

HISTORY OF THE HISPANIC CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

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INTRODUCTION

To speak of the past as part of the history of the church in whatever place or context is to speak of the history of God in His Church. In his sovereignty God has chosen people and races to make them be part of His history. God throughout history has called men and women to develop projects of His mission in the history of humanity. God is Lord of history and His Son Jesus Christ is the incarnated revelation of the history of God's project of salvation for all peoples and races among those the Hispanics-Latinos in the United States and Canada. Hispanic-Latinos make up a large mosaic and from them is emerging a new people. A new mestizo—we are Indians, we are Africans, we are Spanish, we are Asian—but now what is occurring more and more is a mestizo of a mestizo. It is just as biological as cultural. There is among our people those who have a son that is a Puerto Rican and an Ecuadorian, who has in his blood Dominican and Cuban inheritance, who is a daughter of a Chicano and Salvadoran, son of an Afro-American and a Latina, son of a Guatemalan and a Mexican, daughter of a Nicaraguan and a North American Anglo-Saxon, daughter of an Arab and a Peruvian. A new people are emerging as is a new culture among Hispanics-Latinos that carries the mixed blood of different races and countries, not only those of Latin America but of the whole world. They are part of the Nazarene family in the United States and in Canada and part of the great international Nazarene family.

THE FIRST NAZARENE HISPANIC WORKS IN THE SOUTHWEST

The Church of the Nazarene was born in the city with the greatest concentration of Hispanic origin in the United States, Los Angeles, California. Dr. Bresee had the vision of making the Church of the Nazarene “a church of the people and for the people”. From its first years of formation, The Church of the Nazarene had the vision for the evangelization of the Hispanics in the United States and along the border of the southern part of the country. There is a century of history in the establishment and development of the Hispanic Church of the Nazarene.

In 1904, sister May McReynolds started the first Hispanic mission in the city of Los Angeles under the auspices of the First Church of the Nazarene. This mission was oriented to the evangelization of the population of Mexican descent which have historically lived in the State of California and in other States before those states were annexed to the United States in 1848. As Dr. Esdras Betancourt states, “Immigration has not always been from the south to the north but also has been from the northeast to the southwest.”

In 1907 a Hispanic work was started in El Paso, Texas and in other cities. The first Hispanic District with the name Southwest Mexican included the states of California, Arizona, Texas (El Paso) and Colorado. It also included the districts of Baja California, Sonora and

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Chihuahua. In 1933 Rev. E.Y. Davis was named District Superintendent and functioned in that position until 1944.

In 1928, the first Hispanic mission in San Antonio was started. This area of the state of Texas was part of the Monterrey-San Antonio District until it was divided to form a new district in the South Central part of the United States that went up to the state of Kansas.

The results of this missionary work are the Hispanic districts in the United States. It also helped with the establishment of the first Hispanic ministries among the English-speaking districts such as Los Angeles, Kansas City and others.

THE NAZARENE HISPANIC WORK IN THE NORTHEAST AND IN THE SOUTH OF FLORIDA

The first Hispanic work on the east coast of the United States began in 1952, under the leadership of Rosita Iglesias in the city of Stamford, Connecticut. In 1958 Rev. Harold L. Hampton was named superintendent of the Eastern Hispanic District. The pioneer of Hispanic works in the area of New York was Dr. Alberto Espada Matta, originally from Puerto Rico.

When missionary John Hall, Sr., left Cuba, he went to southern Florida to live to continue his missionary work among the Cubans that were arriving en masse to that area. That is how the pioneer work among the Cubans exiles began. The missionary work of John Hall has been the inspiration for the Hispanic work on the South District of Florida, currently with more than 16 churches and where the largest Hispanic church is found in all of the United States and Canada, with an average attendance of more than 1,000. This is the Hialeah Church, pastured by Rev. Mel Santiesteben, originally from Cuba. (This information was taken from a document presented to the Hispanic Strategy Committee by Rev. Carlos Sol, 1997).

A SECOND STAGE IN HISPANIC WORKS

The mass immigration of Latin Americans in the decades of the 1980's and 1990's all across the United States motivated English-speaking districts and churches to adopt a new vision in the evangelization among Hispanics and other ethnic groups, as the church pioneers had. The districts and churches began to start missionary initiatives of evangelism towards the millions of Hispanics that arrived in the United States for various reasons. During these two decades the movement of the multicongregational and multicultural district and church models was developed. The multicongregational churches shared installations and some of the governing and financial structures. This new modality has experienced the greatest growth of Hispanic churches starting more that 150 new congregations in a decade. Adjoining are statistical growth charts.

The church in the United States and Canada has asked for help from the church in Latin America, from which pastors, missionaries and leaders have come to help with evangelizing and accompany pastoral of the Hispanics. The numerical growth of Hispanics has helped the church in the United States and Canada in its statistical growth.

New areas of ministry under this movement during the past two decades include the following districts: Central Florida, Rev. José Cardona; Chicago, Dr. José Alfaro; New England,

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Rev. Juan Rivera; Washington, D.C., Rev. Roberto Hodgson; Northern California, Rev. Wilmer Guido; South Arkansas, Rev. David Pérez; Alabama, Rev. Leonel Alvarado; Georgia, Rev. Georgino Martínez; Kentucky, Rev. David Samayoa; Tennessee, Rev. Leonel de León; Northwest Indiana, Dr. Alberto Guang; Southwest Indiana, Rev. David Morante and Rev. Carlos Morante, and the list goes on...

The work in Canada started under the direction of Pastor Rafael Moreno in the Central District in 1988. In 1996, when Pastor Moreno retired, Rev. Pedro Julio Fernández and his family arrived from the Dominican Republic to assume the ministry of the Emmanuel Church. Under the leadership of Rev. Fernández six new churches have been started on the district and the Hispanic church enjoys an average attendance of more than 200 people. On the West District in the Vancouver area the Hispanic work was started by Rev. Willy Choriego.

UNITED STATES AND CANADA, A MISSION FIELD

The massive wave of new immigrants during the past two decades brought the General Superintendents to declare the United States and Canada as mission fields in 1997. With this declaration they implemented the naming of five directors for the minority groups with the largest number of churches. The Hispanic church has the largest quantity and members of all the ethnic groups.

On May 1, 2001, the church created the Office of Hispanic Ministries for the United States and Canada and named Dr. Roberto Hodgson as director. The assistance of the director of Hispanic Ministries has pushed the initiative for six new Hispanic Ministries under the district structure, assigning coordinators for these ministries: South Carolina, Rev. Luis A. Valverde; Montreal, Rev. Rafael Reyes; Northeast Oklahoma, Rev. Otoniel Dannemann; Washington State, Rev. Julio Ortiz; Virginia, Rev. Rigoberto Acosta. Of the 82 districts in the United States and Canada, there are three Hispanic districts and 55 English-speaking districts that have Hispanic ministries.

The Office of Hispanic Ministries prompted the organization of three sub-committees that function under the Hispanic Strategy Committee. This committee was established more than ten years ago and is formed by leaders that represent the nine educational regions of the United States and Canada. This committee was approved by the Board of General Superintendents to advise the general church in relation to Hispanic strategies and activities. Rev. José Pacheco is the president of the Hispanic Strategy Committee.

The sub-committees are the following: New Churches, Education, and Church Development. These committees were established to create national strategy projects, to help in the establishment and development and the growth of the churches and to respond to the evangelization of the growing Hispanic population in the United States, approximately 40 million.

MINISTERIAL EDUCATION

The Hispano-American Seminary in San Antonio, Texas began in 1946, under the direction of Rev. Derrell Larkin and its last rector was Dr. José Rodríguez. The closing of the seminary in 1980 created a vacuum in the formation of new leaders. This decision affected and

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limited the preparation and development of the leadership, and as a result, limited the development and growth of the Hispanic church. Not having an educational institution for Hispanics limited the formation of new ministers, particularly among second-generation Hispanics.

In a new chapter in ministerial education, an Education committee was created, under the direction of Rev. Giovanni Monterroso. The committee established the program ENTE (Educación Nazarena Teológica Especializada [Specialized Nazarene Theological Education]) and it had its first program of intensive courses in September of 2003, with 19 students. On the basis of this experience a residence program has been designed at the installations of the Native American Indian Bible College. On May 30th of this year the second period of courses was given with 31 students enrolled.

Another program for ministerial education was the adaptation of the “Master Teacher Plan”. Under this program, 24 modular courses from the Course of Ministerial Studies for ordination in the United States were translated into Spanish. The conference for training of Master Teachers was held to train Pastors-Teachers how to teach the modules in the different district ministerial studies centers.

During the PALCON events, training workshops were presented for the Pastors-Teachers. The Master-Teacher committee is preparing the celebration of the First Hispanic Theological Conference: “Hispanic Presence—Prophetic Vision and Mission”. The purpose of this conference is pastoral theological reflection and the role of the Hispanic church in the United States. The guest speakers will be Dr. Justo González and Dr. Jerry Porter.

CONCLUSION

Through this historical documentation we can learn and reflect that the mission of God goes forward by means of women and men willing to establish the kingdom of God in their communities in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. A new missiological paradigm is rising along with the pastoral among the Hispanics, the pastor of a local church becomes a missionary in his ministry among the cultural and racial diversity of the Latinos and other groups. The pastor from Uruguay ministering to the Hondurans, Salvadorans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Columbians, Anglos, Nicaraguans, etc.

During the celebration of the National Pastors’ Congress in 2001, the theme “A New Day” was adopted for Hispanic-Latino ministries. The projections are inspiring in the face of the opportunities of the Hispanic Church of the Nazarene to fulfill the mission of the kingdom in the evangelization of Hispanic-Latinos (Jerusalem), to the other cultures in the United States and Canada (Judea), collaborating with the evangelization of Latin America (Samaria) and sending missionaries to the ends of the earth. God is Lord of history and of His church.