

Desideria Yáñez:

A PIONEER AMONG WOMEN

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After a dream led her to the restored gospel, this early Latter-day Saint from Mexico became a stalwart pioneer of the Church.

One night in early 1880, Desideria Yáñez was sleeping in a comfortable pueblo in the cactus-lined hills of Nopala, Mexico. As she dreamed, she saw a pamphlet titled *Voz de Amonestación* (*Voice of Warning*) that would change her life and aid her spiritually. Upon waking, she knew the men publishing the pamphlet were in Mexico City.¹ She also realized it was physically impossible for her to travel the 75 miles (120 km) to the city, but she was determined to follow the impressions of the dream and find a solution.

The Faith of a Family

Desideria discussed her dream with her son José. He believed her and journeyed to Mexico City in her place. He began anxiously talking to people and eventually met Church member Plotino Rhodakanaty, who directed him to the Hotel San Carlos.²

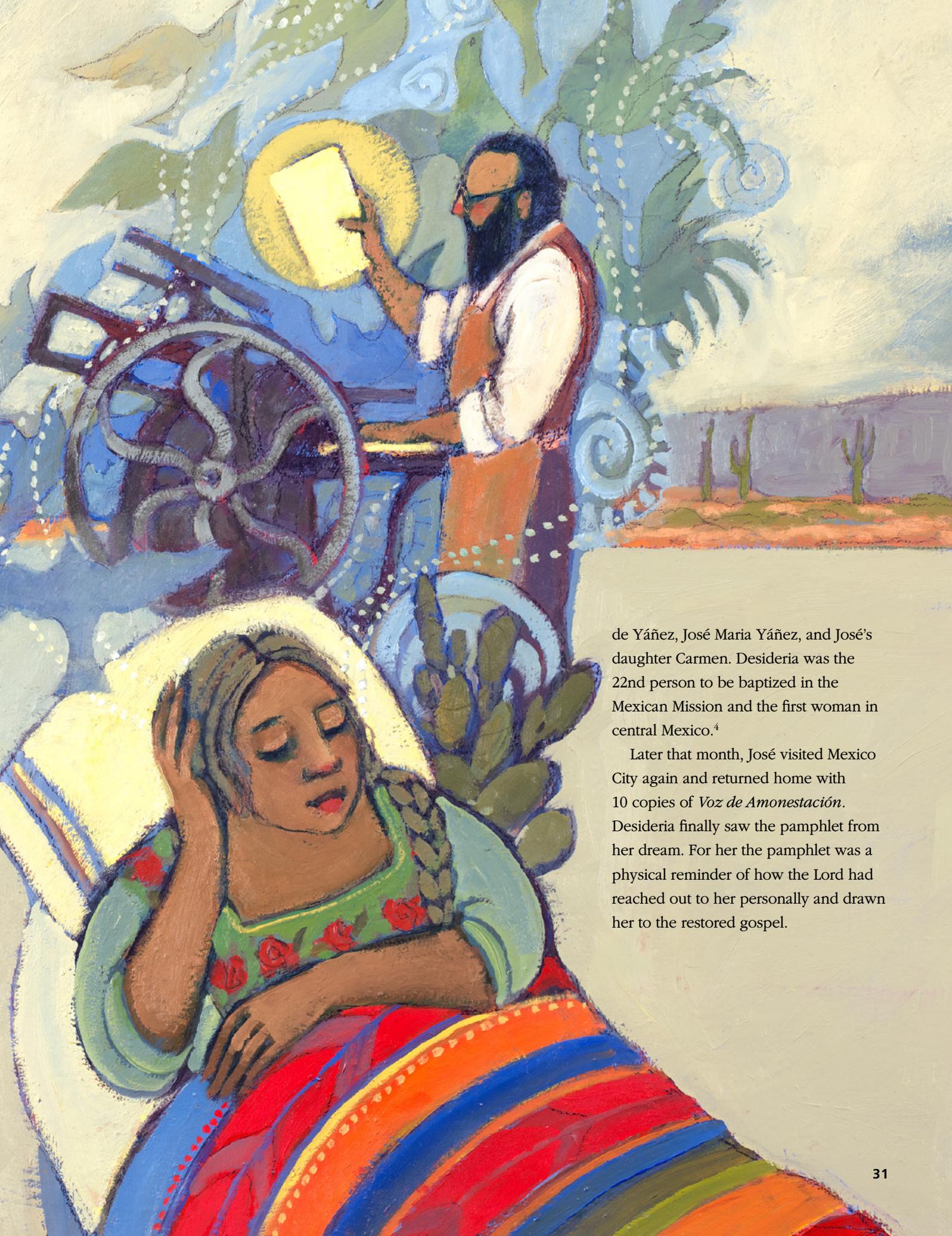
At the hotel, José found Elder James Z. Stewart correcting the printer's proofs of

Parley P. Pratt's *Voz de Amonestación*, the same pamphlet Desideria had seen in her dream. After José talked to Elder Stewart about Desideria's dream, the missionary gave José some other Church pamphlets, since *Voz de Amonestación* was not finished, and Elder Stewart noted the interesting conversation in his journal.³

Many dusty miles later, José reunited with his mother. Upon learning of the pamphlet's reality, Desideria knew that the dream had been true. She pored over the pamphlets José had brought her, and the basic teachings of the gospel they contained touched her soul. She desired to be baptized.

Found by a Missionary

Because Elder Stewart was still completing *Voz de Amonestación*, Elder Melitón Trejo, a missionary from Spain, was sent to Nopala to find Desideria and José. On April 22, 1880, Elder Trejo baptized Desideria Quintanar



de Yáñez, José Maria Yáñez, and José's daughter Carmen. Desideria was the 22nd person to be baptized in the Mexican Mission and the first woman in central Mexico.⁴

Later that month, José visited Mexico City again and returned home with 10 copies of *Voz de Amonestación*. Desideria finally saw the pamphlet from her dream. For her the pamphlet was a physical reminder of how the Lord had reached out to her personally and drawn her to the restored gospel.

The First Spanish Book of Mormon

At age 72, Desideria found her health growing worse. By 1886 she was confined to her little home in San Lorenzo near Nopala. One dreadful evening, thieves broke into her house, beat her, and escaped with \$3,000.⁵ Desideria survived. Instead of despairing, Desideria waited in faith for the Lord's help. She had already learned from her dream that the Lord was aware of her situation.

Then in October 1886, an Apostle and two mission presidents unexpectedly visited the area. José Yáñez told them about his mother's suffering. The brethren came swiftly to Desideria's home. Desideria was delighted to meet Elder Erastus Snow of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and have him place his hands upon her head for a priesthood blessing.

During the brethren's visit, the new mission president, Horace Cummings, surprised Desideria with important news. He told her that the first translation of the entire Book of Mormon in Spanish was near completion in Salt Lake City. Desideria quickly requested a copy of the forthcoming scripture.

A month later, President Cummings returned to Desideria's home with a copy. Of the experience, he wrote: "Visited old Sister Yáñez, an invalid and gave her an unbound Book of Mormon which I had sent to Utah for. It was the first in Spanish that had been received in Mexico. . . . She seemed much pleased with it."⁶ This would be the last visit of a missionary to Desideria during her lifetime.

Isolated but Not Forgotten

By 1889, just 10 years after the restored gospel arrived in central Mexico, Church leaders had felt prompted to shift the Church's limited resources to establishing colonies in northern Mexico. The members near Mexico City, about 1,000 miles (1,600 km) from the colonies, felt like sheep without a shepherd as missionaries left for the north. Though still surrounded by her family, Desideria knew that they would have to practice the gospel in isolation. This meant she would never have the benefit of joining the Relief Society or of receiving temple blessings while alive.



But she recognized that the Lord knew her. Through His servants, the Lord had manifested His desire to minister one by one to His flock. Because of her dream, the priesthood blessing, and the Book of Mormon, Desideria could testify of her absolute assurance that God cared for her spiritual and temporal needs. Though this knowledge did not prevent trials and challenges from occurring in her life, it did give her the confidence that the Lord would always ease her burdens.

An Enduring Legacy

In 1903, missionaries returned to southern Mexico for the first time since 1886. They met with José, who summed up Desideria's endurance to the end and legacy of faith by saying that both his wife and his mother "died in full faith of Mormonism" and that he had "hope of dying in Mormonism."⁷

After having her dream, Desideria embarked on the gospel path, becoming a Latina pioneer of the Church. The seed of faith planted through a dream in 1880 was not wasted; it had sprouted forth as Desideria made the covenant of baptism and endured her trials in faith. It

would have been easy for Desideria to wither away spiritually as she and her family practiced the gospel isolated from the rest of the Church, but she held on. She knew God cared and watched over her small part of the world.

Though she couldn't leave her home, she became an example of faith, diligence, obedience, and fortitude not only to her family but also to each of us as we seek to carry on the pioneer spirit. ■

NOTES

1. See Alonzo L. Taylor Mission Papers, July 10, 1903, and Mexican Mission Manuscript History and Historical Reports, July 7, 1903, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
2. See Taylor Mission Papers, July 10, 1903, and James Z. Stewart Papers, Feb. 17, 1880, Church History Library.
3. See Stewart Papers, Feb. 17, 1880.
4. See Moses Thatcher, Journal, Nov. 20, 1879, and Stewart Papers, Apr. 26 and June 20, 1880, Church History Library. Desideria was the first woman baptized after the Mexican Mission opened in 1879 in Mexico City. However, a brief mission to the northern city of Hermosillo in 1877 resulted in the baptism of five persons in a nearby village, including Maria La Cruz Paros, the first known Mexican female convert. Official Mexican Mission records created by Moses Thatcher list Desideria Yáñez as the first woman convert, when she was in reality the second. See also Louis Garff Reminiscences, undated, Church History Library.
5. See Horace H. Cummings Papers, Oct. 24, 1886, Church History Library.
6. Cummings Papers, Nov. 29, 1886.
7. Taylor Mission Papers, July 10, 1903.

