

## ***LATIN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT***

*Developing Healthy Churches and Church Leaders in Latin America and Beyond*

### ***Mission and Ministry Newsletter***

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#### **A Decade Plus!**

In June of 2006, I began writing regular reports about mission work in Latin America. I had traveled to Latin America at least once a year since 1997, often making multiple trips each year. I thought it would be good to capture what I saw, what I was doing, and the progress in the churches.

The title that was used for the first reports, *Hope for the World*, became *Eternal Hope (Esperanza Eterna)* in 2007. By 2009, the title and subtitle of the reports had evolved to *Esperanza Eterna: Bringing Hope for Eternity to Latin America and Beyond*. Beginning in 2010, I was able to give full-time attention to the mission, having retired from my university employment and having completed an interim ministry after my retirement.

That gave me time to focus more intently on the needs of the churches and to evaluate how best to meet those needs and to help the churches move forward. I traveled extensively in Latin America, met with others who were involved in Latin American missions, and spent lots of time talking to the members and leaders of churches in Latin America. In 2014 the reports assumed the title you see above, using the official name of the mission work, with a subtitle that reflects a dual focus on healthy churches and healthy church leadership.

This is my eighth year of full-time involvement in this effort: to develop healthy churches and church leadership in the Spanish-speaking world, primarily in Latin America but also in the Hispanic churches in the U.S. God has blessed the effort beyond my expectations—the opportunity to work with hundreds of churches each year, to see elders in more and more churches (12 of the churches I am working with most closely), thousands of baptisms (I have quit collecting annual statistics, but for several years there were 2500-3000 baptisms each year in the churches I work with), more and more mature and healthy churches capable of becoming self-governing, self-sustaining, self-edifying, and self-duplicating!

The gospel has not lost its power! (picture right, a Bible study in Peru with some new Christians and several non-Christians). In my observation, our first problem (and therefore, perhaps the biggest problem) is how to make contact with interested people. To find those who are interested, we have to make more contacts, and we have to learn how to develop interest. In addition, we must encourage and facilitate processes that help every member share the gospel, we must have good evangelism studies available, and we must learn how to close a study so the result is a commitment to Jesus. The churches that are growing the fastest have the members actively working in evangelism. I receive reports every month from people who are using the evangelism studies *En Pos de la Verdad* and are amazed at how many students decide to follow Jesus in baptism without cajoling, or coercion, or manipulation. In recent months, reports have come from Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru. “These studies work!” “The student asked us about baptism, we did not have to ask him.” “These studies help people make a decision. I am amazed!” “We did what you recommended to close the study, and it worked—four baptisms!”



Mission work is principally about taking the gospel to the world! I am thankful to my Lord that he has put me in a place where I see that happening regularly! Churches are growing in number and spirit, in health and maturity, wanting to share the gospel, excited about establishing new churches in their regions!

In this report, you will find a summary of stateside travels and activities, a report on my mission trip to Guatemala and Honduras, and a special projects update.

### Travels and activities during the last three months

The last part of November, the month of December, and the early part of the new year are traditionally the time when I work on writing and producing studies and materials for the coming year. I spent most of the last three months stateside, visiting in several congregations. I accepted two invitations to share a presentation of slides of our trip to Israel and Jordan. I received my first invitation to do a “Seniors Retreat”! I met with several who have expertise and experience in AV production. I participated in two “Mission Emphasis” Sundays and was blessed to teach and preach in four U.S. churches. I am thankful to have a little more time than usual at Park Plaza and to spend worship time with Jan.

Some of you know that I have been working on a series of New Testament Bible Study Guides. I am almost done with the eleventh New Testament book in the series. I have been e-publishing these guides as I complete them. The studies can be downloaded from my website: [www.bobyongresources.com](http://www.bobyongresources.com).

**UPDATE:** It looks like the first paper-print publication in the series, a study guide over Hebrews, will be available in March! This book is being made available by an anonymous donor with the goal of calling attention to this mission work and generating donations. When the work with the publisher is completed and the template is finalized, I hope to follow quickly with the publication of additional books in the series.



### Guatemala and Honduras

The first two weeks of February found me in Guatemala and Honduras. In Guatemala City, I spent three days with the Zone 11 church. This church wants to establish a biblical leadership, the primary reason they invited me to be with them and present a leadership seminar (*picture left*). On Sunday afternoon, I took the bus to Sololá on the north end of Lake Atitlan. Sololá served as my center of operations for the week, with visits to the churches in Santa Clara and Sololá, and a two-day regional Bible study seminar in Chichicastenango.

On Friday, I flew from Guatemala to San Pedro Sula, Honduras, where I had a weekend scheduled with the Pastor Zelaya church, and a Saturday leadership seminar for the churches in and around San Pedro Sula. For me, it is special to have the opportunity to visit churches where we have worked together toward biblical organization and effective ministry and outreach. It was especially good to be at Pastor Zelaya (named for the



neighborhood [colonia] in which the church building is situated). This church was formerly known as Barrio Cabañas, but has recently moved a short distance after they purchased their own building, a project completed with their own efforts and their own funding (*picture left*). The church purchased and remodeled a house, a facility that serves very well with ample space for growth. The church is led by three elders and two deacons. Despite the fact that there is no local

minister (the men share the preaching task and the members share the evangelism task), the church is growing. This was my first opportunity to see the new building; I was very impressed!





On Saturday I presented a leadership seminar for area churches, with six churches represented (*picture, bottom of previous page*). The leadership seminar focused on general principles, and the churches that were present ask me to return and present a seminar outlining the steps for organizing a church biblically. That is typical of the way this work goes—the first six months of the 2018 calendar are already scheduled!

I finished out my time in Honduras with a day of teaching at BICA in El Progreso (*picture left*) and a couple of days at Baxter in Tegucigalpa, where I spoke in chapel and was honored to share some

thoughts in Dr. Steve Teel’s positive preaching class (*picture right*).



### **Jesus came teaching, preaching, and healing**

Good models of missions can be found in Acts, but we often overlook the way the Gospels can help us understand the mission task. Jesus sets forth several mission principles as he sends out disciples in Matthew 10. Matthew’s description of Jesus’ ministry is that he came “teaching, preaching, and healing” (Matt. 4:23; 9:35). I see in these texts several things. First, I see that Jesus came doing all three. Second, I see that teaching and preaching apparently had priority. Third, I notice that Jesus’ work in healing brought the people to hear the message (4:24-25). Fourth, I note that Jesus wanted the seed to be sown. Fifth, I notice that Jesus expected a harvest of souls.

I applaud the hearts of missionaries whose primary work is focused on physical hurts, but such is of no eternal value unless it is coupled with teaching and preaching that brings people to Jesus. Healing without teaching and preaching is an activity that is just as well done (and often better done) by secular, non-Christian organizations. Teaching and preaching must be coupled with concern that reflects the heart of Jesus.

Perhaps we should not measure mission success by numbers, but God through the Holy Spirit chose to give us numbers, both specific and general in the inspired history of the early church (Acts). The commission is to go forth and preach the gospel to make disciples! It is good to ask ourselves from time to time how we are doing!

### **Pray for this work—pray for the churches in Latin America**

Here is a list of international travels for 2017 for those who want to include specific aspects of this work or specific locations in your prayers.

- Guatemala (February): (1) leadership, Zone 11, Guatemala City; (2) churches around Chichicastenango; (3) Santa Clara; (4) Sololá
- Honduras (February): (1) Pastor Zelaya; (2) churches around San Pedro Sula; (3) BICA-El Progreso; (4) Baxter Institute; (5) Talanga, church plant in Trinidad
- El Salvador/Honduras (May): (1) churches around La Palma and Ocotepeque; (2) the Bible Institute; (3) church plant in El Rosario
- Dominican Republic (June): (1) church in Neyba, new elders and deacons, evangelism seminar, campaign
- Peru (July): (1) Bible Institute; (2) Trujillo; (3) churches around Huamachuco
- Ecuador (August): (1) churches in northern Ecuador
- Colombia (August): (1) Los Angeles, Bogota, church leadership; (2) church planting in Puerto Gaitán; (3) churches in southern Colombia
- El Salvador (September): (1) evangelism campaign in San Salvador
- Dominican Republic (September): (1) seminars; (2) evangelistic campaign
- Peru (October): (1) speaker at international conference of leaders and preachers in Latin America, Cusco
- Uruguay (Oct-Nov): (1) church in Montevideo
- Chile (Oct-Nov): (1) various churches in Chile, evangelism and church health, leadership
- Ecuador (TBD): (1) churches around Guayaquil, leadership development

- Honduras (December): (1) 2017 graduating class at Baxter Institute; (2) Marriage and Family Program, (3) ability to help the churches, (4) activities at the clinic

### Special Projects Update

I am constantly introduced to special projects where a little funding makes a big difference. I include these in my reports because people ask how they can make a difference. Here are the projects being funded thus far in 2017: (1) Nicaragua evangelist; (2) Colombia church plant; (3) help for the churches and for evangelism in Venezuela; and (4) Honduras/El Salvador church planting effort.

A new opportunity has come with the transfer of the School of the Good Samaritan in Catacamas, Honduras to the Mission for Christ effort of Benny and Donna Baker in Nicaragua. A child can be adopted for \$39/month.

### MORE INFORMATION AVAILABLE—HOW YOU CAN HELP

Thank you for your help—prayers, work funds, and special needs. Through my host congregation (Main and Oklahoma, McAlester, OK), we accept tax-deductible gifts (checks payable to “Church of Christ,” memo line indicating “Latin American Leadership” or the specific project being funded). **ALL CONTRIBUTIONS SHOULD BE MAILED TO MY ADDRESS** (10704 S 89<sup>th</sup> East Ave, Tulsa, OK 74133), so I can handle deposits, acknowledgements, and accounting. If funds are for a specific need or project, please include that information with your gift.

*Que Dios me lo bendiga (may God bless you),*  
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*[Photo: night overview of a part of San Salvador, capital city of El Salvador. In this photo, part of the city of 6 million souls cannot be seen because of the mountain. In the great cities of Latin America people are receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ and Christians hunger and thirst for the word of God and encouragement toward healthy church development and effective leadership]*

