

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

As I mentioned in my last report, I intentionally planned time in the States in January and early February to take care of medical appointments, to adjust to new medications, and to have cataract surgery on both eyes. What came next was not expected! After I returned from three weeks in Chile (February-March), I had to have lens exchange eye surgery to correct a problem that resulted from the cataract surgery. I was barely past the corrective eye surgery when I left for two weeks in Ecuador and Chile in mid-April.

The additional interruption in scheduling was unanticipated, but I used the time to complete the Bible study guide over the *General Letters*, the fourth volume in the series, and to complete most of the writing on the fifth volume that covers the *Prison Letters*. I was also able to complete some additional study materials and videos. I worked with the Cornerstone Bible Class at Park Plaza to

develop a series of lessons over the Minor Prophets. In March, April, and May, I am teaching a Wednesday night adult Bible class at Park Plaza, "You've Got Mail!" Teaching this class has been a regular part of my spring calendar for the past several years.

Since I have had to postpone the Peru trip that was planned for June, the schedule for the rest of the year has to be reprogrammed. The calendar now includes trips to Colombia, Perú, El Salvador, Honduras, Bolivia, and Honduras. Something will have to be eliminated—please pray for wisdom as I determine how and where I can best serve to advance the kingdom!

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

- Continuing needs in Venezuela; problems in Nicaragua
- Report on the trip to Ecuador and Colombia

Tremendous needs in Venezuela; Problems in Nicaragua

Venezuela. The exodus from Venezuela is an immigration crisis that is having an impact all across South America and in parts of the Caribbean. Millions have sought refuge in other countries. I saw some of the severity of the problem in the Rumichaca border crossing between Ecuador and Colombia—a border I crossed eight times, although I only had to work through passport details twice. Fortunately, I was able to present myself to the entrance guards and validate my passport with no problem, but the lines of Venezuelans waiting to be processed were incredible, although less than in recent weeks. (I hope you will appreciate that I did not take pictures—human dignity, treat others as you wish to be treated!)

In Venezuela, 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. The needs are tremendous; inflation is beyond imagination. Brothers and sisters in Christ do not have enough for their families. Funds are helpful because we can get dollars that have tremendous buying power into the hands of the churches. At present, it appears that the goods being shipped in are passing through customs with no problem, thanks to our contacts in the country.

Nicaragua. It is not yet clear how severe the current crisis in Nicaragua is or may become. From the *Costa Rica Star*, “Political problems in Nicaragua have caused President Daniel Ortega to attack his own people. What began as students in Managua protesting increases in employer and employee contributions to the national pension plan while decreasing benefits has spread throughout Nicaragua resulting in at least 30 deaths as pressure mounts to oust Ortega and his vice-presidential wife from office. News reports from the region say Ortega has responded to the crisis by deploying armed military forces, local media has been shut down, journalists are being assaulted or killed as pro-Ortega demonstrators clash in the streets with the anti-Ortega protesters. Medical personnel say the deaths are the result of Ortega’s military shooting their own citizens.”

As of early May, reports say Nicaragua may be calming down a bit, but certainly Christians should be in prayer that the gospel might go forth in every place and that political barriers can be overcome. Let us pray continually for the advance of the gospel and for those who share the Good News!

Ecuador and Colombia — April



Ibarra, Ecuador. This church is now about six years old, and in desperate need of a new building! It is always a joy to present the word to those who are hungering and thirsting. Seminars and suggestions to help with evangelism are always appreciated, followed by a multitude of questions from the members. This church has had 10 baptisms so far this year and continues to grow while planting additional churches.



The construction of the new building is underway (an elder standing on the slab of the new building). The members have underwritten a loan and have contributed above and beyond their capacity. They were grateful for the money I was able to assemble and deliver on short notice. They are still in need of just a little more help. Let me know if you can help!



A Monday night Bible study resulted in the baptism of Miguel. His wife, Jessica, was baptized about 6 months ago. Miguel is a policeman, the third policeman brought to Jesus in recent weeks.



The church in Ibarra is also working to establish a new church in **San Lorenzo**. I had hoped to visit San Lorenzo on this trip, but that part of Ecuador is currently a “hot spot” with lots of drug-trafficking activity, so we decided against the visit. The church has recently purchased a property with a wood building (thanks to a brother in Louisiana). The members are working to repair the building for services, using their own resources and time. At right is a picture of the church members in front of their previous (rented) location. This church is less than one year old!

Tulcán, Ecuador. On Tuesday I traveled to the border and validated my passport for entry to Colombia. (As long as one is within a few kilometers of the border, it is not necessary to continually submit one’s passport.) In Tulcán on Tuesday afternoon, I taught an evangelistic Bible study and preached that night! The lady I studied with promised that she would soon be baptized. The church in Tulcán is working to complete their new building (picture right). They are willing to get a loan for two-thirds of the amount needed—a \$2000 gift finishes this project.



Colombia. On Wednesday and Thursday, I visited the churches in Cumbal, Ipiales, and Pasto. I am always wonderfully received. The churches are generally healthy, although there are always problems and difficulties to be resolved. (Picture left, two new brothers in Cumbal, baptized on Saturday; picture right, the church in Pasto.)



Túquerres, Colombia. The primary purpose of this trip was to keynote the 2018 men’s conference in Túquerres, on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. We spent 7+ hours studying the book of Colossians, plus I presented an evangelism workshop on Saturday. The conference was attended by about 30 present and future leaders in the churches of that region (picture right, part of the Sunday morning attendance of conference participants and members of the church in Túquerres).



Sunday afternoon I officially crossed back into Ecuador, eager to travel to Quito on Monday to catch the midnight flight back to the US.

What if God gave you a gift and you did not know you had received it?



When we describe the gift of salvation from God, we often make the point that the gift has to be received. God extends grace, but grace must be accepted. In the question above, I am thinking of another gift.

What if God gave you as a Christian the gift of sharing the Good News, but because you have never acknowledged the gift, never used the gift, never practiced, and never developed the gift, you are not aware that you have the gift? In fact, you generally say that you do not have the gift—but you have never tried to discover whether you have the gift or not.

This describes many Christians. We have the ability to tell what has happened to us. We have the ability to share our experiences with others. God has given us the gifts that are necessary to share Good News. But we have never been taught how to use the gift, we have never practiced, we have never developed the skills related to the gift.

Churches grow when members in the pews share Good News. In my local church ministry, I depended heavily on the members, and the churches doubled and tripled in number. In Ecuador, I asked an elder what was the source of their contacts that they were so effectively evangelizing. He responded by saying the members were the ones making contacts and sharing the Good News.

A brother in Ecuador told me this story. "I never knew I had the gift of evangelism. In fact, I thought I did not have that gift, but some of my cousins asked me to explain the gospel and they were baptized. Then I had more opportunities to tell the story, and more baptisms resulted." This brother has secular employment, but he is constantly sharing the gospel and bringing people to Jesus.

My goal is to equip brothers and sisters in the pews for evangelism. Many have the gift of evangelism, but they do not know it because they have never tried to do it. You can develop your gift. You can learn to talk for Jesus. You can learn to guide a simple Bible study that will bring people to Jesus.

If you or your church want to know more, contact me!



Mission Possible: Bringing More People to Jesus

I never tire of reminding us that "missions" is about souls! We must seek to understand biblical teaching and biblical practice. When the purpose of missions is to sound forth the gospel, multitudes respond. I rejoice in the reports of the churches—hundreds of baptisms each year. On my most recent trip, I was privileged to teach several Bible studies. The seed is sown, the harvest is reaped—baptisms, 2, 1, 1 during my visit. And I do not go primarily to evangelize, but to equip and train Christians for the spiritual work of sharing the gospel and developing strong, missionary churches.

Once the gospel has gone into an area, the Christians on-site are the ones best qualified and capable of advancing the gospel. My goal 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. We must train workers—especially vocational workers. Members must be taught how and

encouraged to evangelize. In multiplied locations across Latin America, church planting and evangelism efforts done by local brothers and sisters are far surpassing the efforts of paid workers from the US. Here is my adjusted version of an old saying: "it is better to teach fishing than to do all the fishing."

Let us never tire of God's mission: bringing people to Jesus and establishing strong churches that will establish more strong churches—saving the lost and keeping the saved.

2018 Calendar--Looking ahead

Prayer is a powerful force! As I explained above, the schedule for the rest of the year has been disrupted and is being reprogrammed. Please pray for my trip to Colombia in July-August. I share also a list of possible international trips so you give prayerful support to God's work: Perú, Honduras and El Salvador, Bolivia, Baxter and Honduras.

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 hundreds of baptisms with new churches being planted each year. Through my 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 — help for **Venezuela**, a **Colombian church plant** done by Colombians, a **Colombian evangelist**, evangelism and church planting efforts in **Chile**, evangelism and church planting in **Ecuador**, and help to finish several church buildings.

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 Ibarra, a city in Ecuador where the gospel is sounding forth. The world is in darkness without the gospel! Who will bring the light of the gospel?

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.

