

LATIN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: WHY THIS WORK IS IMPORTANT

By Bob Young

The brief article by Phil Waldron (*Mission UpReach Newsletter*, February 2015) caught my attention. The Mission Upreach team has planted 11 new churches over the past several years. A recent church plant in the city of Santa Rosa has blossomed and now has elders. The work at Mission UpReach provides a model for rural church planting and outreach. Some aspects of the model would not apply equally in an urban setting. But one aspect of the work is extremely important in every missionary church planting effort—the desire to plant self-reliant, self-supporting, self-governing local churches that can do the work of God in their community with a minimum of outside support and resources.

Here is Phil's statement concerning a new church plant in Contamal:

[We] have helped the local church construct their own building. Our support for these brothers and sisters in Christ does not consist in providing them with a monthly, financial support. To the contrary, we work very hard to raise up churches that are self-reliant in the sense that they do not depend on funds from anyone in the US to “keep their doors open.” Too many churches in Honduras have been on the US church's payroll for 15 to 20 years and are no closer today to being autonomous and self-supporting that they were 10 years ago.

The need for men and women in the respective communities to take responsibility for evangelizing there is paramount to having a successful church. [Our programs] are designed to help men become the leaders in their local church and in their local community that God intends them to be.

Contrast this approach with a model that reflects much of our mission experience and results. We send a mission team to a location and the very presence of the team contributes to an initial dependence on the team members rather than beginning with dependence on the local, indigenous leaders. In parallel to US ministry-missions models, the presence of the church in the community is represented more by the workers than by the local members. In some cases, there are few local leaders available because the focus on evangelism and baptisms (by sponsoring, supporting churches in the US) discourages spending the time, effort, and energy in outreach to families and community leaders who would provide a solid foundation for a healthy church.

The primary work of Latin American Leadership Development is to help local churches grow beyond the missteps that may have occurred in the church planting and development process. This involves Bible studies focused on spiritual growth for every member, encouragement to develop strong Christian families, member training in evangelism and how to share the gospel, the development of indigenous teachers and leaders, and the challenge for the church to become a missionary church capable of planting other healthy churches. The overall goal is healthy churches—churches that are capable of doing the work God places before them with a minimum of outside help. Such churches are in a process of becoming more and more self-reliant, self-sustaining, self-governing, self-teaching, and self-duplicating.

I am grateful for the work of Mission UpReach. My prayer is that future mission and church planting efforts, both rural and urban, will take to heart the need to begin with processes and activities that demand that the local church members accept the responsibility for sustaining the local church, for evangelizing the community, and for spreading the gospel through the establishment of more local churches in prime locations nearby. This model does not require more and more US funding for missions. It is a model that calls the US church to do what the local churches cannot do for themselves, and to find genuinely new fields where a foothold needs to be established.