

Evaluating God's Mission 2021—Positives and Negatives

By Bob Young

As we near the end of a second year with COVID-19 impacting our lives, I am still asked frequently about the impact of the pandemic on the Latin American churches I am involved with.

For the past dozen years, I have worked toward the development of “model churches” that will serve as examples of God’s plan for the church. The work of developing model missionary churches committed to evangelism and church planting has included training in evangelism and discipleship, spiritual development of the local church, leadership development, Bible seminars and conferences, and a focus on facilitating the evangelistic work of every member. Across Latin America, numerous model churches have been developed and have become missionary churches, active in establishing new churches in their own countries. Such churches serve as examples of God’s New Testament plan for expanding the gospel.

During the pandemic, many of the model churches have continued the work of evangelism and church planting, seizing new opportunities. In some cases, the works have advanced even more rapidly during the past two years. I see several positive factors; I also see some potential negatives that we would do well to address.

Four Positives

The pandemic has increased the interest and receptivity of many unbelievers. Churches that have sought contact with unbelievers, focusing on personal evangelism, have seen continued baptisms and multitudes have come to the Lord. In some locations, results have surpassed pre-pandemic levels of conversions.

The pandemic has required local churches to learn and use technology. Technology has allowed the churches to meet virtually when in person meetings were forbidden and illegal. Technology has helped the churches maintain contact with members to be aware of needs, discouragement, and those who are in danger of straying from the flock.

Increased use of technology has opened new doors for evangelism with online evangelistic studies and new tools to help members reach out. Online resources have been used to bring dozens, perhaps hundreds, to the Lord.

The increased use of technology has opened new doors so that elders and other spiritual leaders in one country have become known in other countries. Technology has made possible new international connections. Churches are able to receive teaching from elders and evangelists with hearts for the souls of others.

Four Negatives

The increased use of technology has found us mostly “speaking to ourselves.” Many online groups have been developed and have met regularly, but few if any unbelievers are present. I applaud the opportunity for increased spiritual growth, but we must be concerned and address the tendency to “speak only to ourselves.”

Technology has not been used widely to reach out to unbelievers. There are some exceptional examples where model churches have reached out and touched unbelievers with online resources and efforts, but such examples are too few.

Some Christians have substituted the increased use of technology and attending online groups for personal evangelistic efforts. Personal evangelism has been less prevalent in many local churches.

Some preachers have substituted online teaching and preaching for personal evangelism. Preachers may be neglecting the evangelistic efforts in the local church in their almost constant presence online.

This short list may encourage you to make your own list, asking yourself whether you have used well the open doors God has provided during the past two years.

The question is not only, “Are we sharing the Good News?” Equally important, “Is anyone listening?”

For supporting churches who provide resources for mission churches, the end of 2021 would be a good time to ask yourself if the mission work you support is productive, resulting in more and more souls for Jesus, with growing churches planting more and more churches.