

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

Having just returned from two weeks in Colombia, a trip that immediately followed a retreat week in Tennessee where I spoke about God’s mission, my heart is overflowing with gratitude for what God is doing among his people. This special “out of season” report (only one month has passed since the last report) focuses on these two trips.

Honestly: God’s People Talk About Mission Work

I spent a week at a retreat where I was honored to speak about God’s mission for his people and how we can fulfill that mission. Present were about 140 church leaders and members. I did not realize the level of frustration many feel concerning our current mission efforts. More than once I heard questions about the amount of money being invested in comparison to the results. One brother observed that sending 20 youth to Latin America, at a cost of \$30000, to build a couple of houses results in two \$15000 houses! His question: couldn’t we hire locals to do the same work for a lot less? And the answer is, yes! I heard the frustration in the descriptions of mission works that have existed for years with little numerical growth, resulting in churches that are less than healthy and at times non-functional, with no exit plan in sight. When I talked about the importance of exit plans in our mission work, ears perked up! When I described what God is doing among his people in other nations with very little, if any, US funds invested, rapid-fire questions came my way. What happens when locals realize that the success or failure of the church depends on them, and that the work will not be propped up forever with outside funds and support?

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

(from an email Jan and I received)

Just wanted to let you know how much we were blessed by getting to meet and know you. You all are a true light for Jesus. Thank you for loving like you do. We pray that God continues to bless you both and your ministry.

Two Weeks in Colombia

The first three days of this trip, I visited and preached at three churches in the Cauca Valley and helped with Bible studies in other villages and locations to explore additional church planting possibilities (*picture right, preaching in Cartago*). I then flew to Bogota to present a weekend “Family and Leadership Seminar” in in the Los Angeles congregation. Two more days in Bogota were devoted to Bible studies, evangelism, and meetings with Colombian missionaries. Finally, I flew to Santa Marta to speak at a national preachers’ conference with 39 Colombian preachers present (*picture, top of next page*). On Sunday, I preached in Santa Marta Central before the return flight to Bogota and the flight home.



The North American churches are not sending missionaries who seek souls, so the work of missions and evangelism falls to us! -- Haitian missionary in Colombia



I was blessed to be present for the establishment of a Colombian mission committee, five well-known Colombian brothers who will seek donations from Christians and churches in Colombia for the purpose of advancing Colombian mission work. Their goal is 12 million Colombian pesos given during the next 12 months, with all funds dedicated to church planting efforts in Colombia – new churches, new church buildings, missionaries to Colombia supported by Colombians!

The churches in Colombia are growing in spirit, in biblical organization, and in missionary fervor! While I was in Colombia, I received a phone call from an elder in Cali, Colombia: please send us materials to help us understand what elders should do so the church can grow. After observing

the model being used in other countries and seeing the possibility of doubling or tripling within a decade, his request was simple: help us learn how to do it!

The Story of a Church Planter in Colombia

How blessed I was to get to spend time with Carlos Alberto Escobar! He is a Baxter graduate, my brother in Christ, and he understands the process of planting and developing local churches! I first got to know him at Baxter in the years 2002-2003. On my most recent trip to Colombia as we talked and reminisced, he reminded me of a seminar I taught over Hebrews.

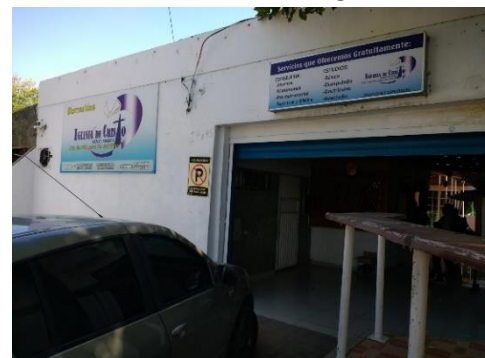
In the Colombian churches, it is rare to hear a public prayer that does not include a mention of God's mission work!

I was privileged to see Carlos at work in church planting in 2006 when I was in Santa Marta to speak at a retreat for Venezuelan and Colombian preachers. He was working to establish a new church, Christ the King church of Christ (iglesia de Cristo Cristo el Rey). The reason for the unusual name is that "Christ the King" is the name of the neighborhood where the building is located. At the retreat, I met church leaders from El Varal, Colombia and became aware of some financial needs with regard to their building and outreach projects.

The needed funds (\$700) were contributed by the Northside Church in Mena, Arkansas, and Carlos Alberto assisted in the delivery of the funds and in various purchases. He assisted with the development of the mission work around El Varal several times in 2006-2009. This was the beginning of an expanding work. In addition to the work at El Varal, the work in El Banco was strengthened, a preaching point and eventually a new church was established in Las Playitas, and more recently a fourth church has been established in the same region.

In 2014, after reaching a point at Christ the King where the church could function on its own with its own building completed, Carlos Alberto began a new work in Santa Marta Central. I preached there my last Sunday in Colombia with 60-70 present. They are renting a building that was formerly a restaurant (*picture right*) and have a good foothold after 3+ years. The church is growing, evangelizing, and constantly dreaming.

Carlos Alberto makes the 5-6-hour trip by car to El Banco at least annually, to work in the four mission churches, preaching every night for two weeks. The custom of the churches is that they take Mondays off, so they have preaching every night Tuesday through Sunday.



Reaching the churches requires arriving at El Banco, then a 2-3-hour trip by river on the “Jhonson,” and another five miles walking. I had not personally visited Santa Marta during the last 12 years; I simply depended on Carlos and the Colombian brothers and churches to advance the work. I received periodic reports so I could monitor the progress of the churches. In their extreme poverty, the churches have purchased lots, built buildings, and are growing and multiplying. God can do so much with so little!

The Importance of Being Part of a Discipleship Team

People often ask me questions about mission work, trying to understand what I am doing and why the effort is so effective. Simply put, I am a part of a discipleship team—facilitators, supporters, national workers, and Christians across Latin America—that has as its primary purpose to establish and grow the church through evangelism and discipleship. I am merely part of an integrated, larger team of workers who have our eyes set on the goal of fulfilling God’s eternal purpose to bring souls under the Headship and Lordship of Jesus. I receive most of my invitations from national churches who want to grow and make a difference in their communities! *(picture right, with various Colombian brothers, hearts united for Christ)*



One of my favorite concepts from the gospel is that Jesus took a small group of fisherman and nobodies and turned them into pillars in the early church. Working with a small group, he trained them, shaped them, encouraged them, and left them with the Holy Spirit to lead them. They turned the world upside down. Jesus is doing the same thing today as he turns new Christians into disciple-makers who make more disciples. Christ’s final instruction was to make disciples who make more disciples. One of the great challenges of the contemporary church in the US is to learn how members like myself (those who have been around a while) can catch the new vision, overcome our past inaction, and be equipped for sharing the gospel. *(picture right, with Jhon Fredy Hernandez, Colombian missionary who is working to plant the church in Puerto Gaitan, overseen by the Los Angeles congregation in Bogota)*



I like to remind Latin American Christians that “everyone is a leader.” But I have to explain what I mean. The idea of leadership carries a lot of baggage in our world. Jesus focuses on service, does he not? The world’s idea of leadership often includes control more than servanthood.

We have noted the plurality of leadership in the New Testament without fully understanding the why. Team leadership is biblical. Every Christian should be part of a team of disciples who make other disciples. Evangelism and discipleship are more the work of the church than of individual members. Each member contributes according to his or her giftedness. The goal of this mission ministry project is to facilitate mission work in the context of the team. The goal is to develop disciples who will make disciples. I often return to five basic themes to assist in the development and growth of the Latin American churches.

- Spiritual growth and maturity, prioritize time with God.
- Be a model of how to study and apply the Word of God in your own life, so you can assist others.
- Equip others so that all are involved in the work of ministry. Help others use their gifts.
- Expect group members to be involved in evangelism. Evangelism is not optional. Teach, mentor, and demonstrate how to develop evangelism and discipleship muscles.
- Find and develop “Timothys.” Keep the chain intact, do not become the broken link. Equip others so that the process continues, generation to generation.

Examples of How the Work is Progressing

In Colombia, the dream of evangelism and mission work is alive. The churches have the goal that the church will be present in as many places as possible in the country. In fact, they have a list of department capitals

without a church; they know where is the greatest need and the greatest receptivity. They are a good example of how to thoughtfully approach mission work in their own country.

In Peru, I know a brother who has a list of the largest cities without a church. He is focused on new church planting efforts, using students from a Bible institute to support those new works on weekends. He has a dream. I appreciate the model that uses teams of Peruvians who are working to establish churches. I am

Praise be to God! He is making possible hundreds of baptisms with new churches being planted each year.

blessed to work with many others brothers in various parts of the country who have the same dream—bringing people to Jesus, planting and strengthening new churches.

In Chile, I have previously described *Mision Chile*, where several Chilean churches are working together to take the gospel to new cities. The result is new churches established through the efforts of Chileans.

In Venezuela, many churches are amazing examples of church planting efforts despite the current problems in that country.

Upcoming Plans

In **late-August**, I will make a trip to Peru to work in Lima with the Bible Institute and the Los Pinos church, and then with the church in Trujillo. I will report on Peru activities in a future newsletter. We are planning several U.S. trips visit friends, family and churches in **September-October**.

Jan and I have decided not to travel to Cuba later this year. Many good churches and excellent workers are involved in that nation, and the funds we would have spent on our trip can support a national preacher for a year in various parts of Latin America. Among those who are doing a great work in Cuba are the students and graduates of Baxter. We look forward to the trip to Honduras and Baxter graduation in **December**.

A Personal Note and Update

I am thankful for your prayers for Jan and for me. Before the Peru trip, I will have a capsulotomy, my third eye surgery of 2018. Jan and I have several other medical appointments scheduled—seems as though some parts of the body don't work as well after the years of wear and tear! We are looking forward to celebrating our 49th anniversary. The weekend before my trip to Peru, I will be with the Iglesia de Cristo in Madill, Oklahoma.

Thank you for your prayers for Jan during my absences. When I am away on a mission trip and I ask by phone how she is doing, and she replies, "I am lonely," my heart aches. She has made a great sacrifice over the past 10+ years, a sacrifice that does not go unnoticed. May God bless those who sacrifice so His will may be done!

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Thank you for your interest in this mission ministry – whether through prayer or financial support. I am always looking for those who want to be part of the team—financially, traveling with me, helping in various ways. 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). **ALL CONTRIBUTIONS SHOULD BE MAILED TO MY ADDRESS** (10704 S 89th East Ave, Tulsa, OK 74133), since I handle deposits, acknowledgements, and accounting.

Dios lo bendiga (God bless you),

Bob and Jan Young

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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, discipleship, healthy church development and effective church leadership.

