

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN EL SALVADOR

By Luis Flores

Country of Origin: El Salvador

Serving in: El Salvador

Our history begins during the decade of the 1960s, 1964 to be exact. The country found itself in series of social protests between the government and the teacher's union; there were strikes, protests, disrespect of human rights, which all ruled at the moment. This environment during the next ten years brought the Salvadoran people to civil war that resulted in approximately 80,000 people killed, coups, 20,000 people who disappeared and conflict that lasted twelve years.

Seven years after the happenings just described, God awoke in the hearts of some fellow Guatemalans to travel to El Salvador. Several years before, in 1957, the first attempt to start a mission of the Church of the Nazarene took place due to the initiative of Robert Ingram (from the United States), Federico Guillermo (from Guatemala) and eight members of Guatemala's missionary council. Their desire was to leave a group in El Salvador that would preach the message of holiness. In August of the same year, Ismael Bolaños was added to the team; the team started the work in the city of San Martín, reaching 16 people for Christ. However, the work was stopped by the local priest who accused Bolaños of teaching Communism in the country. Along with the local authorities and residents of the area, the missionaries were expelled from the area, stopping in this way the first attempt to open a mission in our country.

In the midst of the chaos in the 1960s a second attempt was made, promoted by the district superintendent Federico Guillermo, sending Guatemalan missionaries Ernestina López and Amparo Ruano who arrived in El Salvador on May 1, 1964. They settled in a poor barrio called Concepción, founded the first Sunday school with 40 children, and their first adult convert was Rafael Flores. In August of the same year, missionaries Larry and Eunice Bryant arrived to help with the mission work.

Time went by very quickly and two years later, on Saturday 25, February 1967, they officially announced the organization of the First Church of the Nazarene in El Salvador, with 29 full members and named Juan Xitumul López, a Guatemalan, the first pastor. The next day, during a beautiful service, a second church was organized as the Jardín (Garden) Church of the Nazarene. The newest church had 18 members and the pastors were Rev. and Mrs. Larry Bryant.

The Church of the Nazarene continued to expand and in 1970 the following churches were organized: Santa Ana, San Miguel and Vista Hermosa. The missionary work was done by Stanley and Norma Storey, Danilo Solís and Juan Lucas. All this effort resulted in the birth of the first district in El Salvador, with Rev. Allen D. Wilson named as the first District Superintendent.

During the following decades produced growth that was a great blessing. Between 1970 and 1979 five more churches were organized in the central and western parts of the country.

During the 1980s, 16 more congregations were organized with 9 more during the 1990s. In 1994, as part of the Region's strategy the country was divided into three districts with the following results: **Central District:** San Salvador, San Vicente, Cuzcatlán, Chalatenango, Cabañas, and La Paz; **Western District:** Santa Ana, Sonsonate, Ahuachapán, and La Libertad; **East District:** La Unión, San Miguel, Morazán and Usulután. This division brought good results although there a few negative aspects. But God has accompanied the work in such a way that the difficulties have been reduced over time.

The overall vision just described of the church's historical process gives us a base to formulate a description of the numerical growth of the church, which we will separate into three areas:

1. *Membership.* Current membership is 5,500 on three districts.
2. *Churches.* According to the 2003 district assembly minutes, there are 38 organized churches and five missions
3. *Districts.* As previously mentioned, currently the districts are classified as: West District, Phase I with eight local properties and a district parsonage; Central District, Phase III with 90% local properties, two schools and district center; and finally the East District, with two local properties, no district center, but with great vision for the future.

In regard to the area of missional evangelism in El Salvador, by means of its districts and local churches, have been able go into heavily Roman Catholic areas, but perhaps not ethnic group areas. God has been powerful and His Word has penetrated the hearts of many individuals, with the ensuing result of organized churches, and in other parts of the country, the opening of new missions. For the development and execution of the mission the following strategies have been used:

- During the decades of the 70's, 80's and 90's, Plan Impacto was the tool that the Lord used for qualitative and quantitative growth in the churches.
- After the earthquake of 1986, helped by World Relief, the Church of the Nazarene joined with other denominations and was part of the reconstruction of houses in poor areas; being able to repair many material and spiritual needs of the inhabitants in such a way many were reached for Christ and even some church buildings were constructed.
- The construction of Christian schools was another form of getting close to and presenting the salvation message to many individuals and young people.
- As part of an aggressive evangelism and reaching the masses, there were evangelistic campaigns in gymnasiums, parks, sports fields and neighborhoods; as well as the Jesus Film. Both methods have brought hundreds to the Lord.
- Compassionate Ministries have been a tremendous help to the Salvadoran mission, training, helping and providing materials for the implementation of health campaigns, dentists, mental health, etc.

I could continue mentioning more strategies but those just mentioned have been used the most.

With reference to theological education, this has its base and beginning on February 4, 1980, the date that SENDAS sponsored the CENETA program with the intention of preparing pastors and local leaders. The vision continued in such a manner that some pastors traveled to the seminaries in Guatemala and Costa Rica in search of professional theological classes. In 1994, the Nazarene Theological Seminary in Guatemala decentralized the bachelor's and *profesorado* programs in theology; these programs gave fruit. As a result of these programs, in 2002, SENDAS, from Costa Rica, opened a center of their Master's of Science in Religion program. Currently, we have the blessing of being able to count on the programs of ETED, bachelor's, *profesorado*, *licenciatura* and the future construction of our first study center, to be built under the auspices of some Christian brothers from Washington, D.C. This center will serve for the preparation of all the leadership on the three districts to be able to serve more effectively the Church of the Lord.

Because **we are a missional people**, and recognizing that the Scriptures present a redeeming and missional God, we have attempted to develop an integral *missio Dei* as Jesus Christ requires. So our mission is directed to incarnating with the various groups and social classes of the country and their needs, so that these persons can visualize and recognize in the church God's great love for all humanity. For this reason, we have changed many paradigms that at the beginning were obstacles. The believers and churches have been and are being taught and guided not to carry out a centripetal mission but a centrifugal mission, so that some congregations have formed groups focused on the new Biblical missional paradigm which are giving numerical and qualitative growth. The districts and churches are now developing a prophetic and priestly mission in order to minister to the physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs of the Salvadorans.

However, if this mission and vision had been taught and practiced from the beginning, we would now have more churches, schools, students, pastors and leaders. But not everything was negative and we should not look at the past with pessimism for what was not accomplished; on the contrary, we look forward to the challenge with great vision. The current generation of Nazarene pastors and leaders are challenged to extend and conquer new territory with the only purpose that the name of Jesus be exalted. Our projections for 2010 are: 48 churches, 53 pastors, 6000 members and 500 ministerial students. We must recognize that at one time the church was not as visionary and aggressive as the first missionaries and workers. We also consider that the Church of the Nazarene has reached adulthood and is ready to multiply. For this we will have to put all our efforts into the extension of God's Kingdom and the proclamation of the doctrine of holiness, and examine our ministry in order to make changes in **thinking, feelings and action**.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

District Assembly minutes. Districts of San Miguel Chicaj, Guatemala, 1963. Guatemala and El Salvador, 1965-1969. El Salvador, 1970-1992. El Salvador West and Central districts, 1993-1997.

“History of the Church of the Nazarene in El Salvador”, by students of ESM and *profesorado* en Theology, San Salvador, El Salvador, March, 1998.