

## The State of Training Ministries in Latin America

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We just ended the **2011 Educational Leaders Dialogue** here in Panama City, hosting 27 leaders from 11 countries. The Resource and Advisory Center for Bible Schools conducts this event in the odd years while the Summits are conducted in the even years. We invite a smaller, select group to the Dialogue on purpose. We want to maximize the participation of our key leaders. The Dialogue includes receiving country and ministry reports, selection of areas in need of attention and small group work to develop solutions and actions plans. We finish our time working through pending and new items that include planning the Summits for the next year.

During the Dialogue we were able to present to the group a “State of Training Ministries in Latin America” report. We had shared the same report several weeks ago to the triennial meeting of national church leaders for the northern 14 Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America (CELAD). We serve as Education Director for the 20 Spanish-speaking Latin America / Caribbean countries. Following is a condensed version of the report that looks at factors that are working for against ministerial training.



### Working for us...

***Unifying Effect of Language.*** There are 20 Latin American and Caribbean Spanish-speaking countries. This is the single largest geographical block of countries in the world that speak the same language. In addition, these countries share a common heritage that contributes to cultural similarities. As these countries learn to work together and “speak as one voice” their world influence continues to grow, especially in the area of world missions.



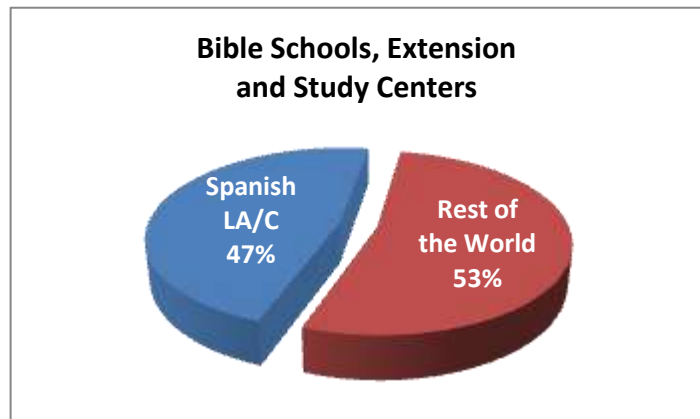
***Historical Commitment to Pentecostal Training and Strong Training Infrastructure.*** From the very beginning, Assemblies of God missionaries have placed strong emphasis on training from the “cradle to the grave.” Historically, ministerial training has focused on maintaining pure doctrine and practical preparation for ministry. This emphasis has generally continued without government imposition. In the

last two decades, training has extended both geographically and ethnically within countries. Current statistics tell the story. In the Assemblies of God worldwide, the 19 Spanish-speaking Latin America / Caribbean (LA/C) countries account for:

- 10% - ADHERENTS
- 14% - CHURCHES
- 18% - MINISTERS
- 34% - MINISTERIAL STUDENTS
- 48% - BIBLE SCHOOLS, EXTENSIONS AND STUDY CENTERS**

***National Leaders Engaged and Cooperating.***

Today, more than ever, our national leaders are engaged and cooperating. They recognize the importance of working together to achieve international educational standards. This is vital to improving the effectiveness of ministerial training.



***Diversification of Ministry.*** As the church develops in Latin America, ministerial training must adapt to the new ministry paradigms that develop. We are currently in the process of implementing four new ministry specializations (majors) throughout the Bible schools of Latin America: Pastoral Ministries, Missions, Christian Education and Youth Ministries. We have also begun work on a Children’s Ministries specialization.

***Strong Missionary***

***Movement.*** The new Missions specialization goes hand in hand with the missionary awakening that is occurring on the continent. Most of our countries have “caught the vision” to send missionaries to other countries. Latin American missionaries will be able to go places impossible to reach for North American missionaries.



***Strong Christian School Movement in Many Countries.*** We must also recognize that the more than 300 Assemblies of God Christian Schools in Spanish-speaking the Latin America / Caribbean region can provide the first front for training.

***Working against us...***

***Antiquated Structures and Weak National Coordination.*** Even though overall the Spanish-speaking Latin America/ Caribbean region has a strong tradition of training, some countries struggle with developing and maintaining visionary national leadership for training. Some countries are utilizing leadership structures that served 20 or 30 years ago, but have become antiquated because of church and institutional growth. Training ministries must be structured and led well if they are to continue to be relevant.

***Lack of Priority and Sustainable Resources.***

Training ministries quite often are under-funded. Some countries do not give adequate priority to funding these ministries. In addition, most of these countries are “third world” or at best “second world” (developing) countries and do not have adequate resources for training ministries. This often results in reduced quality and out-dated methods and resources.



***Inability to Achieve Quality Standards.***

Our training ministries struggle to achieve accepted educational and quality standards. Text books and library books are the greatest challenge. We have introduced new initiatives to raise the quality of teaching. We have also emphasized the standards. However, each institution must adopt these standards, measure how they are meeting the standards and make necessary improvements.

***Accreditation Pressure and Imposters.*** There is an education frenzy in the Spanish-speaking Latin America / Caribbean region. Rightly, parents believe that education is the path to improving the life of their children. They want education to count and that means accreditation. Accreditation is difficult to achieve for our Bible schools. Meanwhile, imposters and diploma mills offer degrees with little or no academic study.

Years ago Assemblies of God World Missions formalized its traditional missions strategy, identifying the four pillars as Reaching, Training, Planting, Touching. The emphasis on training by pioneer missionaries in the Spanish-speaking Latin America / Caribbean region was the correct faith response to the growth that the Holy Spirit would bring to this continent. Training continues to sustain it by preparing for the thousands of new churches that will be opened in unreached communities, both in Latin America and throughout the world. We are committed to building upon our strengths and correcting deficiencies for God has called us to ***raise up Christian leaders*** in Latin America.

