

**Via Wendy's or friends;
The Lord is building an English-language church in Venezuela**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg
LAM News Service

Valencia, Venezuela (LAMNS)-
Missionary Dan Rambow may minister more at his local Wendy's restaurant than he does in the church where he serves.

For one thing, his congregation rents church space for only a few hours a week. And, as a pastor of Valencia Community Church, an English-language congregation in Venezuela, Wendy's or McDonald's is a natural place to meet English speaking, foreign residents.



“A woman came to church this past Sunday for the first time,” Dan said recently. “I met her when I was just standing in Wendy's at noon and found the two girls in front of me talking in English. They said that they had been here for months and had been looking for a church.”

Finding English-speaking residents in a foreign country can be both difficult and easy. On the one hand, there are usually no English language radio stations or newspapers in which to advertise and foreign residents can quickly disappear into the community. On the other hand, expatriate residents tend to congregate around the local English-language school and stand out in public places both physically and by their language.

Dan, who serves with the Latin America Mission, says that the church is beginning to look for new ways to reach out. “Our angle for evangelism is to get into the industrial community and find a target audience,” he says. “I figure there are about 20,000 English-speaking people in the community who could attend the church and understand the message if they want to.”

As with any pastor who serves in a multi-cultural, foreign setting, Dan is learning cultural sensitivities. “On Mother's Day, I wanted to hand out roses for the holiday, and I wanted to give out different colored roses, for example, white for single women,” he remembers. “But, in this Venezuelan culture, the color coding is different. I ended up just getting one color.”

“We have to study the different culture and learn to deal with different customs, such as for funerals,” he explains. Members of the Valencia church come from a variety of countries such as the United States, Trinidad, Nigeria, Granada, England and Venezuela. “We also have people who come from different denominations, and I have to study church history and traditions to understand them,” Dan says.

That diversity is hailed by many members of the Valencia church, says Michael Taylor who was born in Rangoon, Burma, and came to Venezuela via England. “It's good to have so many denominations within one church; it helps us to grow,” he says.

Dan, who was born in Farmington Hills, Michigan, but now considers Boca Raton, Florida, as his home, is a new pastor, serving his first church. "I'm new at this," he reports. "Right now, I'm following where I sensed God has opened the door. We are following where the Lord is leading. God is training me."

His first week at the Valencia church last February could be described as a 'baptism by fire.' "When I first got here and was trying to unpack my bags, in one week we had five people in the hospital," he says. "I wasn't ready for it, I didn't have a telephone and nobody knew how to contact me."



Those obstacles didn't stop the church from mobilizing to help out. "It was neat to see how God took care of the hospitalization, a funeral and the birth of a baby," he says. "The church came together. God laid it on each person's heart to step in and take care of it. God was taking care of the big stuff!"

The Valencia church holds its Sunday service at 8:30 a.m. in the rented facilities of a local Lutheran congregation. "The early morning is a good time because of the heat in Valencia," Dan explains. "Sometimes we have birds fly right through the chapel."

The service is informal and contemporary with music accompanied by a CD and guitars and led by church members. Attendance hovers around 25 to 30. There was a time when the church counted between 200 and

300 in attendance, but much of the foreign industry has left Valencia and the number of expatriates has declined.

"On Sunday I get to preach, but I don't get to know the people," Dan says. "Wednesday nights I get to hear the people share as we study through books, Bible study material and other guides such as *Experiencing God*. It's a wonderful time when almost half of the people are a different group than come on Sunday." He says that through the Wednesday evening studies, people have made professions of faith and renewed their commitment to the Lord.

An English-language church in a foreign setting such as Valencia is a welcome institution for expatriates. "The church brings the Christian community together and it brings a little of home to me," says Jenna Nelson who is from Kansas City and teaches middle school classes at the local English-language international school. "The church has helped me to assimilate into the culture better and has given me a local family to call on."

Melissa Oberdiech from St. Louis says that she would rather attend an English language church overseas because she can participate more easily and understand what is going on.

While hanging around Wendy's has proven to be helpful, Dan is encouraged by the way the Lord is bringing people to the church. "One by one, people are showing up, calling. We are ready for God to use us. People come to us, that's where our biggest ministry has been."

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.

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