

Colombian Bible institute provides “on the job” training; Ministry is threatened by growing violence in the country

By Kenneth D. MacHarg
LAM News Service

In the midst of mounting violence and political uncertainty, an evangelical Colombian institute is training over a thousand students to become leaders in their local churches. Yet spiraling violence is threatening to disrupt the education of those who want to serve the spiritually needy in their own country.

The Institute for Pastoral Education (CIPEP) provides courses in Bible, preaching, counseling, Christian education and theology to 1,500 students scattered throughout this war-weary South American nation.

“We have 160 centers in all parts of Colombia,” says Gregorio Landero, the founder and Administrative Director of CIPEP as he ticks off cities such as Bogota, Medellin, Cartagena, Sincelejo and others where classes are taught. Landero is an ordained minister of the Caribbean Association of Evangelical Churches, a denomination founded by the Latin America Mission (LAM).

“Of our 1,500 students, 400 are pastors and the others are church officials, Sunday school teachers and other leaders who are studying to serve the Lord,” he says.

But the deteriorating situation in Colombia is threatening to short-circuit the student’s course of study. “One does not know when they leave home what will happen,” Landero says. “There are many groups of guerrillas who look for people along the road to rob.”

As a result, many pastors who work at a secular job to provide support for their family and pay their tuition at the Institute have found themselves out of work. “In February, newspapers reported that two million people in Colombia are unemployed,” Landero said. “Because of the violence, many leave their area to go to the city and live in poverty. As a result, many students are unable to finish their third year because they can’t pay for their tuition or their books.”

“We have always tried to obtain scholarships for the students,” says missionary Nick Woodbury of the Miami-based LAM. “Now, with the worsening situation in Colombia we have more students in need and some who may not be able to complete their studies.” Woodbury served as a missionary with LAM in Colombia for 15 years. He is now the Director of LAM’s Christ for Miami project in Florida.

The tuition is not high by North American standards but is difficult to pay for many in a country wracked by over 40 years of guerrilla warfare. “We need to raise scholarship funds for 300 of our students if they are to finish their courses,” Landero says. A scholarship that covers tuition and books costs \$250 per student per year.

The Institute grew out of a need to continue training pastors and lay leaders after the close of a Bible college in the late 1970’s according to Woodbury, a Philadelphia native who studied at Gordon College and Gordon-Conwell Seminary in Massachusetts.

“The Institute is important because it allows students to study in their own town where they are ministering and to immediately put into practice what they are learning,”

Woodbury explained. “The school is important because of growing educational expectations for pastors in Colombia and the growth of the Evangelical church there.”

The CIPEP centers have trained over 8,000 students in the 18 years since Landero founded the school. “We have had students from all denominations,” he explained. “The Presbyterians alone in Barranquilla have at least 200 students who studying in our program.” Currently twenty-one denominations participate in CIPEP’s programs.

Many graduates go on to study at the Biblical Seminary of Colombia in Medellin while others are serving as pastors and leaders in churches throughout the country.

CIPEP and its leadership maintain a relationship with the Latin America Mission. LAM is accepting donations for “Colombian Pastor Scholarships” to help assist students at the school.

The Latin America Mission is an international fellowship of men and women who, motivated by love for the Lord Jesus and in obedience to His commands, have joined together to encourage and assist the Latin church in world evangelization. The mission currently has approximately 240 missionaries in 13 countries. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami Springs, FL 33152, by e-mail at info@lam.org, or by calling 305-884-8400. The mission’s web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>.

Colombian Bible institute provides “on the job” training; Ministry is threatened by growing violence in the country, *LAM News Service*, May 12, 1999