

LATIN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Developing Healthy Churches and Church Leaders in Latin America and Beyond

Mission and Ministry Newsletter

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A Personal Note

Anticipating the “busyness” of the holidays and thinking that those receiving my reports might have more time to read before the holiday season, I published the December 2017 newsletter in mid-November 2017. Looking back, it is hard to believe that almost four months have passed by so quickly!

Except for a quick trip to Honduras for the Baxter board meeting and graduation, I spent December, January, and the first half of February in the US.

In mid-November, I was thankful that I was in the US and able to attend the funeral of **Mary Bridgwater**, dear friend and sister in Christ who was always a great supporter of missions. One of the last times Jan and I visited with Mary, she wanted to make sure we got a check for the mission work in Latin America. November was also enjoyable because I was able to spend time with family for celebrating my birthday and Thanksgiving.

In December, Jan and I were able to make extended trips to visit Jan’s mother and my stepmother in Arkansas. We also visited friends and collaborators in northwest Arkansas.

November, December, and January provided a good, extended window for taping and producing additional video studies. I intentionally planned some additional time in the States in January and early February—medical appointments to help adjust some new medications plus cataract surgery on both eyes. I used the time to write more materials and to schedule various meetings to help advance the mission work with supporters and publishers.

Some of what you can read about in this report...

- Great needs in Venezuela
- Report on the trip to Honduras for Baxter graduation (December)
- Good news from the Dominican Republic—annual conference, support for preachers, church planting plans
- Good news from Colombia—church planting success, VBS, help for evangelism in the southern regions of Colombia
- Report on the trip to Chile (February-March)
- A brief description of the work of Latin American Leadership Development

Venezuela—needs beyond belief or imagination!

The exodus from Venezuela is being described as an immigration crisis all across South America and in parts of the Caribbean. Millions have sought refuge in other countries. Now the borders are being closed, and hopelessness will increase. In Chile, I talked with Venezuelan immigrants who are in constant contact with family and friends in their country. I talked yesterday with Bob Brown who has a long history with the churches of Christ in Venezuela. Violence is rampant; the national government is virtually powerless to stop or control the criminal element. While I was in Chile, we received news of a sister being killed in a car robbery. Basic foods and medicines

are not available or are so expensive as to be beyond the financial ability of the people, due to incredible inflation.

Inflation is rampant. In the last year. The inflation rate (value of money) for 2017 was 2616%. It is predicted to surpass 4000% in 2018. It now requires over 30000 Venezuelan bolivars to equal US\$1—60 bills \$500 bolivars to buy a \$1 candy bar. In November 2017, Venezuela introduced a \$100,000 bolivar bill now worth about \$2US.

The needs are tremendous, the gospel is going forth with more power and with greater receptivity than ever. Bob Brown has the contacts necessary to get help into Venezuela. During March, I am putting together funds to send to him. Please help if you can. Dollars have buying power—we literally hold in our hands life and death. To funnel funds, make checks to Church of Christ, indicate “for Venezuela” and send to the address on the last page of this newsletter.

If you prefer to send contributions directly to Bob Brown—make contributions to the Highlands Ranch church of Christ and earmark it for L.A.M.B. Mail your contributions to PMB202, 9457 S. University Blvd., Highlands Ranch, CO 80126-4976.

Baxter--December Trip to Honduras Amid Civil Unrest

After a hiatus of two years (during which time I served as a senior board member), I am again serving on the board of Baxter Institute. A part of my commitment is attending the annual board meeting and graduation at Baxter. It was a joy to be on campus for graduation and the board meeting in December (picture right, some of the graduates).

The trip was made somewhat difficult, however, by the unrest following a contested presidential election. The streets were made impassable by demonstrations, nightly curfews sequestered us in the safety of our hotel, United airlines did not fly for two days. Graduation was scheduled early Saturday afternoon so all could return home or to hotels before curfew. We had a good trip despite the problems and uncertainty. And, we exited Honduras on our scheduled flights since United made the decision to fly on Sunday.



Dominican Republic Update

In 2018, this ministry is again helping the elders of the church in Neyba, Dominican Republic, with the support necessary for preachers in five established churches, and a new evangelistic project in the city of Duvergé.

The Dominican churches are maturing—eleven congregations now have elders, and spiritual leaders are preparing more leaders. The Dominicans are very evangelistic in spirit, they continually seek training in evangelism,

and they are successfully reaching out in their own context. It is a joy to work with maturing churches, to see them able to function and accomplish God’s purposes. What they are doing and will do represents the fulfillment of the pioneers of the gospel who first carried the Good News to this island nation several decades ago!

I recently received a picture of the annual conference hosted by the Dominican churches (left above). The meeting is held each year in a different part of the country. Some of the objectives are to maintain fellowship between the churches as a necessary part of unity, to bring new Christians together as a way of integrating them into the church, and to work together to assemble funds for new church buildings for those churches that do

not have their own building. The final commentary attached to the picture was this: *although we do not have an earthly counsel, we believe the Bible as the Word of God is sufficient for our work together to evangelize everyone in the entire world.*



Good news from Colombia!

The church plant in Puerto Gaitan was blessed by several sisters from Bogota who traveled to host a VBS in January during the school break. New families were contacted, more children are attending Bible classes, and a baptism resulted. Studies continue with the husband of our new sister. The VBS was funded by a memorial gift in honor of my cousin, Carol Arledge, after her death in December.

The church has continued to grow during the first two years of the church planting project. Puerto Gaitan has a population of only about 20,000 but will provide a foothold in a department with 750,000 people (picture above left, some of the baptisms that have occurred since the church was planted).



In the south of Colombia, the work has continued to expand. Jairo and Andrea (picture left) are actively involved in the evangelistic work of several congregations. We have been blessed by the increased involvement of a brother in Christ and new funding from church from the Texas panhandle. The additional funds will enhance the work with additional support and a small working fund. I will be with the churches in southern Colombia for a leadership and ministry retreat in April.

Chile—February and March

I just returned from Chile two days prior to writing this report. My heart is filled and overflowing with joy! I hardly know where and how to begin with a summary of all that God is marvelously doing in Chile through Chilean believers.

Nogales, Santiago

A little less than 10 years ago, this church appointed additional elders and made the decision to escape the rut that mission churches easily fall into. After reaching a plateau of 50-75, a church often fails to keep growing; satisfaction sets in. In Nogales, the elders committed themselves to shepherding and asked the members to accept responsibility for the daily function of the church. The preaching task at Nogales is now shared by a number of brothers, the ministries are overseen by a group of brothers who serve as evangelists.

The church has committed itself to evangelism and to discipling new members. The church has also accepted more responsibility for the expansion of the gospel within Chile through “Mission Chile.” (see below)

The result of the renewed commitment to evangelism and discipling is that a church that had about 80 in attendance 10 years ago has grown incredibly. My first contact with the church was in 2011 as they were working through their renewed commitment to biblical organization and shared ministry. The church was beginning to grow again. In my visit three years ago, attendance was averaging about 120.

In five visits over the past seven years, the elders have asked me to focus on leadership, evangelism, and spiritual development. Now attendance is often near 200 with visitors and new contacts (picture above, I preached in Nogales on Sunday). With the arrival of numerous Haitians and Venezuelans to Chile, the church



has grown through evangelism and by incorporating new brothers and sisters from other nations. Based on various reports and conversations, I believe the church (locally and through “Mission Chile”) had 42 baptisms last year. About 60 members were added to the local church through baptism and immigration.

My role during my visits is one of consultant—how to work through various problems, suggestions about how to move forward, seminars, Bible studies, and training. I share evangelism training and ideas for finding new contacts. One of my primary roles is to say, “keep on keeping on.” Do not grow weary in well-doing.

Here is a model church that is continuing to develop. The church is seeking more shepherds and is constantly seeking to expand ministry. One of the biggest challenges they face right now is that they have simply outgrown their building. Thinking back to my visit late in 2016, the church has made tremendous advances. During the first weekend I was with the church, about 30 young people were at the congregational youth retreat, and two of the elders were traveling for “Mission Chile.”



“Mission Chile”

“Mission Chile” is a gospel mission to Chile done by Chileans. More than a dozen churches are involved in prayer and encouragement; brothers from three churches help with planning. Many of the workers come from the largest church in Chile, Nogales in Santiago, where I help train and encourage more workers.

“Mission Chile” is funded by contributions from four annual “united worship” services. The result is \$4000-5000 US available annually to fund church plants and to help with travels to support and encourage smaller mission churches. Churches now exist and are being strengthened in Ilo (Peru), Arica, Antofagasta, La Serena, Los Andes, Rancagua, Temuco, Chillan, Chiguayante, Coronel, and Puerto Montt. Every report brings news of more baptisms into Christ and churches that are growing in number and spirit.

In my work with the brothers, coordinating with the efforts of “Mission Chile,” they decide on each visit the locations that most need to be visited. On this trip I was blessed to share in the works in La Serena, Chillan, and Los Andes (pictures below, the assembly in La Serena, **Marcelo and Matraca Toro** are church planters in La Serena, the “church of the workshop” in Los Andes, preaching in La Serena, preaching in Chillan, preaching in La Serena).





Culto Unido (United Worship)

The last weekend of my trip, I was in Santiago to present another seminar and to preach in the quarterly united worship. The united worship serves several purposes: to unite the churches of Chile—especially those around Santiago, to provide funding for “Mission Chile,” and to reach out to new prospects. Brothers from other parts of Chile came to Santiago to attend the final seminar of this visit (Arica, La Serena, Puerto Montt). It was good also to spend some brief time with **Zane and Tae Perkins**.



Missions: Bringing More People to Jesus

The work that is done through Latin American Leadership Development is firmly based on a biblical philosophy of mission. Once the gospel has sounded forth into a new area, the Christians in that country or region are the ones best qualified and capable to continue to advance the gospel. The need is to develop strong spiritual churches, biblical leadership, and an evangelistic spirit so that new churches become missionary churches that have a heart for planting more churches. The need is to train workers—especially vocational workers. Churches need the encouragement of visits along with additional teaching and training, because the work is best done by native workers. In place after place across Latin America, church planting and evangelism efforts done by Latinos are far surpassing the efforts of workers from the US. The philosophy is sometimes stated like this: it is better to teach fishing than to do the fishing.

The focus of God’s mission is on bringing people to Jesus and establishing strong churches that will establish more strong churches—saving the lost and keeping the saved saved. The results continually amaze—hundreds are being brought to Jesus every year, primarily through the efforts of new Christians who are supported and encouraged by native evangelists who understand that evangelists are those who evangelize, that missionaries are those who are sent with Good News.

2018 Calendar--Looking ahead

Prayer is a powerful force! I share a list of some of my upcoming international trips so you give prayer support with the spirit and through specific requests: Ecuador and Colombia (April), Peru (June). Colombia (July-August), Honduras and El Salvador (September), Bolivia (October), Baxter and Honduras (December).

HOW YOU CAN HELP

I do not have words to tell you how grateful I am for your interest and prayers. Through the work in the various churches where I visit to teach and preach, God is making possible thousands of baptisms with new churches being planted each year. Through the host congregation (Main and Oklahoma, McAlester, OK), we accept tax-deductible gifts (checks payable to "Church of Christ," memo line "Latin American Missions" or the specific project being funded).

Please note these needs and projects from this newsletter—help for **Venezuela, Baxter Institute** where training is focused on developing the kind of workers that I describe above, **Dominican church planting** done by Dominicans, **Colombian church planting** done by Colombians, a **Colombian evangelist**, evangelism and church planting efforts in **Chile**.

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS SHOULD BE MAILED TO MY ADDRESS (10704 S 89th East Ave, Tulsa, OK 74133), since I handle deposits, acknowledgements, and accounting. If funds are for a specific need or project, please include that information with your gift.

Que Dios lo bendiga (may God bless you),

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Overview of Pereira, a city in Colombia where the gospel is sounding forth. All across Latin America, people are receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ and Christians hunger and thirst for the word of God and encouragement and training in evangelism, healthy church development and effective church leadership.

