

## **HISTORY AND REVIEW OF THE PAST: URUGUAY**

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### **PIONEER STAGE**

The work of the Church of the Nazarene in Uruguay began in 1948 as an extension of the missionary work in Argentina, the pioneer missionaries being Rev. John Cochran and his wife, Mary. In 1949, Rev. Ronald Denton and his family moved to Montevideo. They came to a country predominately Roman Catholic (66%), with only 2% confessing to be Protestants, and the rest of the population professing no particular faith at all. In spite of bragging for years that we are a highly cultured country calling ourselves the Switzerland of South America, secularism predominates to such a degree that the Catholic Church is separated from the state.

According to the testimonies of those first converts in Montevideo, 16 people attended the first meeting in one of the family's homes on January 16, 1949. The young missionary couple worked with great commitment, inviting, talking with neighbors and doing work house to house. In March 1949 there were a series of special meetings resulting in the first professions of faith. Among these was Mr. Salvador Cipriano Ramos, which was the first fruit that remained firm and during the next several years, became the first ordained pastor in Uruguay. He is still one of many living testimonies of the beginnings of the church.

Within a year of start of the meetings, the first baptism was held with eight people, the first members of the Church of the Nazarene in Uruguay; these were the members that made up the first organized Church of the Nazarene in the country. The Dentons looked for another place in the city and on November 6, 1952, Rev. Denton started meetings in homes and special services under a tent in the Piedras Blancas and Manga area. Later, in 1958, a house was rented and the work came under the direction of Pastor David Corvino. In 1959 a property was acquired in the Piedras Blancas area and a church was constructed and later organized in 1962, with Rev. Cipriano Ramos named as pastor. In 1954 the work was started in a place called Carrasco which was made up of mainly people from the middle and upper class. This church was organized in August 1955 with ten members. The new church building was inaugurated in March 1959.

### **EXPANSION OF THE WORK OUTSIDE OF THE CAPITAL**

As the work advanced, new missionaries came, such as the Perkinson family who came from Argentina. In 1956 the Armstrongs came from Bolivia and finally, the Wilkinson family arrived. In 1956 the missionary advance extended outside of Montevideo to a city called Canelones, 47 kilometers away. In 1957 a church was established there. In 1963, the Hughes were added to the missionary family. With the passing of the years, in a small country like Uruguay, there was a quite a concentration of missionaries in the capital. But 14 years after the work had started; the farthest the work had extended was Canelones, barely 47 kilometers from the capital.

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Because of this situation, and even without full agreement among the missionary council, it was resolved to send pastor Ted Hughes to the city of Minas, in the department of Lavalleja, about 129 kilometers away from the capital. The Perkinson family, along with Miguel Rodríguez as assistant pastor, moved to the city of Florida located about 97 kilometers from the capital. Later, more missionaries arrived, who were younger, more dynamic and had a lot of enthusiasm. These used the strategy of mobilizing the students from the Nazarene Bible Institute. In this way, the church went to the city of San José. In 1973, pastor José Pedro López with his wife and small son, traveled to the northern part of the country, to Tacuarembó, to start the work there. Today this is the seat of the Uruguay North District. There were some very difficult times, but at the same time, very enriching for the unforgettable experience gained there.

I would like to bring out some specific points related to the way in which the mission was promoted: organizing **camps**, not only permitted the members of the different churches to get to know each other better but they also were an important element in getting to know the Church of the Nazarene. This type of activity included children, young people and adults. Regarding the **formation of national leaders**, Sunday school was an important tool. Believers who had a call to the ministry were prepared by means of correspondence courses from the Bible Institute located in Buenos Aires. Later, an extension of the same institution started classes at the church in Pocitos, with evening classes, until everything was moved to the property in Ciudad de Bahía Blanca, which resulted in an important change in the process of training new pastors. For their practical experience, the student began as an associate pastor and later he was assigned a church. In November 1957 the first student graduated from the extension of the Biblical Institute of Buenos Aires, Mr. Salvador Cipriano Ramos. In 1959 a property was acquired in Montevideo where the Nazarene Bible Institute started. The Nazarene Bible Institute was categorized as an excellent place to study from the academic point of view given that in Uruguay there was a large group of teachers with high academic levels.

## **WINDS OF CHANGE AND TRANSITION**

By 1980 most of the missionaries had left the country. With the presence of the last missionaries, a time of transition began that resulted in the district reaching regular status. The changes were so abrupt that it is only comparable to the situation of a baby that goes from being weaned to solid foods. The biggest problem arose from the situation that there were no longer subsidies for the pastors. Four generations of students passed through the Nazarene Bible Institute of Uruguay. The last generation suffered from the abrupt closing of the institution. Added to this was the problem of the marked difference in economic level between the missionaries and the local pastors, to such a degree that the people saw the difference and asked why. Time showed that we were not prepared for this change but had to accept it.

However, the good teaching we received allowed the national pastors to continue the path of sacrifice to such a level that many of them are still in the ministry today. These were very difficult times given that the pastoral changes happened frequently and inexperienced pastors were sent to the interior of the country while the missionaries remained in the capital.

In 1980 Rev. Walter Rodríguez was named the first national district superintendent. Those first years in the life of the national district were difficult, when the church stopped receiving subsidies to sustain the pastors and pay taxes on the buildings that had been

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constructed and when the economic situation of the country was not good. This gave rise to the situation where the churches were mostly composed of people from the lower class, especially many young people, children and women who did not have the possibility of giving through their tithes and offerings sufficient to cover the local budgets. This caused the District Advisory Board to analyze alternative strategies, deciding that the pastors needed to look for secular work to support their families.

In midst of these circumstances, the District Advisory Board suggested to the authorities the creation of a pioneer district in the north of the country with its seat in Tacuarembó. Rev. Jesús Bernat was designated as superintendent and the work began to expand throughout the northern part of the country. After 19 years, the district has 32 active churches with a membership of 2100. When the last missionary left, the district assembly elected a new superintendent, Rev. Miguel Rodríguez. Later the General Superintendent named Rev. Adán Villalba as district superintendent thus concluding here the first chapter of the Church of the Nazarene in Uruguay.

## **NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION**

It wasn't an easy task that the national church now had to adjust the missionary model of extension to the reality of the country. The district lacked vehicles and pastoral training, and had many other deficiencies. The believers had become accustomed to the missionaries picking them up, taking them to church, and bringing them back home. Now that the national pastors did not have the same possibilities, church attendance dropped drastically.

It was a new situation and a great challenge for a Phase III district that implied a lot of responsibility, seriousness, honesty, faithfulness and wise administration of what had been received. In spite of this difficulty the work grew much more with national workers. As we have mentioned, in 1980, after 30 years, there were 12 churches with 350 members; in October 2001, there were 24 organized churches with a membership of 1000. For the training of new leaders, the nationals established a new program of studies, CENETA. This has permitted the work to continue in spite of the crises that have occurred and that the church is still experiencing.

In regard to the situation of the pastors, among the benefits received we can mention the possibility of official recognition of the pastoral function so that pastors can receive a pension. This was accomplished in 1985 and is still in practice today.

The District of Uruguay maintains a closed relationship with the Field and Region making use of the different instruments offered by them for a better development of the church. This has generated sustained but not sufficient growth. Personally, I am concerned that there are few new converts because growth has mostly come about by transfers from other churches. There is still a lot to do to reach the interior of the country and for this we need committed people that join with pastors who are currently active in the work.

## **CONCLUSION**

I have attempted to present in this paper what is the most accurate about our historical reality and our country's present situation, part of which I have personally lived. When analyzing the missionary's administration, we cannot say everything was bad because we are not

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in the condition to judge without knowing in depth the motives that led to certain decisions that we do not understand. So then, thinking in the moments of transition, in all of the documents during that period that I had access to do not demonstrate what the fundamental reasons that led to the mass exodus of the missionaries were. This raised the question, was it the result of the lack of support for the poor results, given that only 12 churches with 350 members existed after 30 years of effort? If we look deeper, from a logistical point of view, they had everything and spent a lot, but with little to show for it. Added to this, there was strong paternalism that significantly affected the development of a district that was not ready for the new stage of national administration.

Even so, the legacy that we have to emphasize is that of the training of pastors and the buildings, such as parsonages and churches that were left to be administered by the national church. However, in regard to pastoral training, the Bible Institute produced generations of pastors that didn't remain in the ministry. Personally, I believe that at times the numbers make us dizzy and we aren't able to distinguish between those who were really called to the ministry and those who were pushed into a ministry they did not feel.

In spite of this, I must point out that my beloved missionary co-workers established good foundations in the current leaders during the formative years and without them, the Church of the Nazarene in Uruguay would not have a future. It is important to remember that the model of pastoral formation had a solid base on the knowledge of the Word of God. The world has changed but the church must return to the foundation of these good principles tied to God's faithfulness and His Word. It is also worthy to imitate their organizational and administrative aspects.

The legacy of the missionary spirit that has been left to us is the extension of the Kingdom of God on this earth. Today we see the North American missionaries as those men and women who penetrated the darkest jungle to open the way, and the national leaders as those who took the handle of the plow and continued opening the path, planting the precious seed. Dear brothers and sisters, let us maintain this precious legacy of active missionary passion that was given to us by our brothers and sisters that began and motivated the work! May the Church of the Nazarene in Uruguay be encouraged and accept the new challenges that we grow numerically but also in the understanding of the new needs.