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Latin church growth brings need for training;  
LAM missionary works to nurture pastors

IN BRIEF:

The growing churches of Latin America are very strong in evangelism and in presenting the gospel but their weakness is that there is not enough development in the area of discipleship or educational programs says LAM missionary Carlos Pinto. To remedy the situation, Carlos and his colleagues are working to educate those who cannot afford to attend seminary or a Bible college. “We provide an intensive, short-term study time,” Carlos explains. “It is often very practical, addressing a situation that a church is facing. Their hearts are on fire to share the word even though they don’t know the content,” he says. Through studying, “the pastor gains an understanding of who God is and how He relates to us. –Latin America Mission

By Kenneth D. MacHarg  
LAM News Service

Quito, Ecuador (LAMNS)—The rapid growth of the church in Latin America is well known. But with that growth come problems for Latin church leaders.

“It’s not something that the church leaders had planned, but they are facing that,” reflects LAM missionary Carlos Pinto. “The churches that are growing in most of Latin America are the independent churches, not the historical churches. They are very strong in evangelism, in presenting the gospel, but their weakness is that there is not enough development in the area of discipleship or educational programs.”

To remedy the situation, Carlos and his colleagues are working to educate those who cannot afford to attend seminary or a Bible college. “We are trying to go along with the church and develop educational materials that can be helpful for them. We go around and gather pastors interested in training and we spend a week with them, teaching in the morning and afternoon.”

Carlos explains that the courses taught vary according to the community and the needs of the pastors. “We provide courses in Bible, hermeneutics, pastoral counseling, evangelism and discipleship,” he says. “We also provide a set of reference books like a Bible atlas, a Bible dictionary or commentaries. The books help them to get into the content of what we are teaching.”

“The pastors need to learn more about the Bible and they need to grasp how to become a better leader in their church,” Carlos says.

Many Christians in Latin America are appointed as a pastor because they know the Lord and emerged as a leader in their community. “They have little or no training, no theological education,” Carlos explains. “But, their hearts are on fire to share the word even though they don’t know the content.” Through studying, “the pastor gains an understanding of who God is and how He relates to us. Before, his only book was the Bible, but now he has a dictionary to expand his vision of details of what the Bible is talking about.”

“We have a call to hear what the condition of the church in Latin America is,” says Carlos. “Our goal is not to teach the material we know, but to teach the material that the churches need.”

But, education is not the only result of these weeklong sessions. “Many times we hear that this is the first time that pastors from different denominations have come together,” Carlos says. “Some express their feelings of guilt because they have talked against another church. They learn that their task is to help each other.” Carlos says that he and his team see themselves as a catalyst, bringing together the body of Christ.

Carlos, who has served as a missionary with the Latin America Mission since 1992, works with other missionaries through the Apoyo (support) ministry of HCJB in Quito, reaching out to pastors throughout Ecuador and in other countries such as Peru and Chile. “We work in urban and rural areas,” he says. “We provide an intensive, short-term study time. It is often very practical, addressing a situation that a church is facing.”

Each member of the team has a specialty area in which to teach. Carlos, a native of Lima, Peru, specializes in family counseling and family ministries. “When I talk about counseling, what I see more and more is the issue of migration,” Carlos explains. “Many families are forced to move to an urban setting, looking for employment and schooling. Sometimes they are forced to relocate because of violence related to terrorism or drug dealing.”

“The uniqueness is that the urban church has the opportunity to become the extended family that they left behind,” he says. “I try to help change the church, to help it minister to families living in a city and to help the church become the extended family.”

Carlos reaches out to Latin society in other ways. For a while, he wrote an article for the “family” section of Quito’s *El Comercio* newspaper. “I always had an interest in expressing Christian values in a secular environment to contribute to society without being preachy,” he explains. “We are called to get into the world and get involved in the world without being too narrow-minded. We had good feedback from the articles.”

In addition, Carlos participates in regular radio broadcasts over Quito’s Christian missionary radio station HCJB where he answers listener’s questions about family matters.

While Carlos is educating pastors, his wife, Becki, is working with pastor’s wives as well as a group of single mothers who are working to better their economic status. “We are interested in helping the women develop microenterprise groups,” explains Becki who grew up in Lima where her parents served as missionaries with Wycliffe Bible Translators. “If they could just earn \$100 a month it would help. They spend a lot of time trying to earn money, often at the expense of the family.”

“These women are teaching each other the skills they have and are going out selling pastries or candles or other things they make at home,” she says.

Addressing the economic needs of pastors and their wives, Becki says “If we can provide some small business for the pastor’s wives, we can get a network of pastor’s wives together and support them.”

The Latin America Mission works in partnership with churches and Christian agencies throughout Latin America and supports missionaries and projects in many Latin countries as well as in Spain. LAM is seeking to place new missionaries throughout the region. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami, FL 33152, by e-mail at [info@lam.org](mailto:info@lam.org), or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission’s web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>. LAM’s Canadian office is at 3075 Ridgeway Drive, Unit 14, Mississauga, ON L5L 5M6.

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