

Latin American Leadership Development Program

Churches in Latin America are experiencing a critical shortage of leaders. The focus of Protestant churches and missions on personal salvation and church attendance during the past century has produced an unprecedented growth of Protestant churches in Latin America. This growth has created an urgent need for qualified leaders capable of mentoring others and reproducing themselves. The need for a new generation of leaders is especially striking in relation to discipleship of new believers, involvement in transforming society, and cross-cultural mission sending.

As hundreds of seminaries, Bible schools, and ministry formation programs have been established, a dire shortage of qualified teachers has arisen. In years gone by, expatriate missionaries from Europe and North America served as the Bible school and seminary professors. Because fewer of them are being sent, there is a shortage of those who will shape the next generation of pastoral leaders in Latin America.

Today, over 240 Latin American mission agencies send more than 4000 cross-cultural missionaries for world evangelization. Yet many are sent into difficult cross-cultural mission situations with little or no training because there are too few leaders capable of training others.

The Present Reality

Many of today's teachers in Latin American Bible schools and seminaries lack adequate training, with most having only the

equivalent of a bachelor's and some a master's degree. In many cases, courses are taught by persons who have the same or lower degree than their students. This situation would be like high school teachers having only a high school education. Meanwhile, the educational level of the young people in the churches has risen dramatically, raising expectations for the educational level of the pastors and leaders.

Because of the high cost of doing advanced theological studies in North America and Europe, the need is urgent for leadership development programs to be offered in Latin America, in Spanish and Portuguese. Yet there are few opportunities for Protestant church leaders to pursue upper-level theological studies in their continent and in their language.

Meeting the Need

To meet the need, Latin American Christian Ministries (LACM) was formed as a nonprofit corporation. LACM has created a network of Latin American scholars, churches, and educational institutions to provide upper-level theological education in Spanish and Portuguese. The first step in creating the program was a consultation of Latin American Christian scholars held in Miami in March of 2001. Thirty-five scholars from 12 Latin American countries, representing 23 denominations, mission agencies and educational institutions met to lay the foundational infrastructure for the program. A ten-member Academic Council was named to direct the program's future.

This group of scholars organized the Latin American Leadership Development

Program (LALDP) to address the need for leaders who can mentor others to lead churches in mission in Latin America and from Latin America to the world. Known in Latin America as PRODOLA (Programa Doctoral Latinoamericano), the LALDP is designed to prepare scholars to shape the next generation of leaders for the churches and mission agencies in Latin America. It seeks to mentor the mentors who will form the next generation of pastoral leaders for the church in Latin America.

The LALDP is organized as a multi-site and multi-denominational community of Latin American scholars working together in a School of Postgraduate Studies, academically linked to the Evangelical University of the Americas (UNELA) in San José, Costa Rica.



Dr. Enrique Guang of UNELA and Dr. Chuck Van Engen celebrate the beginning of LALDP.



LALDP students, faculty, Academic Council and LACM Board Members meet in Londrina, Brazil.

The LALDP is directed by Latin Americans, taught by Latin Americans, and offered to Latin American church, mission, seminary, and Bible school leaders. It is a 4-year program that will lead to an accredited doctoral degree in theological studies. Candidates for the program must hold an academically accredited masters' degree and fulfill strict entrance requirements.

The program was launched in February 2004 in Brazil with the first class of 21 deeply committed doctoral candidates from 14 countries and 18 different denominations. Each of them is involved in the ministry formation of church and mission leaders in their countries. Each will be mentored by a Latin American expert in the student's area of study. A number of sites have been chosen throughout Latin America where intensive 2-week course modules will be offered. Courses are taught by Latin American professors. A system of local collegial study groups will be organized in each country so that students in the program can interact with each other under the guidance of a professor for encouragement and mutual enrichment.

Administrative Organization

The LALDP is a ministry of Latin American Christian Ministries, Inc. (LACM). LACM works in partnership with congregations, denominations, foundations, and individual donors. The president of LACM is Rev. Charles (Chuck) Van Engen, Ph.D. Chuck grew up in Chiapas, Mexico with missionary parents and was subsequently educated in the United States for high school, college and seminary. Chuck and his wife, Jean, spent 12 years administering an extension theological education program of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico in Tapachula, Chiapas. In 1981, Chuck completed his Ph.D. at the Free University of Amsterdam. Since 1988, he has taught missiology at the master's and doctoral levels in the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California. During that time he has also taught in the Hispanic Ministries Department at Fuller and in seminaries in the U.S., Japan, Denmark, Korea, India, and many Latin American countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Peru, and Mexico.

To help support the Latin American Leadership Development Program, you may send your inquiries or donations to:

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