

## **COLOMBIA-ECUADOR Mission Report, August-September 2014**

**By Bob Young**

### **The Purpose of My Mission Trips**

The general purpose of my trips is to serve local churches as a consultant and resource person. As the trips are arranged and during the first part of my visit in any given location, I spend time conversing with church leaders in order to understand the local situation and context. I meet with the leaders to guide a discussion about the challenges, difficulties, and problems, and how the local church can move forward. The purpose of these meetings is to facilitate the spiritual growth of the church, often to assist with conflict resolution or management, and to develop strong families and leaders in the local churches.

My recent work in the development of a new evangelism study series had added an item to the visits—training in how to present the gospel to contacts. On this trip, I spent a lot of time in evangelistic Bible studies, partially to demonstrate the use of the new materials.

In most of the places I go, there is no North American presence or missionary. The problem I am trying to address is the continuing growth and spiritual maturity of the church after the North American presence has been withdrawn. My work is in training and maturing so that the local churches are capable of doing the work with minimal outside support. I train and encourage, then leave the locals to do the work until I can be present again for more training and encouragement. Of course, contact is maintained by phone and email to help manage various circumstances that may arise.

Once the local church has established its own leadership, I make fewer trips to those churches. The ultimate goal is to help churches grow toward self-government, self-sustainability, and the ability and desire to plant more churches in their region without additional US resources. It is a great encouragement to see the progress of the churches, and to continually add more churches to the list of those seeking this kind of assistance.

### **Bogotá**

I spent four days in Bogotá. In Bogotá I worked with the Los Angeles congregation. The church is growing in attendance with more and more baptisms. The local church in Los Angeles is now able to pay all of its own expenses and is putting money aside to work on obtaining their own location. The only outside support they receive is for the two Colombian workers who serve as evangelists for the local church. These two brothers also work diligently in the development of the churches in Bogotá and in other regions of Colombia. The Los Angeles church is currently meeting in a community center with an average attendance of near 60.

I also worked with the Bosa congregation. The local church is working to redo their building. This is one of the oldest congregations in Bogotá. They are averaging about 40. At the Saturday seminar in Bosa, there were leaders and members present from 6 congregations. The seminar was focused on discipleship and counting the cost. I also presented a mini-seminar on evangelism. I worked with the local church in two extended evangelistic Bible studies.

There are now 10 congregations working together in Bogotá (about half of the overall total) with a monthly Saturday morning breakfast for church leaders and workers. Bogotá is a city of 8-11 million persons, one of the 30 largest cities in the world; we are barely touching the hem of the garment. The traffic problems and lack of freeways makes it essential that we think

strategically about the centers from which the church can work. It is not hard to spend a couple of hours in transit to a study or event. There is a new congregation in Nieva (about 5 hours to the south by car) that has been established in a cooperative effort of some of the congregations. Time did not permit a visit to Nieva but I have been asked to put that on the itinerary for my next visit, along with a marriage and family seminar to be presented as a combined effort of multiple congregations.

### **South Central Colombia**

In Tuluá, I met with leaders from two churches, seeking to help them find more ways to work together. On my next visit, plans are for a united effort of the two churches. They have a combined attendance of about 150, but Tuluá is a city of about 150,000. A new effort in Buga (population 120,000) has been begun by one of the congregations; the attendance is 20-25 with a dozen baptized believers.

In Cali, the Metropolitana church continues to work on developing leaders. This was my fourth visit to this church. Much progress has been made and the quality of the leadership has improved, especially with the transfer in of some excellent Christians who have more spiritual experience and maturity. At a meeting with the 3 best elder candidates (and various church members also present), much progress was made. The potential candidates, along with their wives, affirmed their willingness to serve if selected. I believe they will be able to appoint elders before the end of the year. There is still a need for teaching and encouragement for the church, which can be supplied by an elder from a congregation 2-3 hours away.

In Cali, we were also able to continue to collect clothing for the poor congregations further to the north in Colombia. These are the churches that I was focused on in 2006-2007 in El Banco, El Varal, and a new church in Playitas. The work in this very poor, remote area is developing through the support and encouragement of the Colombian Christians in other locations.

The days in Tuluá and Cali were especially long with late nights extending past midnight and the days beginning before 6 AM. The last morning I arose at 3:30 AM to catch a 6 AM flight to Pasto.

### **Southern Colombia and Northern Ecuador**

In Pasto, I was able to spend time with the preacher, Jose Tomas, who also serves as one of two elders appointed last November. We talked extensively about leadership principles and leadership succession planning. Jose Tomas is very capable of providing assistance to other congregations and has a good understanding of the Word and also of biblical organization. I was pleased to hear of the progress of the church and to have the opportunity to encourage the work. I have been asked to return next year to present a conference in Pasto.

From Pasto, I went by land to Ipiales (Colombia) right on the border with Ecuador where I spent 3 days. There I stayed in the home of German and Ailen. They are relatively new Christians, having been members of the church about 4 ½ years. German is retired from the Ecuador police, and they now live in Ipiales which is Ailen's home town. In Ipiales and Tulcán, sister cities right on the border, there are at least 250,000 people. The churches are small and often struggle.

In Tulcán (Ecuador), I presented two days of seminar teaching on the book of Acts, approximately 10 hours on Friday and Saturday. The purpose was to establish the identity of the New Testament church and to encourage evangelism. I worked with the local church in numerous evangelistic Bible studies. On Sunday there were about 80 present.

On Sunday evening, un an unplanned turn of events, I was asked to preach for the small church in Ipiales. There were about 40 present in a very small building; several had to stand in the doorway. After the teaching and preaching, the leaders asked me to please include them on my next visit.

### **Ibarra, Ecuador**

On Monday I traveled by land to Ibarra (Ecuador). Jairo and German accompanied me. German is an excellent driver, very experienced as a result of his police work, and we sailed through check point after check point without being stopped. We labeled his pickup "The German Express" and noted that it seemed that we were almost invisible. In Ibarra, my primary purpose was to present a seminar on how to study, read, and understand the Bible. This was a combined effort of four area churches. I was able to be there only three nights, but spoke in three different congregations. The Pilanquí church began only a couple of years ago, and has about 60 in attendance regularly with special days swelling into the 80s and near 100. The church is very evangelistic. They had four baptisms just before I arrived, and are looking to appoint elders within the next six months. The Otavalo church is working on building its own building, and I was able to visit the construction site. The work has temporarily stopped, but will begin again soon with help from a US brother who is a builder. The seminar was very well received with an average attendance of 60+ for the three days.

### **Back to Southern Colombia**

On Thursday I traveled back to Ipiales with Jairo and German. After lunch with German's family, we went to Túquerres. Due to traffic and construction delays, the short trip took more time than usual. I was glad to be in Túquerres and was ready for an evening without scheduled activities.

Túquerres is the highest city in Colombia and it is cold at 10500 feet. Couple that with houses without heat, and you get the idea. On Sunday morning (my last day in Túquerres) the temperature was 34 degrees. Highs mostly stayed in the 50s and the days were generally overcast although the sun did peek through periodically. I had suffered from the cold on a previous trip, so I was better prepared and able to deal with the cold except my feet stayed cold. The layers of wool blankets on the bed make it almost impossible to move or turn over.

On Friday night I preached in Sapuyes, a location where we have a family who are members of the church. The ultimate goal is to establish a new congregation in this area. The family who lives there comes to Túquerres for worship, but it is a very long trip as they have to wait for the "Pickup taxi" which leaves when it is full. There is no schedule, so the 30 minutes (by car) of travel often requires two hours or more. Upon returning to Túquerres a little after 8 PM, the local preacher and I went to a home Bible study with a young couple.

On Saturday I taught and preached in Cumbal. The church there has been meeting in the home of one of the members for a number of years. Since the brother is getting older, he has suggested that his children will not be as open to hosting the church, and that the church

should consider buying its own location. The members have obtained a loan from the local bank, with five families committed to paying the loan over the next three. They have also put together funds to begin the work on the foundations. The total cost to complete the first phase (foundations, columns, plumbing, concrete floor is slightly less than \$2000. I am hoping to be able to assist them with some of that sum since they could move ahead much more rapidly without a multi-year delay.

I returned to Túquerres to preach at a meeting of the church late Saturday afternoon, and enjoyed a hot soup of corn (with the kernels heated to bursting) and milk. Sunday morning was cold, but warmed rapidly. Unfortunately, we were not able to get good pictures of the volcanoes during this trip since the summits were always clouded.

Sunday afternoon, I returned to Pasto to spend the night with Jose Tomas and Gladys. The distance from Pasto to the airport is about an hour, so I was up early and left slightly before 6 AM to catch an 8 AM flight to Bogota. In Bogota I spent Monday with the Rosero families discussing the work in Los Angeles and after supper they took me to the airport to catch the midnight flight. I arrived back in Tulsa shortly after noon on Tuesday.

This was an excellent trip. I was able to work with 19 churches and I taught and preached in 10 different locations.