

THE NAZARENES COME TO HONDURAS

By Begardo Bardales

Country of Origin: Honduras

Serving in: Honduras

As we come to share the story of the development of the Church of the Nazarene in Honduras, three questions come to mind. First, how did the church get established? Second, what was the method used to train pastors? And third, what was the strategy used to extend the church? These questions will allow us to analyze and observe the positive aspects that contributed to the development of the church, while at the same time we will find some situations which did not benefit the formation of the work of the church in Honduras.

MEMORY: SEARCHING FOR POSSIBILITIES

There were many people who had an interest in starting the work in Honduras. I would like to mention two of these. Juan Madrid, originally from Honduras, working as a district superintendent in the western part of the United States, showed a great desire to open the work, and the second individual was Ira L. True, who mentioned repeatedly his desire to send someone to open the church.

In 1969, Rev. James Hudson, Dr. William and Elizabeth Sedat, Stanley and Norma Storey, Larry and Eunice Bryant, and Samuel and Gwladys Heap came from Guatemala and El Salvador on an exploratory visit to Honduras. They reached the city San Pedro de Sula which was in those days was an industrial city. Later they went to Tegucigalpa, which at that time had 430,000 inhabitants. After this trip, they evaluated which city to start the work in and who should be responsible. This first visit opened the door to commence the work of the Church of the Nazarene in Honduras. Two years later, Rev. James Hudson sent Danilo Solis to the city of San Pedro de Sula to plant the first Church of the Nazarene in the barrio of Guamilito. In July 1973, the denomination's Department of World Mission sent missionary Rev. Stanley Storey to direct the work of the mission in Honduras.

PLANNING: PIONEER MOMENTS

The challenge of laying the foundations of this recently established church would be decisive for the development of the denomination. Very soon they elaborated a strategy that contemplated the following aspects: (a) the formation of national pastors, (b) have the support of two missionary couples to open new fields, (c) that the national church would be sustainable. Although the strategy had some very good elements, it did not achieve the desired purposes, due to the fact that these ideas were not communicated or these initiatives followed up on realistically.

In the first eight years after the founding of the denomination, five churches were planted. I would like to mention some relevant aspects of these formative years: (a) the International Churches programs were implemented, (b) the properties that were purchased were large, (c) the preparation of church members was done with great care. But on the other hand, some of the negative aspects we have are: (a) Theological education was very weak and was not

Honduras (Begardo Bardales)

well promoted, (b) the majority of the pastors that were serving came from other churches, and although they had very good intentions, they were not able to incarnate holiness theology and the mission of the church.

At the beginning of the 1980's the church experienced accelerated changes. The MAC Region emphasized "Church Growth". However in those days the Honduran church was not experiencing "growth". In 1981, Rev. Paul Jetter assumed the direction of the mission in Honduras. With his arrival, theological education was formalized and courses were offered in both intensive and regular modalities. Some of the people who taught the intensive courses were: Dr. Jerry Porter, Dr. Daniel Zani, Dr. Danilo Montero and others. It seems to us that the courses that these people taught were of very high quality, but the candidates that started their preparation were not ready to receive theological instruction, and so this effort signified a lot of investment with very little results. This experience should lead us to reflect: that our seminaries and decentralized centers should not promote "easy way to theological education" through intensive courses. It needs to be mentioned that only four pastors who were formed in this way are still serving.

Due to the fact that many of our barrios and neighborhoods of our city were receptive to the Gospel, the churches were encouraged to start new works. But later this provoked conflict among several churches led by lay leaders, who although had good intentions, showed deficiencies. As a result, frustration soon arose and churches were left without pastors. The mother churches were weakened because their mature members were sent out to start the new works. In this sense we lost ground as the churches did not develop in a healthy manner and we lost identity. There was still a long to go before the Church of the Nazarene could really be established in Honduras.

HOPE FOR THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORK

In 1998, 16 years after the work had been started in Honduras, leadership began to be given to the nationals, although it was too soon, since the Honduran church was very young and was not yet prepared. We found ourselves with a very weak church with poor identity, with pastors that produced little and with a membership who were not committed to the purposes and mission of the Church of the Nazarene. This terrain was fertile when neo-Pentecostal movements began to open up in 1992. The groups which accepted this wave of teaching were "growing" and many pastors and members were easily motivated but very soon we soon fell into a "crisis". In the midst of this uncertainty, a small group accepted the challenge to rediscover their heritage of the doctrine of holiness and in this way, assume the responsibility to develop the task that our Lord Jesus Christ has given us.

At the beginning of this new era, there was neither numerical growth nor new churches. However, a process of putting into order and correcting the churches' membership lists was started. A small group of pastors and lay people began to reflect and act on how the Church of the Nazarene in Honduras should be developed. Slowly, the foundations were reaffirmed. This position was strongly criticized by the church authorities who perceived that the church was not "growing" and "nothing relevant was happening" as shown in the statistics; very soon, phrases such as "In Honduras there are no leaders" was heard. As a result the church began to take seriously the task of preparing strong pastors who emphasized the doctrine of holiness.

Honduras (Begardo Bardales)

Twelve years later, we find a healthy church. A church that understands the importance of educating its pastors and future servants of God, and is even contributing to the training of leaders of other denominations through the theological education centers. We are using the resources that the Region shares for these purposes and have even created social action ministries for the promotion of human development. The church is now committed to the message of holiness. Little by little, the Church of the Nazarene in Honduras is assuming the responsibility to extend the Kingdom of God here on earth.