

**20,000 expected at 19th Urbana Convention;
Event challenges students, young people, others to mission service**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

LAM News Service

Miami, Florida (LAMNS)—For the nineteenth time since 1946, thousands of students, young people, missionaries, church and campus leaders will gather together in December for five days of worship, Bible study, hundreds of seminars, and one of the world's most comprehensive missions fairs.

Urbana 2000, sponsored by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, is expected to draw nearly 20,000 participants to the University of Illinois campus at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, December 27 through 31 with the purpose of challenging college students and recent graduates to active participation in world evangelization.

“The biggest effects of Urbana conferences are (1) call people to cross cultural service, (2) impart a world view and (3) help students develop a global perspective,” says Kristofer Fegengbush, Mobilization Coordinator for the Latin America Mission. This year's event will be his third Urbana conference.

“I went as a student the first time,” says Kristofer who is coordinating LAM's participation in the event. “God really changed my direction at Urbana in 1993. I knew that I was headed for missionary service, but I thought it would be among a Muslim population, maybe in Cairo. At Urbana, I discovered that there were missionary opportunities in Latin America.”

The first Urbana conference was held at the University of Toronto with an attendance of 575. The event moved to the University of Illinois in 1948 and was attended by 1,294. Since then, the conventions have challenged more than 194,000 people to participate in the Great Commission.

More than 240 mission agencies will be represented at this year's event as well as over 50 seminaries and Christian colleges.

With a projected attendance of 20,000, Urbana leaders are working hard to make sure that no one feels lost in the big crowd. “We are working to write to each person and to place each one into a small group of ten right where they live in the dorms or hotels,” explains Jack Voelkel, an LAM missionary who is working on the Urbana staff. “Each small group has a trained leader who looks out for the members and encourages them to look out for each other. The small groups meet every morning and evening.”

Jack says that special lounges are being provided for all major foreign groups as well as native Americans, African Americans and Hispanics.

Worship will be at the heart of this year's Urbana according to Jack. “Students love to worship. This Urbana seeks to expand their vision of what worship really involves.”

LAM plans a sizeable presence with a state-of-the-art exhibit booth and several workshops led by LAM missionary personnel. “We begin a lot of relationships with people who attend Urbana,” Kristofer explains. “Through time spent with attendees and significant conversations, we help to begin the process than often leads to missionary service.”

Several LAM missionaries will be leading seminars and workshops says Amy Maves, LAM’s Director of Administrative Services. These will include:

- *Spearhead: Full-Contact Short Term Missions*, led by Wendy Der, Sarah White and Kristen Larson from LAM’s Spearhead program in Mexico
- *Sniffing Glue and Sexual Exploitation: Reaching Street Kids in Latin America*, led by LAM missionaries Ron Neptune from Colombia and Sue Leak from Mexico
- *Gringos Working with National Partners*, led by various LAM missionary personnel
- *Latinos Alcanzando al Mundo Latino (Latinos Reaching the Latin World)*, led by various LAM missionaries. This workshop will be offered only in Spanish

In addition, LAM’s president, Dr. David Befus, will be conducting several sessions of a seminar on *Microenterprises and Empowering the Poor*.

Other general workshops will include *Choosing a Mission Long-term, Guidance and God’s Will, Urban Missions, Tentmaking* and many others.

Missionary Jack Voelkel, who along with his wife Mary Anne served for 31 years in Latin America working with university students and teaching at the Biblical Seminary in Medellin, Colombia, has a special ministry for those with questions. He writes “Ask Jack,” a regular column on the Urbana web site (<http://www.urbana.org/tomorrow.askjack.cfm>). “Wow you sound like the person I need to talk to,” writes one student. “I am 19 and a sophomore at Florida State University. I am not sure what I want to major in yet, but God has given me such a desire to speak Spanish.” Jack’s job is to answer inquiries and encourage students who want to know more about missions and the Urbana conference.

Kristofer says that LAM wants to help those attending to understand that with all the emphasis in mission studies on unreached people and the 10-40 Window, that “it is great to have a call to serve in Latin America. There is still a valid, strategic place for cross-cultural workers in Latin America,” he says.

At Urbana, LAM will emphasize its commitment to collaboration with the Latin church in missionary placement and its commitment to diversity in types of ministries and a holistic approach to service. Kristofer says that the mission will be looking for people to serve in many types of ministries, particularly in the areas of children-at-risk, Christian camping, student ministries, and the mission’s Spearhead program which offers young adults between 19 and 30 the opportunity for a 15-month, short term mission training and service program in Mexico, Brazil and Honduras.

Several top-name speakers will be appearing at this year's Urbana 2000. The General Sessions Bible Expositor will be Ken Fong, Senior Pastor of Evergreen Baptist Church, a multi-Asian congregation in Los Angeles, California.

Other speakers include:

- Vinoth Ramachandra, a man who turned his back on the academic life in the West. Vinoth lives in Colombo, Sri Lanka and is the regional secretary for South Asia of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.
- Susan VanRiesen who is described as being passionate about prayer and healing in students' lives, and about racial reconciliation. She serves as an Area Director for InterVarsity in California.
- George Verwer, a visionary missions leader since college days, who is the Founder and Director of Operation Mobilization.
- Marta Bennett, a Professor of Biblical Studies at Daystar University in Nairobi, Kenya. Originally from the northwest United States, Marta has been in Kenya for six years, and has recently adopted two babies.

Reflecting on the importance of Urbana 2000, Kristofer says, "It is worth it for a mission such as LAM to be involved because of what it does for God's kingdom service, not only in mobilizing future missionaries but in helping participants to develop a world view and a global perspective."

Information on Urbana 2000 may be found at www.urbana.org, or by writing to:

- InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA
Urbana 2000
P.O. Box 7895
Madison, WI 53707-7895
608-274-9001
- InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/Canada
Urbana 2000
64 Prince Andrew Place
Toronto, ON, M3C 2H4
800-668-9766

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, 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.

Related web sites:

Urbana 2000: www.urbana.org

Latin America Mission: www.lam.org

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