

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN THE SAM REGION: PAST, HERITAGE AND INDIGENOUS PROCESS

Compilation of Papers SAM Region

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INTRODUCTION

The SAM Region includes 10 countries in South America. Spanish is spoken in nine of these, and in Brazil Portuguese is the language spoken. It has taken the Church of the Nazarene 74 years (1909 in Argentina to 1983 in Venezuela) of hard and sacrificial labor to develop the work in these ten countries, although officially it was 66 years (1917 in Peru and 1983 in Venezuela). The work in Venezuela was started through a world-wide offering raised in honor of the denomination's 75th anniversary.

The methodology used was quite diverse: independent missionaries, holiness groups joining the Church of the Nazarene, missionaries sent directly from the church and people from other countries like Argentina that helped start the work in Uruguay and Paraguay. We also sent pastors, like Joaquin Lima, a Cape Verdean, nationalized Argentinean to start the work in Brazil alongside other North American missionaries.

OUR HERITAGE

It is interesting to know, as Ignacio Malca says, that the very first convert in the Church of the Nazarene that we have record of in Argentina and probably in all of South America, was a young student of 15, whose name was Lucia Garcia de Costa, who later obtained a doctorate in Philosophy and Letters. Pastor, teacher, church planter and translator, she challenged her students with the following words: "We did the work with much less; you have more, so do something bigger." After all, we have the promises that Jesus made to his disciples for the fulfillment of the mission. Even though He left, He is and will be the greatest of all. As in the ministry of Jesus, education, evangelism, and compassion were from the start the most important parts of the mission of the Church of the Nazarene.

Ten countries, ten histories, ten cultures, ten social-economic realities and different political systems, but with only one message, the glorious Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; one same vision, to reach the lost, one same vision, to preach the Word of God to every creature, one same strategy, to establish the Kingdom of God, and one same goal, that no one should be lost.

As Richard Faúndez shows, we received the church itself; we inherited theological tradition with the Gospel of holiness, clearly defined ethical principles, an ordered organized structure and the love for missions which moves us to look at the Word of God at the world level. We received an international church. The author of the history of Paraguay states we received evangelistic passion and desire and interest in the training of national leaders with

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Christian values, with a call to life holiness and a vision to send missionaries to the world. Pedro López explains, we received a missionary spirit from men and women who penetrate the darkest corner of the jungle opening the way for national leaders to continue sowing the seed and accepting new challenges. From Macedonia Daza: we received the church that works with the poor in Compassionate evangelism. A national church that works with different ethnic groups, adopting a community theology and respecting their cultural values.

We have inherited leadership that is committed, compassionate, with holistic ministry, with emphasis on theological and secular education and the strategy to plant new churches according to Evelio Vásquez. It was the missionaries' influence, charisma, vision and mission which made the difference in the Church of the Nazarene in Ecuador. We also ought to mention, says Carlos Cordero, the importance of the good example of missionary leadership as well as communication programs, such as "La Hora Nazarena" (The Nazarene Hour) which made it possible for the Church of the Nazarene to be present even before being organized.

INDIGENOUS PROCESS

In these ten countries the stages have been different. Some have 90 years of missionary activity while others are celebrating their first 20 years. Some have missionaries while others no longer have them. However, it is possible to reflect on what we have been able to achieve:

- A good movement of consecrated lay people.
- Training of pastors, teachers and national leaders.
- The opening of new churches, pioneer areas and new districts.
- Training of national leaders to the level of *licenciatura*, master's and doctorate.
- Sending missionaries and pastors to other regions of the world. SAM is the Region that has sent more missionaries after the USA.
- The creation of the first Nazarene University in South America.
- The creation of mega-churches. The largest church with the greatest financial resources in World Mission areas is found on the SAM Region.
- Schools that operate with official recognition.
- Decentralized program that trains ministers.
- National boards and legal associations that function.
- National foundations and Compassionate Ministries.
- Production of literature in Spanish and Portuguese.
- Providing leaders for seminaries and universities in Latin America and the USA and for regional and field tasks.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account that not everything is perfect we need to point out the integral character of the pioneers, their passion for the lost, their vision and their confidence in the Lord that their work was not vain. They formed national leaders, who with love and obedience not only shared the message with the people but also became a new generation of missionaries in the Church of the Nazarene who would work in other countries, fields, regions and continents to continue to extend the Kingdom of God here on this earth.

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I believe that the Church of the Nazarene is in a new era. A time of new opportunities and great challenges. The proof of this is this conference.

I believe that all of us want our church to become the church that God wants and the pioneers dreamt of.

It is important to know what has been our inheritance, our history, our past to that we can be sure to write it better in the present, convinced that our future in the Lord will be brilliant for the glory and honor of “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Eph. 3:20).