

The Latin American Missionary Movement

For the context of this event I will be covering the Latin American missionary movement in some aspects, since that was the theme I was asked to present. But I will also touch on information covering a wider region known as Iberoamerica. COMIBAM has now been working as an Iberoamerican movement for 25 years. It covers 24 Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries in the American continent, the Caribbean and Europe, as well as the Hispanics in the United States and Canada.

I. An example to follow – history of the church in Latin America

As we look at the Latin American Missionary Movement we need to first consider the church in Latin America itself. It is a history of dedication, vision and sacrifice. The first to come were killed before getting off the ships. Those who followed also laid down their lives in obedience to God. Please allow me to abound on this as much as on the other three areas of this presentation. The Iberoamerican Mission Movement, as well as the missionary work being done today across the world by Iberoamerican missionaries, was a result of the vision and commitment of those early missionaries, those who followed them and the pastors and church leaders of the more recent history.

During the first 300 years of the Colonial period, German, French, Dutch and Scottish Protestants established colonies, some with very good results among the general population, while others were more exclusive. But the dominating Roman Catholic Church would not allow it, so the Colonial powers would stop those efforts for a time.

In the early XIX Century, the British Bible Society would send missionaries to begin distributing Bibles throughout Latin America. James (known in Latin America as Diego) Thomson arrived in Argentina in 1819, but would soon move on to Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico and the Caribbean.

Many other British Bible Society missionaries followed Thomson, preaching and distributing a short and economical version of the Reina-Valera Spanish Bible throughout Latin America. At the time, most countries were still dominated by the Roman Catholic Church and there was no freedom of religion.

Many foreign mission entities considered Latin America evangelized, but later realized there was a huge need and opportunity for the Gospel. Around the middle of the XIX Century most countries allowed the establishment of Protestant movements. But it was still a persecuted and lower class minority. However, the missionaries had done and continued to do significant work not only in evangelizing but also in education and medicine, establishing many schools and hospitals. The church was well accepted by the politicians and the governments.

The Evangelical Church in Latin America was young and still very small at the turn of the XIX Century. It is estimated there were about 250.000 Protestants in the whole region in 1900. But there would be phenomenal fruit in the years to come, and nationals would lead those efforts, with the help of many missionaries who continued to come and collaborate in reaching out to the far corners of the continent. The current size of the church in Latin America is estimated at 55 million (1,000,000 % in 100 years).

The following table summarizes these historical events, giving us a clear perspective of the high price paid to bring the Gospel to the nations and peoples of Latin America.

Year	Country	Event
1528	Venezuela	Welser family establishes a Lutheran colony. It became influential and well accepted. Lars Qualben wrote that the whole colony embraced the Lutheran faith. By 1546 it had been dissolved.
1555	Brazil	French Huguenot escapees form a colony near the Guanabara Bay. Disbanded by 1560 by order of the King of Portugal.
1624	Brazil	Dutch Calvinists establish work in Pernambuco. It lasted 30 years, until the Portuguese regained control of the region.
1698	Panama	Scottish Presbyterian colony is established, but fails economically and causes major problem for Scotland. Only lasted 2 years.
1700 - 1800	Several	A number of individuals manage to establish small communities, but are discovered and accused by the inquisition. No evangelical work remains.
1700	Caribbean	Moravians work among the African slaves
1819	Argentina	After the independence of the colonies, a new era begins. British Bible Society missionary James (Diego) Thomson is well received.
1821	Chile	James (Diego) Thomson arrives in Chile, invited by President Bernardo O'Higgins
1822	Peru	James (Diego) Thomson arrives in Peru and is appointed national Secretary of Education
1824	Ecuador	James (Diego) Thomson arrives in Ecuador. He later worked in Mexico and the English and Spanish islands of the Caribbean.
1836	Brazil	Methodist missionaries arrive, followed by Congregationals in 1855, Presbyterians in 1859 and Baptists in 1881
1868	Chile	Foundation of the Presbyterian Church
1892	Mexico	Under persecution, but 566 churches had been established. By 1908 there were 700
1909	Chile	First indigenous church is established

II. Not only a mission field, but also a mission force – Latin American missionary work history

During the Colonial period, when some efforts were made to establish Evangelical churches in Latin America, some nationals were trained to become ministers and evangelists. The early missionaries knew they should make disciples and teach them, so that they too would go out to make more disciples.

When the British Bible Society missionaries came, they quickly decided to look for locals they could train and send out to do Bible distribution itinerant work. They found willing servants, ready to travel long distances on the back of a horse to bring the precious Word of God to very distant and remote areas.

Unfortunately we still do not have a comprehensive work on the history of the Iberoamerican missionary work. We are working on it, so I must say this is a very limited and brief research and most certainly justice will not be made to many across the region who gained a vision for the unreached peoples of the world and went out to bring the Gospel to them.

Based on the information we have gathered so far, early in the 1900's the first denominational national mission entities were established and sent out missionaries. The Brazilian Baptist Convention sent out a Portuguese born believer as a missionary to his own country. This was followed in 1925 by a Brazilian sent as a missionary to Portugal. The Brazilian Presbyterian Church sent their first missionary, also to Portugal, in 1910. In 1916, the Latin American Cooperation Council organized a conference in Panama to discuss mission work in Latin America. This was a reaction to Edinburgh 1910 because at that well known event they did not include missionaries serving in Latin America or leaders of the church in the region due to pressure from certain sectors. They accepted the concept that Latin America was already evangelized by the Catholics, and Protestant missionaries going there were fanatics and illiterate. The Panama congress contributed to the expansion of the missionary vision of the church in Latin America.

Non denominational mission societies followed soon after. In 1928 an indigenous mission was founded in Brazil, Missão Caiuá, with the specific aim of reaching the tribal groups of the country. In 1946, in Peru, Juan Cuevas founded AMEN, an indigenous non denominational mission organization, focused on reaching the unreached towns and peoples of Peru. This agency would soon begin to look beyond and work to see Peruvian and other Latino missionaries serving in Europe. In the years that followed, other denominational mission efforts were initiated in countries such as Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Puerto Rico and Cuba.

But only a few non denominational organizations existed until the mid 70's. In Brazil, Jonathan dos Santos and Decio Azevedo, challenged by missionary and mission teacher Barbara Burns, established Missão Antioquia in 1976, with a focus on mobilization, training and send missionaries to unreached countries. In 1982 an indigenous, Latino formed, interdenominational and international organization would be established in Spain, focusing on work in North Africa.

More mission entities were being established, more churches were participating and more missionaries were going to more places. There was a need to communicate and cooperate, and the first steps were taken to form national mission networks. The Brazilian Mission Association is established officially in 1982. Mexico forms a similar entity in 1987 and Argentina follows in the early 90's.

In 1984, Luis Bush and a few other pastors in Central America begin to consider the idea of a major continental and international mission congress. The plan takes shape and in 1987 the First Iberoamerican Mission Congress takes place in São Paulo, Brazil. More than 3,000 attend the event, representing almost every country in the continent. Other mission mobilization events had happened in several countries, but none had been as focused and challenging. At the end of the congress, Luis Bush and those in the organizing committee drafted a declaration. The main statement of the document was simply "Iberoamerica is now not only a mission field, but also a mission force".

In 1997 the Second Iberoamerican Mission Congress took place in Mexico, and in 2006 the third congress was organized in Spain. These events were known as COMIBAM, and by 2000 a decision was made to establish an international Iberoamerican collaboration entity under the name of COMIBAM Internacional. Many other national, regional and thematic events have been organized over the years.

This brief history could be presented in short by viewing it in the following five periods:

1. Early post colonial period: 1840 – 1900 In country, focused on Jerusalem and Samaria – entirely done by denominations
2. Initial international mission efforts: 1900 – 1950 International, but mostly within the neighboring countries or culturally related – founding of the first non-denominational agencies
3. First response to the challenge and opportunities: 1950 – 1980 Significant mobilization, recruiting, training and sending to the most needy and unreached people groups - forming of national networks
4. Growth and expansion: 1980 – 2000 Entering some of the so called "creative access" countries, but better equipped due to the establishing of mission

focused training programs, fast increase of sending structures and missionaries - forming of an international Iberoamerican cooperation

5. Partnership unto the ends of the earth: 2000 and onwards – Maturing, focus on the field and the missionary - Forming of alliances with other international networks.

Recognizing once again the limited research done so far in this area, the following table summarizes these historical events and lets us take a first look at the first steps taken by the Iberoamerican church in the process of becoming a missionary movement.

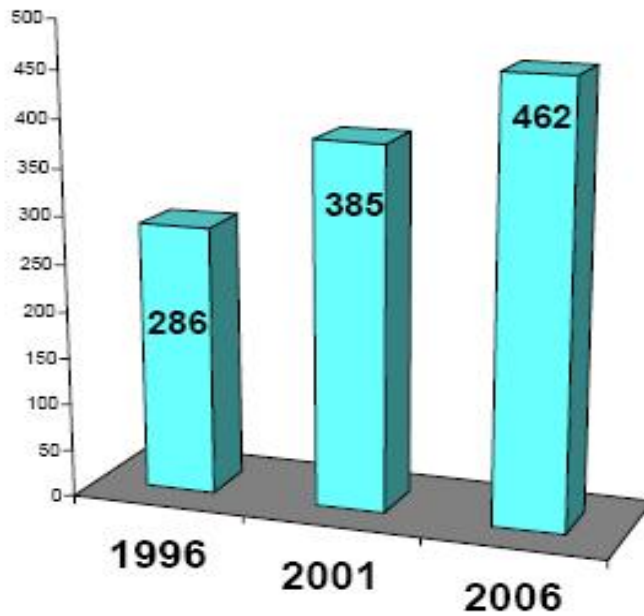
Year	Country	Event
1908	Brazil	Brazilian Baptist Convention supports North American and indigenous missionary in Chile. In 1911 the Brazilian Baptist Mission Board sent their first missionary to Portugal, followed by a second worker in 1925.
1910	Brazil	The Brazilian Presbyterian church sends missionary to Portugal
1916	Panama	Latin American Cooperation Council conference (reaction to Edinburgh 1910)
1928	Brazil	Missão Evangélica Caiuá – An indigenous agency focused on reaching the tribal peoples of Brazil. Another agency with a similar vision, MEVA, was established in 1948.
1946	Peru	Juan Cuevas - AMEN
1976	Brazil	Jonathan dos Santos & Decio Azevedo – Missão Antioquia
1976	Brazil	Eude Martins establishes CEBIMI – Centro Brasileiro de Informação Missionária. The first meeting to create AMTB, which was officially established in 1982.
1982	Spain	Pablo Carrillo - PMI
1987	Mexico	COMIMEX
1987	Brasil	COMIBAM I – About 300 known missionaries
1997	Mexico	COMIBAM II – Around 4000 missionaries
2000	Peru	I COMIBAM International Assembly
2006	Spain	COMIBAM III – 9265 missionaries

III. Under construction – Current state of Latin American missionary work

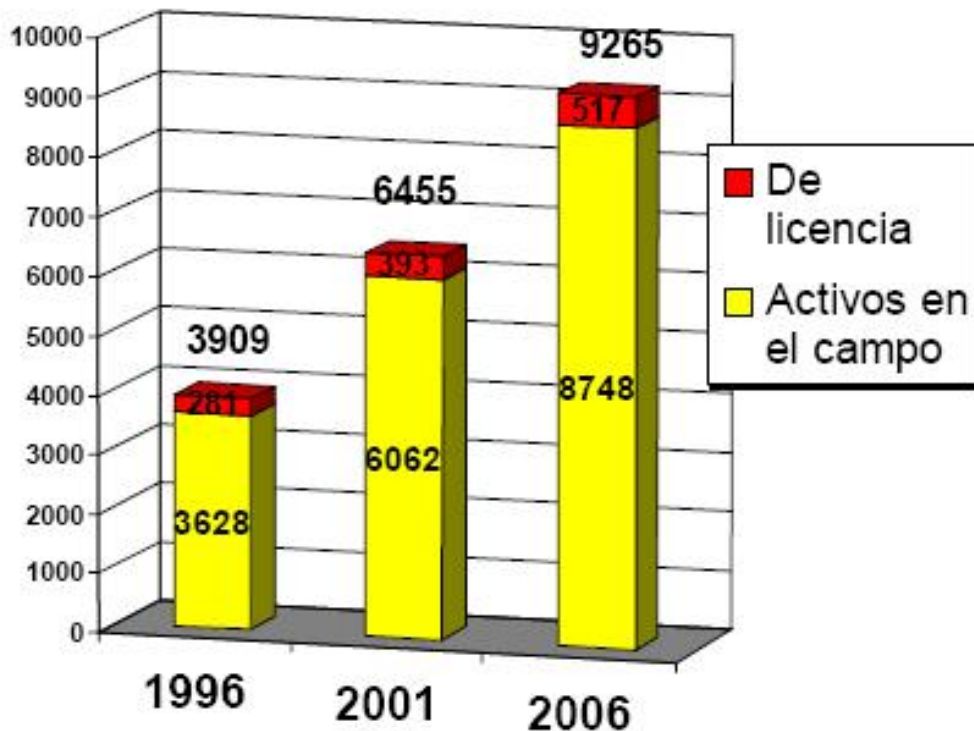
Information presented at a meeting in Bombay in 1977 to international mission leaders indicated there were 136 Latin Americans serving as overseas missionaries.

There has been significant growth, but we all agree that we would love to see so much more happening. Since 1995 COMIBAM has carried out periodic statistical research to

gather information on the state of the movement. From 286 mission entities in 1996, in 2006 we found that the number had grown to 462.



In 1996 there were about 3900 missionaries, having grown from an estimated 300 in 1987. In 2006 there were 9265. Ted Limpic, who coordinated these research projects, estimates that at the current pace, and even considering an expected slowing down, there may be as many as 32,000 Iberoamerican missionaries serving cross-culturally by 2020.



The research is thorough and offers so much information, including countries of origin, countries of service, types of sending organizations, and more. It is available at the COMIBAM site at http://www.comibam.org/catalogo2006/index_i.htm.

More recently, in preparation for the third congress, a second major research project was launched, this time seeking to examine more closely the state of the Iberoamerican missionary at the field level. It had become clear to us that we were discussing, planning, praying, strategizing and organizing events, but forgetting that those who actually do the work are the missionaries. An online survey was prepared and carried out among 1,100 Iberoamerican missionaries, covering a well predefined range of age, gender, marital status, denominational background, length of stay and other important characteristics. This document was published in 2006 under the name Strengths and Weaknesses of the Iberoamerican Missionary. It can be found at the COMIBAM site at http://comibam.org/docs/report_research_en.pdf.

We consider the movement one that is still young, and therefore prone to mistakes. It is a work under construction, God being the builder.

IV. Collaboration – The future of Latin American missionary work

I wanted to conclude this with a brief look at the future. Where are we going and how do we get there? I must point out that COMIBAM is not an association. It is also not a

representative of the Iberoamerican or Latinamerican entire mission endeavor. The organization exists to serve and to offer a venue for dialogue and collaboration among those national missions bodies and other mission entities in the region.

Leadership

God has raised a great number of capable and committed people in Iberoamerica for missionary work; pastors and church leaders, professionals, business people and mission candidates. We are excited about the future. There is still significant work to be done in the area of mobilization, and that is currently our largest focus area.

Intercession

This has been a strong emphasis in our movement during the past 10 years. We were late, but the Koreans had a huge influence on us and there are now mission prayer initiatives throughout Iberoamerica. But we still need to expand in this area, we need to be more dynamic in passing on information, in calling prayer gatherings and in teaching the ordinary Christians in our part of the world to be effective intercessors.

Focus

During these past two decades, and even looking back to the first years of the Iberoamerican movement, there has been a strong emphasis on the unreached or the least reached. This has helped give focus and maintain a high level of interest. Concepts and programs such as the 10/40 Windows, the Adop a People and the major religious blocks of the world are taken into account by the mission entities throughout the region when considering their current and future strategies.

Children and youth

In Iberoamerica we are facing the same issues as in other parts of the world. Our people have travelled and seen how the young generations, and even the children, from across the planet, are quickly being impacted by the modern societies they live in. They are all familiar with the computer and the mobile phone, the internet, TV and so much more. Their language now includes googling, facebooking and texting. We have noticed it is harder to get them to consider a missionary trip and a commitment to missions these days. At the same time, the average age of population in our countries continues to drop, and so is the age of the average mission candidate. Our response has been to look at the children and youth in Iberoamerica and dedicate time and effort to relate to them and communicate the Great Commission in a way they understand. And we are letting young leaders do this. We also want young leaders involved in the overall mission work in Iberoamerica.

Women

Another huge area is that of women. In our case, the numbers show that they are a majority in the mission field and very significant work has been done over the year by single women and by the wives. However, there is very little focus on their needs and capabilities, and there is little room for them to participate in leadership. We have recognized our failure in this area and have launch discussions to make changes and to implement a women initiative within the movement

Training

Adequate training has been a strong need and an area of very intensive work in Iberoamerica. We are in the process of researching our training schools and their content, but our most recent numbers indicated close to 200 mission training centres. After years of work we have now published a Best Practices Guide for Missionary Training in Iberoamerica. The world is changing rapidly, socially, economically, demographically and in many other ways. The missionaries of tomorrow will not be ready to be effective in the mission field if we continue to train them like we did yesterday. Our next strong effort in the area of equipping is to see an expansion in the practical and professional training programs, which need to come alongside the theological and missionological training being offered.

Practical help for sending structures

The number of mission agencies and sending structures will continue to grow. Another aspect of this is that more and more local churches are sending missionaries and getting involved directly in mission fields across the world. These organizations and churches need very practical help to be able to adequately function as a sending structure, able to provide the needed support and services for the missionary and the ministry in the field. This is another area of focus and we have plans to organize some events to generate dialogue and to eventually create a set of practical tools for the sending structures.

Practical help for the Iberoamerican missionary

As the number of missionaries serving across the world grows, and the world continues to change dramatically, so will the very practical situations the workers face and their needs. This is an area we have been weak at. With our big push to mobilize more churches, see more sending structures and more missionaries being sent, we did not consider the specific aspects of life in the mission field. Along with the already mentioned field oriented research project carried out before the 2006 congress in Spain, missionaries themselves were brought to the event (300 of them) so that we would have their input in every aspect of the thinking and strategising that would take place there. After the publication of the research report, our 8 regions have been looking at the results and several national mission movements have also carried out gatherings to consider these and to help the mission entities in their countries apply the conclusions to their current missions practice. Looking forward, internationally we will be introducing a program to help Iberoamerican families with the educational needs of their children and another to promote advanced and continuous education programs for the missionary.

More research

In COMIBAM we are committed to doing it well, and we know that takes work and requires good information. There are several more research projects already planned or in the planning stages. These will again be invaluable for the whole movement and for those we work along with.

We were born out of a vision of cooperation and collaboration to accomplish the missionary task. This is what led to the expansion of the Iberoamerican missionary work in the 80's and 90's. But God has raised and is using His church from areas of the world we have not had much contact with over the years, such as Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. We are committed to forming new relationships and establishing alliances that will enable all of us to advance quickly. We are in dialogue with national and international networks such as CrossGlobal Link, in the US and the European Evangelical

Mission Association, and already have a collaboration agreement with MANI – Movement of African National Initiatives. We are convinced that together we can do it not only faster, but also better, and in a John 17 way – the God honouring way.

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