

REPORT: MARCH 2026

Wounaan Discipleship

Einer & Girlesa Zuluaga



Dear friends,

On behalf of Multiply, thank you for your faithful prayers and financial partnership that continue to make it possible for the Gospel to advance among the Wounaan indigenous peoples of both Panama and Colombia. We are excited to share more details of the fruit of our first Panamanian Wounaan mission trip to reach the Wounaan in the Chocó region of Colombia.

In December, as we made our way to the Siriguisua River in Choco, Colombia, our team (Obdulio and Alina Isarama, Ricardo and Argelida Membache, Chilin Piraza, and me, Einer) faced many challenges. Venturing into the jungle meant not just encountering transportation difficulties, but also being in close proximity to guerrilla drug traffickers. Added to this was the opposition from traditional Animistic Wounaan leaders, who do not allow Christianity into their indigenous communities. Yet even though evil was evident, God's grace was greater.

What the Enemy Meant for Evil

Initially, we were heading directly to the village of Buena Vista, a community of about 1,400 people living in the middle of the jungle. However, a young Wounaan man living there had committed suicide—the eighth that year—and community leaders decided to relocate all the inhabitants so that the local witch doctors could perform an exorcism of the village, going house to house to cast out the evil spirits inducing people to commit suicide.

The Enemy tried to block us, but God used it for good: we diverted to the town of Balsalito, and found that He had already prepared a way for us to minister there.

We stayed in the home of a non-Christian Wounaan family—parents-in-law of our disciple Nicio. There, we had the opportunity to meet Neftalí, a teacher at the town's public school who came to faith ten years ago through his wife Nohemí. They are a beautiful couple, and passionate about Jesus. Although the Gospel is not allowed in that town, they have remained steadfast and even built a very large building for their meetings, which are attended by a small group of new believers.

Neftalí told us that, long ago, many religious people of different denominations came to their area, but these so-called evangelists used their ministry among the Wounaan as a front to seek funding from Latino and North American ministries, inflicting countless instances of spiritual abuse.

“They caused more harm than good,” Neftali said, “but God sent others, missionaries from [what is now called] Multiply, to help us see the difference between Animistic beliefs and true faith, between our own cultural ways and God’s Way. Now, we are growing in our understanding of what it means to be disciples of Jesus.”



Neftali, Noemi and their small group of believers in Balsalito expressed their desire for the Wounaan of Panama to mentor them in developing a serious discipleship ministry so that the Gospel could be heard, understood, believed, and spread. We began planning what this could look like, rejoicing at how God had led us to them.

Pictured here are the believers in Basalito, and our team.

Light in the Darkness

Four days later, we left their village and continued on a six-hour journey through estuaries and rivers back to Buena Vista. The villagers were only now coming back; the witch doctors having finished their four-day cleansing rituals. We went to the home of some believers, who received us with great joy, and also received the gifts we had brought from our sending church: toys, clothing, medicine. Dinner was a family celebration! Pictured here are some of the believers in Buena Vista, and our team.



That evening, we met privately with the small group of brothers and sisters in the village. Together, we praised God and read the Scriptures. Then, the next day, we spent the entire morning teaching and ministering one-on-one to the leaders of this community—the



Wounaan of Panama ministering to the Wounaan of Colombia. In the afternoon, we went to the river to baptize some brothers who had not yet taken this step; among them was Felipe, a pastor! On the river, we sang songs in their language, and shed tears of gratitude. They knew why they worshipped; they knew that God was with them. Pictured here is pastor Felipe being baptized.

It was all so beautiful. Until we received some horrible news.

A young man from the village, barely nineteen, had attempted suicide. We rushed to the village to see what we could do, but he had poisoned himself and was already foaming at the mouth and convulsing on the ground. His parents stood helplessly by while this young man was dying in front of their eyes.

“Listen!” we told them urgently. “You must take your son to the hospital in Pizarro!”

“How?” they asked, in despair. “The municipality is four hours away. It’s too far! We have no money for gas.”

This was very sad for us, so we spoke with the village leader. “Let us help!” we told him. “Our team will give what we have for expenses—but he needs to get to the hospital now!”

It was agreed, and we were relieved to see the young man taken away to be treated. Would it be too late for him? There was little time for worrying; God had more for us to do.

By the Boatload

That evening, young people began to arrive—literally by the boatload! They came from both this community and also from other communities nearby, some travelling two to three hours up river in small rowboats. One eighteen-year-old girl came all alone, travelling in a small boat with a very old motor that stalled every five minutes. These young people, some as young as fourteen, were determined to meet their Wounaan brothers from Panama, and hear the Word of the Lord.

Many of the teens had already heard the Scriptures from the Wounaan believers of Buena Vista, under the leadership of three young couples and an older couple in their mid-forties (Nicio's parents). They were hungry for more.

That night, they played guitar and sang together, so beautifully that it moved our hearts.



Still, we could not stop thinking about the boy who took poison.

Armed Guerrillas and the Army of God

The next day, we decided to leave for the municipality of Pizarro, where the poisoned young man had been taken. We had heard that the guerrillas had decreed an armed strike and that no one could travel safely on the rivers, but we misunderstood the dates and thought we still had time. When we arrived, we were greeted with astonishment.

“How did you survive?” we were asked. “Terrorists are attacking everyone on the rivers!” Realizing the danger we had unknowingly been in, we thanked God for protecting us with his invisible army.

The community was in lockdown, and we were forced to shelter for three days in a small, local hotel. During that time, the parents of the young man who had taken poison came to find us. We asked about their son, and were told that he was still in the hospital, but out of danger. “It is a miracle!” the father said. “There are not even any internal injuries or burns from the acid he swallowed.”

Even as we gave thanks, we ached to think that any young person could come to that place of hopelessness, seeking to take their own life. Suicide is an epidemic among the Wounaan of Colombia. We heard that another teenager in Buena Vista had hung himself, and our hearts were heavy with grief. We asked the Lord, how can we bring the hope of the Gospel into this darkness?

That same day, God answered. The mayor of Pizarro wanted to meet us.

A Person of Peace

The mayor was an imposing man of African descent, with a snowy white beard (pictured with our team here). Welcoming us into his home, he told us, “I wanted to meet you because I have heard



about Nicio and his wife and the things that are happening in that small group of Christians in Buena Vista. It is impressive! That is why I sent the guitars over the other night.”

The *mayor* donated the guitars? We were astonished. We had no idea!

Speaking about his concern over the surging number of suicides among the indigenous Wounaan and Emberá in the area, he said, ““Your beliefs give you hope. Our young people are in great need of hope right now.”

“Psychology has not worked,” he went on. “More policing does not work. I don’t know what else to do to save these young lives! But this message you preach about Jesus,” he said, “it seems to make a difference. What I see in this small group of Christians is wonderful. So, I will do all in my power to support your teams!”

“So, are you also a believer?” I asked him, grinning.

“Well,” he replied, “I do believe that Jesus is the savior of mankind. But I am not really part of any religious movement or group.” *Not yet*, I thought to myself.

Later, the mayor donated a fiberglass boat and encouraged us to continue to send missionaries to the jungles of Choco. It was such an encouragement!

“We are so tired!”

While we were staying at the hotel in Pizarro, some of the Wounaan from Buena Vista began to arrive, wanting to talk more with us. Some were furtive; the local witchdoctor had threatened them with illness and spells if they approached Christians.

“We are like prisoners,” they explained. “He curses Christians, he claims to be God, he demands that we renounce our faith in Jesus. This man has caused great harm to our community, including through sexual assault.”

We began to understand that the collective anxiety and depression in their community came not just from false beliefs, but from different forms of abuse. While we prayed with them, they expressed their desire to experience walking with God.

“We are so tired!” they said.
“We want to let go of beliefs that only bring destruction and death. We want to be free from fear!” That day Nicio’s parents made a decision to embrace the faith, saying that they were willing to pay the price of walking with Christ. Then, the parents of the young man who had taken poison did the same. We were one, in Christ.



There is a one-nes that God intended for the Wounaan of Panama and the Wounaan of Colombia; it is impossible to separate them. These two people are truly one nation, and God desires for them to be one in His Son. The love our team feels for their brothers and sisters in the Choco jungle impels them to cross rivers, risk their lives, and spend themselves to bring the light and life of Jesus into communities full of darkness and death.

Please pray for this vision!

Prayer Requests

As we strategize for future mission and discipleship initiatives, there are several specific prayer requests:

- Pray for Panamanian artisans who are strong in the faith and skilled in woodcarving to facilitate discipleship groups through occupational therapy.
- Pray for the three leadership couples of Buena Vista to become self-sustaining through small businesses.
- Pray for a second trip in June, 2026, to provide discipleship training for the Wounaan leaders of Buena Vista and Basalito.
- Above all, praise God for protecting our team from danger!

Thank you for sharing in this ministry!



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