, a WIM missionary, who walked up that high mountain to see a national pastor and his work.

To all missionaries who have welcomed me in their homes and shared their ministry with me, thank you.

May God bless you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Walter E. Fleming".

Walter Earl Fleming in this year of our Lord 2011



**USILA:**

## **The Church That Faith Built**

We Christians as a whole have forgotten the importance of fasting and prayer. This book is written to remind us of what God will do if we only make the effort to reach out to Him in faith through fasting and prayer. Just as He can remove a mountain, He can give us the means to build a church building if we will only believe.



## **USILA: THE CHURCH THAT FAITH BUILT**

**Let me tell you the incredible true story of a people who had the faith to move mountains.**

In 1985 one of WIM's young missionaries, Jeff Steen, was working in the ranches (villages) around Tuxtepec, Mexico. He heard that there were some Christians in a ranch high up in the mountains southwest of Tuxtepec; however, there was no road into the ranch. The only way to get there was to walk in for eight hours and walk he did. On arrival, sure enough, he found a few Christians and their Indian pastor.

Romans 10:15; *“And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"*

Pastor Jorge had a heart to expand the work of the Lord, and he had a small building of about 15 feet by 25 feet. He had already filled that building with believers but could go no farther to expand it without help. So Jeff and Jorge began to work together as brothers in Christ. Jeff said that he would bring WIM'S big tent and hold a

weeklong meeting there. I was to go and help them, but my mother was dying at the time, so our president, Myron Anderson, went in my place. They had a great meeting with over 500 coming from three villages to worship!

They told Myron that they wanted to build a cement block church but had no one who knew how to do it. Myron knew that I had worked for a brick layer years before. He told them that I would come and teach them how to build their church when they had the money to pay for it.

I hadn't laid a block in 25 years. A few weeks later I received a call from Myron about it and agreed to do it. There was an airstrip in the village so a few weeks later I flew in with Jeff to talk to them about building their church. I had drawn up some plans for a building that would seat at least 300. When I showed them those plans, they told me it was too small and it should be enlarged by fifty percent. They said that next summer when their chili crop came in, they would have the money to build.

I asked them, *"Where will you get the blocks?"* They replied, *"Brother Walter, you are going to teach us to make the blocks."* I told them, *"Oh, no! I lay blocks. I don't make them. We are going to have to find some other way to build this church"*

You could just see their disappointment. As we walked down by the river a little later, I saw that there were stones everywhere so I asked them why not make it out of stone? Their joy was restored. These were not flat stones but round ones of ever shape and size, however, I knew I could lay them even though it would take longer. They thought this was a great idea since the stones were free. I was told that their chili crop had just been planted, but after it was harvested they would have the money to buy the cement and steel rebar for the church. We set the date for me to return in the fall after the harvest had been sold. I explained that I would teach them how to lay stones and build their church at that time.

We had a service at the old church, prayed together, and the next day I flew out to Tuxtepec. Then I got into my car for the 1400 mile drive home. In those days I had no money for hotels so I would drive all the way home. This was in the spring of 1987 and I was much younger then.

Now I must tell you what it is like to fly with a bush pilot in Mexico. You drive some distance out of town to the airfield. The runway follows the river so it is not a straight line but makes a gentle bend like a half moon just as the river bends. Along the sides of the river there is a high bluff on the right and dense tall trees on the left. Once we are ready to take off a boy on bicycle must ride out to the field and run the cows off. The plane is a Cessna 185 with

all the seats removed except the pilot's. All of the passengers and the freight are loaded into this nearly empty shell. Just before taking off, they fuel the plane and use a stick to measure how much fuel is in the tank. Since I was the heaviest of the passengers, I was on my knees in front of the fuel gage. It was bouncing off of a quarter of the tank flying in and on *empty* flying out. It is a good time to pray!

To fly to Usila we take off, turn right over the river and just miss the cliff on the other side as we climb toward the pass. We do not fly over the mountains but through the pass just over the tree tops between the cliffs on each side. Fifteen or twenty minutes later we land on a very rough strip of grass on top of a mountain. Then, we walk about a mile to the church in the heart of the village.

That fall my wife, Mae, and I were in Blue Springs, Missouri to speak on missions at Cornerstone Church. As I was leaving after church, Pastor Tom Manz asked me where I was going from there. I told him I was going home for a week and then to Usila to build a church up in the mountains in southern Mexico. **He told me to wait a while because he wanted to give me \$1,000 for that church.** Well, I didn't think I needed it, but a missionary never turns down money. There is always something a church needs.



The next Sunday, as I left my home church of many years, Tree Of Life Church in New Braunfels, Pastor Don Duncan asked me the very same question that Pastor Tom had. I answered, “Well, I am leaving for Usila, Mexico to build a new church for the brethren there”. Pastor Don said. “*Come back into the office, I want to give you a \$1,000 toward that church building.*”

These men had never given money for church buildings as far as I know. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was seeing **faith in action**.

At that time one of WIM's rules was that we should not give money to the nationals toward building churches. It was believed that the people would have a greater commitment to their church if they had built and paid for it themselves.

Now I had \$2,000 toward building a Mexican church so I called the leaders of WIM and the missionary most closely involved and asked them how we should handle the money. We decided that since *We* were not the ones giving them the money, it would be all right.

On Wednesday of that week Steve Bonnett, a young builder from New Braunfels, and I left for Mexico. After visiting other missionaries on the way down, we arrived in Tuxtepec. We were joined by Jeff Steen and Tom

Blaine who was training with him at that time. Immediately, we began rounding up the cement, steel and other materials for the new building. The steel rebar had to be rolled up in order to get it on the plane. The materials were delivered to the airfield and by Sunday we had everything ready to be flown in.

We flew in first and as soon as we landed at Usila, the men of the church were there to meet us and carried our luggage to the pastor's house. Then we were off to church for the Sunday morning service. Counting the men, women, and children, there were about 100 in attendance besides us. After the service, the pastor told everyone to go home and eat and change into their work clothes so we could start building the new church.

After lunch, the men started digging the footing, and the women and children started hauling the rocks from the river about three blocks away. I truly believe some of the stones weighed as much as the children carrying them.

The men made short work of digging the footing for the church. When I called the pastor over and asked him to get the cement and rebar, he said, "*Brother Walter, we don't have any cement. We had a great chili crop, but everyone in Mexico had a great chili crop. So we just barely made our seed money back. We were going to write you not to come, but the men and I decided to fast*

*and pray for a week and ask God what to do. We did, and God told us to build the church.”*



### **Supply plane with cement and the rolled rebar**

I replied, *“Yes Pastor, let’s go get the cement.”* He said, *“Brother Walter, you don’t understand. We don’t have any cement.”* It was with great joy that I could turn to him and tell him that God had heard their prayers and laid it on the hearts of pastors in the states to meet their needs.

I turned to Pastor Jorge and said, *“Brother Jorge, you don’t understand. That plane has been flying cement and steel in all morning. You just have to go to the airfield and pick it up.”* These people are stoic people, but I saw tears

of joy running down his cheeks. Pastor Jorge called for the men to come and carry out God's blessing.

**These men of great faith proved that with prayer and fasting to our God, He will make the impossible possible.**

How many of us would have the faith to dig the footing for a new church when in the natural there seems to be no way to build it.

I know that sometimes I don't have that kind of faith, but I hope that the strength I saw in these men has given it to me, and I pray that God will give the same faith to you.

God reached out and touched the hearts of two pastors 800 miles apart and as much as 2200 miles from Usila to meet their needs and answer their prayers.

They quickly poured the footing that evening, mixing all the cement on the ground by hand. The next day Steve and I began to lay stones in the wall. For the next three days we tried to teach the Indian brothers how to lay round stones to build a wall. We had built about 16 feet of wall in two eight-foot sections some three feet high, but not one Indian had laid a stone that would stay in the wall.

That night as I lay on my cot made of sacking material, I

looked up at the open rafters where a big rat was running back and forth. The temperature was in the 90's at ten o'clock at night. I cried out, *"Oh, God! What am I going to do? I just can't teach them how to lay stone, and if I have to lay all of them, it will take a year or more to build this church."*

Then a thought came to me that was so clear it was as if God was speaking to me; *"Walter you know how to build forms for a cement wall. Just build some forms and lay the stones in them."*

### **The next morning at the building site**

I told them not to mix any mortar this morning until they could bring me four boards ten feet long and one foot wide. With these boards, I built two sets of forms ten feet long and one foot wide. The forms were set upon the walls we had already laid. After that, we mixed mortar and I showed them how to lay the stones inside the forms with mortar. Next they were to throw in some more mortar and then lay in some more stones, then some more mortar and some more stones.

I had them lay the stones against the outside wall and leave a space on the inside in order to have a smooth wall inside the church with the stones showing on the outside.



By the time I had filled the first two forms and moved the first form to the footing, the brothers saw how it was done and they took over to build the rest of the church. **God is so good!**

Jeff Steen flew in the next morning to see how things were going. I could truly tell him that the brothers didn't need me any longer. *"Let's go home."* So we packed up and headed for the airport to fly back to Tuxtepec. On the way, a little boy came running up to Steve Bonnett and said he was going home with him. You see, Steve had shown him kindness all week. The boy had no mother or father, just a grandmother, and she was very old and poor. It was heartbreaking to have to tell him we could not take him. I don't think that Steve ever got over the hurt of

leaving that boy. It hurt him so deeply that he would never go back to Mexico with me.

While this was going on, the pastor came up to ask us to go back to the church since there were two men who had come to see us. We found two elderly men who had walked all night from a village about a six hour walk from Usila. One of them told us that last night he had a dream about two Anglos that were in Usila building a church. It was so real to him that he woke up his brother and told him about his dream. The brother said, *“Let’s get up and go see this thing.”* They just wanted to see us. I have no idea why the Lord wanted these men to see us and the church, but I can tell you that it sure moved Steve and me.

The next day we left Usila and traveled 1400 miles north before reaching our loved ones and home. Later I told Brian Leifeste, the youth leader at Tree of Life Church, about our experience. He said he would like to take the youth group to see the village and hold a youth meeting there for at least three days.

That fall we took Brian and his group to Usila. There were too many of us to fly in. So we had to take a bus for a 45 minute drive to the dam below the village and then a two hour boat ride up from the dam on the lake. Next, we walked for an hour to a river crossing where we had to ferry our group to the other side. One of the girls fell into the river between the boat and the bank. Thank God, we

were able to pull her out without her getting mashed between the bank and the boat. From the river we still had a final three hour walk to Usila and the church.

After about two hours of that walk, the girl who had fallen into the river told me that she just could not go on. I explained that I was 59 years old and if I could make that walk surely she could. However, I did add, “*if you just can't make it, you can stay here and three days later we will be back for you*”. Instantly she found the energy to continue walking and was a great help in the meetings later in the trip. Well I did make it, but I was the last one dragging up the rear.

We stayed there for three days and had a wonderful time and great meetings. The youth went door to door inviting young people to the services that we had each afternoon and night. The boys slept in the church and went to the bushes and the group of girls slept in the one house in this village of 5,000 that had an indoor bathroom. Three of these youth are now in the ministry or in missions, how about that!

There were two other men I must mention: Pete Farias, who has made many trips over the years as a van driver, interpreter, builder and fix-it man. He has been a blessing to me and missions for the last 28 years. The other is Maurice Morris who has driven me and mission teams for



many years. Both men have been invaluable in many capacities. They not only drive the vans, they repair them if we have a problem. In addition they interpret, help in medical missions and building churches. And I must add that they did so at their own expense.

Though I stayed in touch with Missionaries Jeff Steen and Tom Blaine during the intervening years, I was not able to return to Usila. I began to feel that I must go there to see the brothers at least one more time for I was 77 years old by then. I had learned that Pastor Jorge's prestige had increased immeasurably because of that church building. He had been elected a leader of the village. Under his leadership, they built a road into the village, as well as a town plaza and some cement streets in the village. The church had grown to over 300. Praise God for small beginnings!

Well, the years had passed at the blink of an eye so I called Tom Blaine who was still working in Tuxtepec and told him of my decision. I asked him to tell the people I was coming to visit Usila and to see how they were doing. Then I called Maurice to set a date for him to drive us down in his van. After two days of hard driving we arrived in Tuxtepec in May 2005. We went to visit Tom's church in the city on Sunday morning. They had over 300 members and it was a great meeting.

After lunch, we set out for Usila 28 miles away up the river to the southwest. After 30 minutes on pavement, we hit the rock and dirt road. The trip took a little over four hours up the mountain.



Most of the men were there to meet us. **What a great reunion!** As I looked at the church it didn't look as it had when I last saw it twenty years before. Now it had a cement roof and the grounds around it had been cleared. Inside I saw painted walls and steel windows with glass where there had been only wooden shutters in the past. There were benches instead of the old board seats and a raised platform of cement.

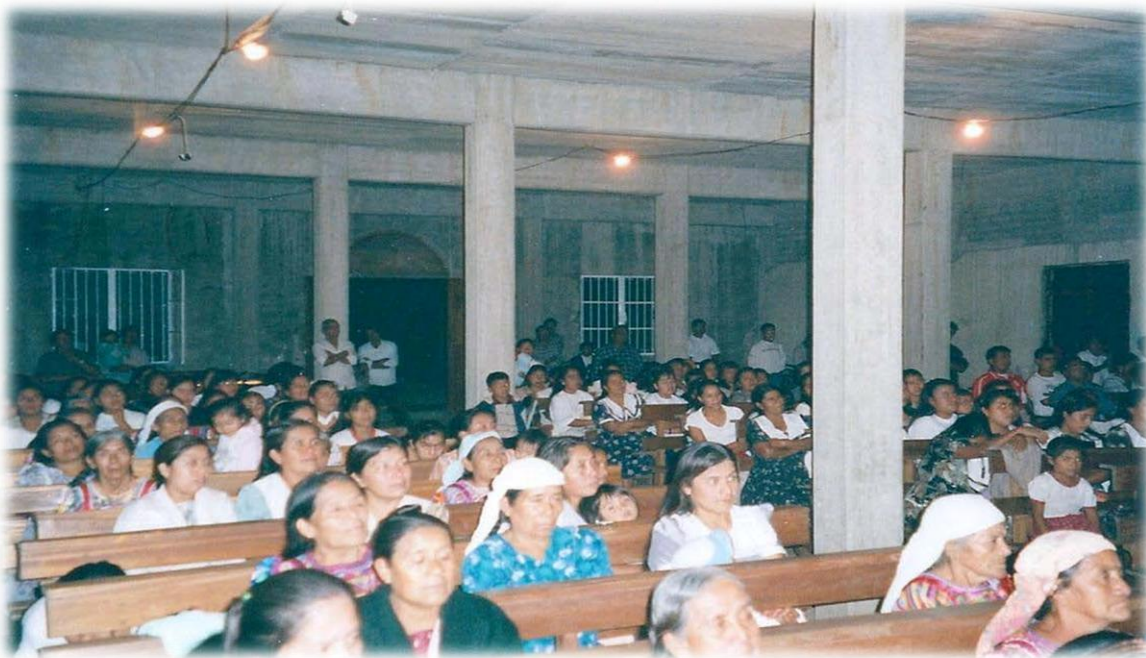
Pastor Jorge told me about raising the money. Since they didn't have churches from the states to come up with

\$2,000, they wanted to do it themselves. The funds came from the brothers and sisters two pesos at a time or sometimes a whole ten pesos at once. Then he said the man who owned the dump truck loaned them his truck. The man who owned the gravel pit gave them the gravel, and the man who sold sand gave them the sand. The whole village turned out to help pour the roof, mixing it on the ground by hand and carrying the cement up a wooden ladder one bucket at a time. They poured the roof in just three hours and then had a big picnic on the grounds.

That night when I got up to preach there were over 350 souls there on a Sunday night with no less than 11 guitar players.



**Guitar players**



**Glorious Praise and Worship  
on the mountain top in Usila**



**Walter preaching with two interpreters, Tom Blaine in Spanish, Pastor Jorge from Spanish to dialect**

As I was leaving I knew that I would never see Pastor Jorge again in this life. I said, *“I regret that I am unable to speak to you in your own language, but there will come a day when we will all be together in heaven and we will speak the same language.”* To say farewell to the people of Usila was a very emotional time for me. This was the greatest evidence of faith and answered prayers that I had ever experienced.

**THIS WAS TRULY THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR THAT CAME TO PASS BECAUSE A FEW MEN FASTED, PRAYED AND STEPPED OUT**

## **IN FAITH BELIEVING THAT GOD WOULD HONOR THEIR PRAYERS.**

I praise God for letting me be a small part in His moving drama with men like Pastor Tom Manz and Pastor Don Duncan whose hearts were open to hear God and to give the money to get this church started.

I know that there are men of faith all over the world that do the same and have the faith to say unto the mountain, **“GO AND JUMP INTO THE SEA”**.

*“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*  
(Mark 11:24 NIVUS)

These men women and children were not building for themselves, but to the glory of their God. It was a labor of love that by faith they built a house to the Lord much better than their own homes.

For the people of Usila this church building made of stones taken from the river is like the “Memorial Stones” set up by the children of Israel in the Jordan River after God parted the waters for them.

*“When all the people had crossed the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, “Now choose twelve men, one from each tribe. Tell them, ‘Take twelve stones from the very place where the priests*

*are standing in the middle of the Jordan. Carry them out and pile them up at the place where you will camp tonight.’ ””*  
(Joshua 4:1-3 NLT)

I WANT TO CLOSE WITH THIS; if God calls you to do something, He will provide the means to do it. Just step out in faith and you will find the greatest joy of your life fulfilling God’s plan for you.

*““Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, „Go, throw yourself into the sea, ” and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.” (Mark 11:22-23 NIVUS)*

## **CAN YOU BELIEVE YOUR GOD?**

If you can, our God will move heaven and earth to make your vision come true. God has a plan for every believer and there is no retirement. Each of you is called in some way to do His work.

At the age of eighty three I realize that the years have gone by quickly so I must make the most of the time I have.

Walter Earl Fleming, Bondservant of the Lord

## **THE REST OF THE STORY**

Just as God blessed the church of Usila for the faith of its people, He has blessed the churches whose pastors obeyed the prompting of God's Holy Spirit to give even though it may have seemed a hardship at the time.

Both Tree of Life Church and Cornerstone Church were relatively new churches with young pastors at that time. They had started in homes and storefronts, but they have experienced a tremendous increase in membership through the years since then and have had to build to accommodate their growth.

Each church continues to support missionaries and missions with finances, as well as making short term mission trips to build churches. Twenty five church buildings in Mexico have had the services of the members of these churches for building projects. In addition to working on special projects with the youth of Mexico, they have well equipped Medical teams to give care and dental services to the cities or villages.

In these last years, they have expanded their trips to many other countries around the world. God has given many young people a vision for becoming a missionary through hearing the stories of missionaries and through their own experiences on a mission trip.



## Mission Teams



**Tree of Life Church building  
on the side of a mountain south of CD Valles**



**Cornerstone Church adding a metal roof  
on a church Tree of Life Church started**



**Cornerstone Church working on the church  
in the city of Huauchinango**



**Clowns and puppets to entertain the children**



**Dental team working on one patient  
with others in line to be treated**



**Registering to see the doctor**

About the cover:

My thanks to Kathryn Taylor of World Indigenous Missions. She had the skills to design the cover and make it beautiful. Of course it had to be a picture of the church in Usila, but I am especially pleased with her design. My trips to Usila are cherished memories and the people there have a special place in my heart.