

Week One

Reviewing three days in Santiago with the Nogales church

A little less than 10 years ago, the Nogales church appointed additional elders and made the decision to try to escape the rut that mission churches so easily fall into. After reaching a plateau (seldom more than 50-100, often less), a church fails to keep growing. A level of satisfaction sets in. In the Nogales church, the new elders committed themselves to shepherding and asked the members to accept responsibility for the ongoing function of the church. The preaching task at Nogales is shared by a number of brothers, the various ministries are overseen by a group of evangelists and servants, and there is no designated full-time minister.

The church has committed itself to evangelism and to discipling new members. The church has also accepted more and 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 in a healthy way. 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. When I visited the church in 2015, attendance was averaging about 120.

I have visited the church in 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, and 2018. On some Sundays, attendance is now near 200 including visitors and new contacts. With the arrival of numerous Haitians and Venezuelans to Chile, the church has grown through evangelism and also by incorporating new brothers and sisters from other nations.

The information I have assembled from reports and conversations during my visit indicates that the church (both locally and in some of the “Mission Chile” efforts) 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 making more contacts. I always explain that one of my primary roles is to say, “keep on keeping on.” The best work in the local church is done by the local church. “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 seeking to expand ministry opportunities. One of the biggest challenges they face is that they have simply outgrown their building.

As is often the case in Latin America, problems with work schedules make assembly difficult. As I think back to my visit late in 2016, the church has made tremendous advances. During the first weekend I was with the church this year, about 30 young people were at the congregational youth retreat. Two of the elders were traveling for “Mission Chile.”

“Mission Chile” [Misión Chile]

This is a work of about fifteen churches, mostly from the Santiago area, who are involved in prayer and encouragement of church planting in Chile. This is a national work—a work done in Chile by Chileans. Three churches do most of the planning. A majority of the workers come from the largest church in Chile, Nogales in Santiago, where I focus much of my attention to help train and encourage more workers.

“Mission Chile” is funded by contribution from 4 annual “united worship” services. The result is around \$5000 available annually to fund new church plants and to help with travels to support and encourage the smaller churches. Some of the newer churches that are being helped include Ilo, Arica, Antofagasta, La Serena, Los Andes, Rancagua, Temuco, Chillan, Chiguayante, Coronel, and Puerto Montt.

Los Andes

On Thursday night, I traveled to Los Andes to be with the church. Los Andes is about an hour and a half north of Santiago. The church meets in the workshop of one of the members who is by profession a woodworker who builds cabinets and works in various projects with wood. Sometimes the church is known as “the church of the workshop” (la iglesia del taller). There were 14 who were able to be present on Thursday night for my visit.

Because my visit occurred during summer in Chile and it was the season of the grape harvest, many of the members had to work and were unable to attend.

The members in Los Andes are little by little putting together the funds to purchase property and build. Once the property is purchased, the men of the church will be able to do much of the work. Work is seasonal because many work in the grapes, so available time in the off season makes this plan practical. They have assembled more than \$20000. With just a little more, they will be able to make an offer on a good piece of property.

The church is part of "Mission Chile" and receives continual encouragement through the presence of brothers from Santiago. About 15 brothers rotate the weekly visits to encourage the church.

Finishing the first week, anticipating the second

To finish my first week in Chile, I flew to La Serena for the weekend to visit a new church plant. The visit included the opportunity to work with the men to develop healthy training and leadership models, to work with the team, and to teach and preach Sunday morning. I flew back to Santiago Sunday afternoon in time for the evening class and assembly at Nogales.

Looking ahead, my second week in Chile will include the Sunday morning study and sermon at La Serena, preaching Sunday night in Santiago, followed by three days in Chillan where there is also a relatively new church plant.

I am praying—may God continue to bless the efforts of his people as we commit ourselves fully to being disciples who follow closely in his footsteps.

Week Two

La Serena

This is a church plant of 2+ years. In 2018, a team has been put together. The original church planters Marcelo and Matraca are joined for this year by two Venezuelan couples, one of which will be able to devote almost full-time to the work. The other couple is seeking secular employment but will be of much help.

There were 35 people present for the class and assembly. It was vacation season and five families were absent. Nine men participated in the leadership meeting so a small nucleus of local leaders is being developed. The church rents a house near downtown for \$600/month, the area used for the assembly will seat only about 40, so they are looking into opportunities to move to another location, but the costs for an adequate location are high (nearing \$2000/month).

We celebrated two recent baptisms on the Sunday I was there. Marcelo and Matraca have a long-term commitment to the work, Marcelo is working in his home town.

Chillan

The church in Chillan began 13 years ago with the arrival of a Christian couple who were transferred from Santiago. The church struggled in its early years and after 8 years only a handful were assembling. When the current evangelist, Luis, arrived five years ago from the Nogales church in Santiago, there were normally five or six who attended worship on Sundays in Chillan. Now attendance each Sunday is approximately 40. Contact has been made with some Christians who live a distance away and host worship in their home. These were converted a number of years ago via a radio program by Larry White. The work is expanding.

The church at Chillan has a vision for expanding the gospel. They hosted a ministry intern for a little while and now help support him in a small church about an hour away. This church has grown from 15 to almost 30 as a result of the commitment to strengthen evangelism and church development in new places and in smaller churches that need a boost.

Although the Chillan church is not big, they are committed to spreading the gospel by supporting more workers. The vision of the churches in Chile is to assist in the establishment and strengthening of more churches in more places in order to reach more people.

Return to Santiago, the final weekend of my visit, preaching at the area-wide United Worship

After three days in Chillan, I returned to Santiago to present another seminar and to preach in the quarterly united worship service. The united worship serves several purposes—to unite the churches of Chile, especially those around Santiago, to provide funding for "Misión Chile," and to reach out to new prospects. Church members from various parts of Chile came to Santiago to attend the final seminar of this visit (Arica, La Serena, and Puerto Montt).