

Churches in a transition from receiving to sending

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Churches in Latin America and the Caribbean are in a "transition from a receiving mentality to a sending mentality," according to LAM missionary Ralph Tone in Argentina. Tone's insights reflect those of church leaders across the region who sense the church in their area becoming more conscious of their need to be a missionary-sending organization.

"Ten years ago we were very much still in a receiving mode mentality, but this has changed over the past decade," said Rev. William H. Cuke, pastor of the Abundant Life Assembly in Barbados.

The change has come partially through education said William A. Landis, the Barbados-based Caribbean Director for Youth With a Mission (YWAM). "Ten years ago...there was only a handful of churches that even had an understanding of the unreached. Much of this was based on the fact that they lacked the knowledge that there were unreached people who had never heard of the name of Jesus," he said.

Luis Bush of the AD2000 movement says there are now around 4,000 Latin American missionaries throughout the world. Forty percent of them are in Latin America, but not in their own culture. Bush said that national mission structures are being formed in every country, especially Brazil. Half of Latin America's home-grown missionaries are Brazilians.

Many groups started by sending missionaries out within their own country, and only later by sending emissaries abroad. "We currently only have national missionaries who are involved in church planting," said Rev. David Blanton, a Southern Baptist missionary in Ecuador.

"There is a young woman who has recently gone to India and her local church and others in Guayaquil are supporting her," he said.

Others highlighted local church members who have gone far afield to minister. "Missionary Lanell Herbert from the Wesleyan Holiness Church in Barbados has gone to Papua New Guinea working with Wycliffe for one year," Rev. Cuke said. "Others are working in England with Operation Mobilization and Missionary Beth Cuke (Rev. Cuke's daughter) just returned home from a special assignment with Wycliffe in Tamale, Ghana."

In fact, Cuke's church has twelve missionaries working outside of Barbados and is supporting other missionaries in Guyana, Colombia and Australia.

Churches south of the United States' border say they realize that the real focus of mission work is in other regions. "The unreached do not live in the Caribbean so we need to focus our efforts on the ten-forty window," Landis said. "So, we have focused our attention on Albania and parts of North and West Africa and India. Our first long term team we sent out to work with the street children in Recife, Brazil. I would say that we send beyond our region although during the training phase we tend to send to needy spots that are cross-culture within the Caribbean."

"There is a growing realization that the Caribbean has been saturated with missionaries and churches," said Gerry A. Seale, General Secretary of the Barbados-based Evangelical Association of the Caribbean. "So, we need to send our missionaries

out of the region. Africa and Europe are receive most right now, though some are going to Central and South America."

The same is true from the Spanish-speaking regions of Central and South America. "From La Plata, an Argentine family was recently sent to Gabon, Africa," Tone said. "They are being supported by the churches of the city, and to our knowledge they are the first cross-cultural missionaries to be sent from the city."

"Some may be called to work in our region, but our goal is to reach into the "unreached peoples" of the world," Cuke said.

Latin and Caribbean missionaries are being supported by their own churches and denominations and many are being trained at home before they are sent out.

Support is "home grown," Pastor Cuke said. "I do not believe money is the problem...it is the people's attitude to missions that needs to be corrected. Thank God as a church we are now giving just over U.S. 8,000 per month to our missionary cause. When we started we had difficulty raising \$500."

Blanton said that Baptist missionaries in Ecuador are trained through the local church, at the denominational seminary in Quito or by the mission board.

Education take several forms. "We have found in the Caribbean that there is much Bible knowledge but not near enough application. Even the drunk on the corner can quote the scripture but doesn't live it. So we have endeavored to base our training on character development....We endeavor to marry the knowledge part (classroom training) with the working, loving serving your fellow man part through a live learning environment on campus. All of our courses have three months of classroom training then two months of practical application as a team," Landis said.

In Argentina, Ralph Tone and his wife Laurie are working to develop missionary consciousness and training among evangelical churches in the La Plata area. "We have established a missions training school and are training young Argentines by means of classroom training and short term trips. Montevideo, Uruguay, the least evangelized country of the hemisphere is the focus on our practical outreach," he said.

Tone's ministry includes three 15 week classes that cover the biblical base of missions, history of missions and cross-cultural considerations. There are approximately thirty students in the school from various denominations.

Church leaders in the region plan to continue to press the cause of missionary sending from these formerly missionary-receiving churches.

Bush called the recent COMIBAM 97 missionary conference in Mexico a "milestone at which Latin America could show whether it had brought forth its own missions movement, and how effective it is."

Caribbean churches will be holding a major missions conference in May, 2000 targeting one thousand key pastors and Evangelical leaders with the theme "From Mission Field to Mission Force: A New Paradigm in a New Millennium."

There are varying opinions as to the interest of local churches in the missionary movement. Blanton says yes, there is interest among Ecuadorian Baptist churches. Landis says the same about churches in the eastern part of the Caribbean.

On the other hand Seale says there isn't a whole lot of interest now, but it is beginning to develop.

Rev. Cuke reflected that the church as a sending church is a new idea for all Christians in the region. "We are still in the nursery stage," he said. "But it is exciting as

more and more churches are catching the vision. we have a lot to learn and we want to learn."

Churches in a transition from receiving missionaries to sending, *World Pulse*, Jan 3, 1998