

## **HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN ECUADOR**

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*Country of Origin: Ecuador*

*Serving in: Ecuador*

The Church of the Nazarene in Ecuador has a specific history to tell, since across time there have been different stages in development—its rise, expansion and growth—processes that have without doubt left transforming prints that have contributed richly to its progress until today.

The rise of the church goes back to March of 1971 when the Swains were given official permission by the Department of World Mission in Kansas City to establish the Church of the Nazarene in Ecuador, a proposal that was accepted as a great challenge. In May of the same year, they made a fact-finding trip, arriving in Guayaquil and starting a round of visits to various cities, confirming that there existed excellent possibilities to start the church. In December they were given visas to enter the country with government permission. It was then that on February 28, 1972, the enthusiastic family of five members arrived in Guayaquil with the only purpose to establish the church, fulfilling the call of the Creator.

From 1972 until the middle of 1975, they used several strategic principles in the missionary task in Ecuador that were defined during those first months of work, to respond to the spiritual needs of the Ecuadorians by preaching the Gospel and doing everything that was within their reach while they had the opportunity. The first convert, a painter that had been hired to paint the missionary's house, immediately opened the doors of his house and invited his neighbors. This is how they began to plant the seeds of the Gospel and the doctrine of holiness in the new Ecuadorian families that were converted.

On June 1, 1972, the first church was organized in Prosperita with approximately 50 people. Later the church located between Letamendi and Babahoyo streets was organized with 80 people. The same year a group of United States university students representing the Student Center of Evangelism arrived in Guayaquil. These students did evangelistic work, built church buildings, taught Bible and missions and were a great blessing as they were able to start two more missions, one in Mapasique and the other on 39<sup>th</sup> and Argentinos streets. In July of 1972, they were celebrating four services in Guayaquil with an average attendance of 270.

The church grew, and it was time to begin the raise up national leadership, for which in April 1973 missionaries John and Sheila Hall were assigned to Ecuador. They were assigned to work in the program of teaching and theological formation of pastors, leaders and Sunday school teachers. In this manner, they could rely on pastors and leaders that were theologically prepared to respond to the needs of the development of the church. With this intention, the Nazarene Evangelical Institute was created and began its first cycle of studies with the class, Introduction to Old Testament.

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In this way the process of multiplication began. At the end of 1974 another church was organized outside of the city of Guayaquil. The work extended to Riobamba, a city located in the central part of the Ecuadorian sierra. The church began as the result of the radio program “La Hora Nazarena” [The Nazarene Hour]. The church started on February 11, 1976. The first District Assembly was presided by Dr. Jerald Johnson, General Superintendent. The report given by Rev. Swain reflected the result of four continual years of service, the period that marked the beginning stage of the Church of the Nazarene in Ecuador.

At the end of the 1976 Assembly, Rev. John Hall was named District Superintendent of the Ecuador District. There was not much growth during his time but there was better doctrinal consolidation as his emphasis centered on the education and theological formation of the pastors and national leaders. His preaching encouraged many of the Ecuadorian Nazarenes to seek the experience of entire sanctification, an element that helped to understand the doctrinal base of the church. Rev. Hall, in his 1977 report, expressed, “The Seminary is the heart of all that we try to do here as its success will determine the success of the Church of the Nazarene in Ecuador.” This same year the government of Ecuador gave official recognition to the denomination, under number 353 of the official registry. This benefit gave the opportunity to legally express the doctrine of holiness throughout the country, facilitated the purchase of properties and the construction of facilities in favor of the church, and permitted offering spiritual, social and beneficial services to all the citizens.

1978 is considered the year of construction. Various Work and Witness teams from the United States, directed by missionary Davis Hayse, came and built churches and other buildings. This ministry strengthened the missionary labor in Ecuador as the constructions motivated the pastors, leaders and members of the churches to follow the plan of expansion in the country. 1979 and 1980 were the years of evangelism; the church expanded into new areas and various ethnic groups were visited, in the Sierra and the Ecuadorian Amazon, forming missions that later were organized as churches. During this period, the Sluyter family arrived in the capital to start new contacts of the mission and work of the church. Between 1981 and 1983, the mission suffered a series of changes that affected the growth of the missions and churches in the country. This crisis produced some instability, as it was difficult to make decisions about the future while there was no stable leadership. Up to this date, there was still just one district, twelve churches, four preaching points and 230 full members.

The years between 1984 and 1995 became a stage of expansion and growth, with the arrival of Rev. Louis Bustle in 1983. Rev. Bustle began a series of changes in the development of the denomination. Just before his arrival the Regional Office was installed in Quito, which became the director of the movement of the church in all of South America. The leadership of Dr. Bustle was very important in this process because of his influence, charisma, vision and mission. With the transfer of the Seminary and the district offices to the Sierra District in Quito, a new time of expansion and growth in the South American church started. The program “Every One Win One” became a first class evangelistic resource. The objective of this plan was that every pastor, leader and member of the church would become involved in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The plan is summed up in “Every one win one, every church plant a church and every pastor train another pastor”.

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With this evangelistic plan designed by Dr. Bustle and Dr. Bruno Radi, missional work expanded year by year. The district superintendent's reports from the Coastal and Central Districts showed that the plan started to generate great results, so much so that it was necessary to create new districts. In the district assemblies that same year showed that the Coastal District had 14 churches, 4 missions, 534 members, including 116 new ones and 30 students in CENETA. On March 8, 1986 the second assembly of the Sierra District took place in Riobamba with reports of 2 new churches, 4 missions, 246 members and 34 CENETA students. Rev. Dwight Rich assumed the responsibility of district superintendent. Various missionary couples, from both the United States and South America, came to the country to help in the denomination's educational and ministerial work. Nothing stopped the growth as in 1991 there were already 6 districts. In the area of theological education, on December 16, 1990, the first class of 12 graduated from the South American Theological Seminary's *Licenciado en Teología* program. With all this joy and enthusiasm, the Impacto Plan was officially launched, a program that would help with the evangelistic plan and explosive growth in all of South America. This stage was very efficient as it was able to extend the church to the least expected corners of Ecuador. In 1994, there were 8,835 members and 175 churches on 6 districts.

1995 was a year of changes. Dr. Bruno Radi was named Regional Director. The unfortunate kidnapping of missionary Donald Cox and other factors caused the transfer of the Regional Office to Buenos Aires, Argentina and all the North American missionaries left the country. But this did not mean that the vision, plans and goals also left. The inheritance that had been received had to be reaffirmed throughout the country; the national leaders worked with enthusiasm, commitment and love in the ministry which God had called them to. From July 1996, the time when the Rich family returned to the country as Field Director along with the McKellips family as Work and Witness Coordinators, until now, the church has continued to guide itself along the path of success. The disconnection from the Regional Office made the national leadership start to depend completely on God. This attitude has helped us be more objective when doing the ministerial task.

In these moments the Church of the Nazarene in Ecuador, taking into account the Jubilee year when membership lists were adjusted, has a membership of 6,998; 137 churches, 58 ordained elders, 79 licensed ministers, 61 lay ministers and 16 missions. We have clear goals—concrete and reachable. God has given a vision to the leadership to have 400 churches and 25,000 members by 2010. In order to reach this goal, the church has committed itself to work fervently in the areas of evangelism discipleship, leadership, in the Seminary, with Compassionate Ministries and the departments of NYI, NMI and SSM. In the area of evangelism we work with the Jesus Film and being able to open a world of new opportunities for the districts that know how to give adequate follow-up. Last year several new churches were organized using this very special tool.

There is a well-established discipleship plan on four levels, directed by a national coordinator that follows up on every district. National leadership is being trained by means of a program called "Sedlo" (Be It).

The South American Theological Seminary is a very important part of the church. There men and women are spiritually and theologically prepared to respond to God's call and to satisfy

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the needs of the growth and development of the church. Its program of decentralized studies has successfully contributed to the entire Ecuadorian church as many pastors and leaders have used this resource for ministerial and theological preparation.

Our country is constantly exposed to natural disasters that have contributed to the hunger and misery of many people, but we thank God that Compassionate Ministries has been there under the direction of Rev. Luis Meza to help and reduce somewhat the people's needs, making us a merciful church. During the past few years we have been developing the program CAUSE with young people from all over the country. The results have been spectacular as many young people have been called into the ministry and are being trained.

Many brothers and sisters from distinct regions have been bulwarks in the consolidation of the church; the successes of each one of them has contributed to the strengthening of the church. Without doubt, there are many things that have not been done over the past 32 years; however, the failures have served as a base to grow. As Ecuadorians we have understand clearly the challenge to continue preaching the message of holiness to the entire Ecuadorian family, in all of the corners of my dear country.