

THE HISTORY OF HISPANIC BAPTISTS IN OKLAHOMA



Written from primary resources and
from the stories of history has told by

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CHAPTER ONE

The Early Years

History is always subject to various interpretations depending upon the amount of resource materials and the distance of time between the initial events and the present. Too often an accurate history is lost due to the passing of time. In the case of the first Hispanic work in Oklahoma, we are fortunate to have fairly accurate records.

The story of documented Baptist work among Spanish speaking people in Oklahoma begins in Tulsa in the early 1930's. The majority of Hispanics lived in the more populated areas of Oklahoma City and Tulsa, and the Great Depression Years of 1931-32 helped churches see the need of reaching out to others.

In those years the North Trenton Baptist Church of Tulsa began an outreach to all people by starting "Joseph's Granary." This supplied food, clothing, and other needs as could be provided. While the benefits were for all people, it is known that Hispanics in the Tulsa area were a major group among those who sought aid.

The North Trenton Church built a new building in 1941 at 1515 East Independence and changed its name to Hillcrest Baptist Church. It was here that the church, in cooperation with the Tulsa-Rogers Baptist Association (now the Tulsa Baptist Association) began the "Mexican Mission", the first official Baptist work in Tulsa and the state of Oklahoma among Spanish speaking people.¹

In 1941, the Mexican Mission was led by the Hillcrest Church to call Phil Rendon to be the pastor. Bro. Rendon was ordained by Hillcrest that same year. It is interesting that while Hillcrest had no parsonage for their pastor, the church established one for the mission pastor next door to the church (at 1511 East Independence).² The 1942, the annual of the Tulsa-Rogers Association Annual recorded Pastor Rendon's report of the mission work:

Last year we reported 41 members. We have had one addition by baptism, two by letter and three restorations, for a total of six additions this year. Our present membership is 46. One was lettered out. Our Sunday school enrollment is

58, B. T. U. 10. Our total gifts were \$318.25. We have enlisted three tithers.³

By 1943 the membership had grown to 51, they had conducted a revival, and the future looked good. Out of 75 enrolled in Sunday school that year, only 15 were over 25 years old. This young church had 48 enrolled from the nursery through the first grade.⁴

Early church leaders included David Alenda, Sunday school Superintendent; Mrs. A. Freeze, Church Clerk; and W. Mendoza, Church Treasurer.⁵ By 1945 Carlos Peralez had become the Choir Leader. The year of 1943 was what some might call a “banner” year. Attendance was up and the church seemed in good order. That year a stone structure was built for the mission to use and it was valued at \$1,500.00. The “parson’s house” (as it was listed) was estimated at a value of \$700.00.⁶

It was mentioned early that there are “fairly accurate” records for the Mexican Mission. There are, however, often times when recorded materials seem to conflict. In this case, the mission seems to have been established in 1941, however, the 1945 association annual lists the mission as “established in 1935”. There is no way to know at this point if that is a recording error, or if some “form” of work may actually have been started earlier. Due to the 1941 annual, and the lack of any mention of Hispanic work in annuals prior to that date, it seems most likely there was no established work prior to the 1941 date.

In 1946 things apparently took a turn for the worse. It was this year that records from the mission ceased to exist. Nothing is recorded in the association annual in either 1946 or 1947.

The Mexican Mission was still listed in the annuals at their location, but apparently Bro. Phil Rendon was no longer the pastor, and no other information was available.

It is of note, however, the association still budgeted \$25.00 per month for the mission work. In 1948 the Mexican Mission had been removed from the list of mission work in the Tulsa area.

It is occasionally easier to determine when a mission or church is “born”, than when one dies. While the death of the Mexican Mission seemed at hand, the association was willing to offer one final attempt to resuscitate the work. In 1949, anticipating a hope of new life, the association under the Community Mission Council’s leadership, spent \$205.45 to improve the condition of the Mexican parsonage and to buy furniture for the home.⁷

The year 1950 brought even more change and an apparent sense of discouragement. The Hillcrest Church voted to discontinue direct gifts to the Mexican Mission, and to give all their mission gifts directly to the Tulsa-Rogers association mission efforts. Therefore, the mission no longer was sponsored or supported directly by Hillcrest, but was now a project on the same level as the other missions in the area. The mission shortly thereafter was terminated and its membership absorbed into the fellowship of the Hillcrest Baptist Church.⁸

The Mexican Mission in Tulsa did not exist for an extended length of time. While very little else is documented regarding the mission, this humble effort is important as the first official work of Baptists among Hispanics in Oklahoma. The sponsoring church, Hillcrest Baptist, also no longer exists.

While it seems the first “mission” work started in Tulsa, the first actual Hispanic “church” may have been established in Oklahoma City. Terminology of a mission rather than a church is often of little consequence to the people attending. A mission is sponsored by some other entity, while a church is usually said to be self-supporting and often incorporated. It could be said that both the work in Tulsa and in Oklahoma City only differed in terminology, for both received financial aid and support from the local associations. In the case of the first Spanish speaking church work in Oklahoma City we have fairly extensive records.

By the late 1940’s approximately 3000 Hispanics lived in Oklahoma. Most, according to some sources, still lived in the more populated areas of Oklahoma City and Tulsa. The overwhelming majority was from Mexico and had come to Oklahoma in search of an opportunity for a better life. The Mexican people in Oklahoma City had migrated to the area of South Exchange Avenue. The first Spanish speaking church in Oklahoma City grew from a concern for strengthening the work of the “Mexican Center” that had developed out of the state Baptist’s “Goodwill Center”. Due to the concentration of needy people in the “packing house district”, the Baptist Mission Center (then called the “Goodwill Center”) was established in 1917 by the state Women’s Missionary Union (WMU). It soon became an outreach area for all people including Hispanics.⁹ The actual beginning of the “Mexican Center” is unknown, but A. V. Alvarado was the first missionary to Hispanics and was the first pastor when the mission became a church in 1947-1948. The church was located at 1201 South Youngs. The history of the First Mexican, Oklahoma City, is enhanced by the fact it was, not only the oldest Hispanic church (considering Tulsa as a “mission”), but it also is the oldest Hispanic church with continuous existence.¹⁰

While we are covering the early years, it would be best to keep the continuity by giving the history of First Mexican up to the present. A series of good pastors helped the church to sustain itself. Early pastors, after A. V. Alvarado, included C. C. Pierson, N. G. Guarnero, Eugene Sloan, and William Fuentes. The current pastor is Johnny Soliz. Each pastor had their specific impact on the ministry in Oklahoma City. The church was originally named La Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana, which in English is the First Mexican Baptist Church. Hispanics had been coming from Mexico for several years looking for jobs in packing plants in the area.¹¹

While other Spanish speaking works had been started in the southwestern part of the state during the mid 1950’s, First Hispanic in Oklahoma City was the only one in “church” status. The missions in southwestern Oklahoma were at Altus, Hollis, and Frederick, Oklahoma.

Eugene Sloan had an interesting impact on the Hispanic Baptists of all Oklahoma. Because of the number of Hispanics in the Oklahoma City area, and Eugene’s pastoral abilities, the work at First Hispanic had grown greatly. In the early 1980’s, Eugene appealed to Daniel Caceres for help. Daniel was not available at that time because of his work with the churches at Hobart and Watonga. Daniel, however, knew of a great young preacher called Mario Zamarron. Daniel took the lead in getting Mario licensed to the gospel ministry.

Mario’s first pastorate was at Swan Lake, an area near Fort Cobb Lake. A lot of people there were working the farms and this included several Hispanic families.

From Swan Lake, Mario came to the Oklahoma City area to answer Sloan's call for help and to relieve and expand the ministry to Spanish speaking people in the area.¹²

Mario was able to start a very successful ministry at South Memorial Baptist, which was located on South Western Street. The South Memorial Hispanic group increased until it literally outgrew the Anglo congregation and the facilities provided. Jim White and Joyce Shelby of Capitol Hill Baptist had been helping support the work at South Memorial, and with their help, the Hispanic congregation was moved to Exchange Avenue Baptist in the stockyard area of Oklahoma City. The church has been at Exchange Avenue for over 25 years, and celebrated Mario Zamarron's 25th anniversary as pastor in 2011.

The location at Exchange Avenue Baptist was the perfect place. Prior to this time, the Anglo members of Exchange Avenue had gained recognition from the work of about 20 members who had been traveling over 1500 miles to Mexico each summer on mission trips. Kent Kellogg, the pastor of Exchange Avenue in 1984 said several factors caused the church to rethink its ministry. In 1983 he challenged the members by asking why they stayed at the corner of Exchange Avenue and South Pennsylvania Streets. Their overwhelming answer was they were to minister to the immediate area. The area had become predominately Spanish speaking.¹³

Kellogg stated, "While the summer trips to Mexico are important, it seemed hypocritical to go hundreds of miles away to minister to Hispanics when there are more than 2,000 Hispanics and Indians in this area."¹⁴

In April 1986 the church agreed with the pastor and called Zamarron as minister to Hispanics. This was Exchange Avenue's inauguration of a multi-faceted ministry to other ethnic groups.

Additional ministries included a clothing room and food pantry for Hispanics. Zamarron, a multi-talented man, moved his free haircut program from the nearby Baptist Mission Center to Exchange Avenue. Exchange Avenue's Anglo Sunday school attendance had declined prior to this time, but owing to the new ministry it rebounded from below 300 to well over 400. As usual, when a church steps out in faith, the neighborhood notices and God blesses. An investment in missions is always a positive factor in church growth.¹⁵

When one considers what actually might have been the first work by Baptists among Hispanics, the history is somewhat unclear. We know the WMU did establish their work in the Oklahoma City area in 1917. We also know "Joseph's Granary" was started in Tulsa in 1931-32 to aid the needy, which included Hispanics. In addition, the Tulsa area established the first recorded Spanish speaking mission in 1941. We can add to that the beginning of the first recorded Hispanic church in Oklahoma in 1947-1948, at the stockyard area of the city.

It is reasonable to assume the WMU work of 1917 in Oklahoma City also aided those few people who were of Hispanic origin. Since missional efforts usually begin on a one-on-one basis, one might conclude other unrecorded works or efforts may have existed in the early years. It could be that a strong witness for Christ was presented by several individuals during the years between 1917 and the 1940's. Those workers and the lives they touched will not go unnoticed. How wonderful it is to know that "God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have

shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints (Heb. 6:10, NAS).”

CHAPTER TWO

The Sleeping Giant

The work progressed very slowly in the 1950's and 1960's, yet the potential was great. Most of the work being done in those years was by individuals in the central and southwestern areas of Oklahoma. As noted previously, other than the First Hispanic Church in Oklahoma City, there were only three other notable works in progress.

In Frederick, Oklahoma, a mission had been started in 1954 by the First Baptist Church. The mission first began with Abell Becerra serving as pastor.¹⁶ Becerra actually served the mission three times, the last being in May 2002.¹⁷

When Becerra was called to the Calvary Baptist Mission in Dallas, Bro. Rudy Ramirez became the pastor. After serving in Frederick and various other places, Ramirez retired as director of language missions for the Baptist Convention of New Mexico.¹⁸

The first building was an old church that was moved into Frederick from a rural area. While the church was very functional, it had a limited size sanctuary and classrooms. The growth of the work eventually caused a need for additional space. To solve this problem, First Baptist came to the rescue.

First Baptist Frederick became debt free on June 18, 1967. The note burning totaled \$62,000. The church, under the direction of pastor Mart Hardin, immediately pledged to go back in debt to build a new Spanish mission building.¹⁹ The "new" Spanish Baptist Mission building on North Third Street in Frederick was dedicated in August 1968. The former building was at the same Third Street site for 14 years, and was sold and removed to make room for the new building. For two months the Spanish mission members were forced to meet in the Memorial Civic Center while the new facility neared completion. In July 1968 the members moved into the new church, though it still required some work for completion. The new facility was named the Bienvenidos Mision Bautista.²⁰

The second notable work in the southwest area was at Altus, Oklahoma. While there is some discrepancy by various sources regarding whether one or two missions were started, the oldest records indicate the following information to be the most accurate.

Hispanics began meeting at Emmanuel Baptist Church with the help of Bro. Angel Murillo. The unofficial name was the Emmanuel Baptist Mission, and apparently began meeting in 1955. It may have developed into a joint effort by Emmanuel Baptist, Southside Baptist, and Southwest Baptist Association, since both churches history seem to claim a part in the beginning of the work.²¹ Another source, a former Altus pastor, credits almost all the early Hispanic work as being sponsored by the First Baptist Church, Altus.²²

While little is recorded regarding the early history, we do know the pastors included Eddie Young 1954-55; Eugene Sloan 1955-59; Reuben Canas 1959-61; Lloyd

West 1961-64; Inez Ramon 1969-71; and Mariano Alvarado 1971-73.²³ A less reliable source indicated Merced Becerra was the fourth pastor, but no dates were given.²⁴

Eddie Young was a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary when he served from the mission's founding in 1954-55. At the beginning, the mission was in a barracks building in the migrant labor camp known as Gonzales Plaza, located on Base Access Road, east of the city. The work began after a Royal Service program at Emmanuel Baptist Church focused on the needs of migrant laborers. The camp barracks were finally sold and property purchased on February 1, 1956, at 1012 South Main. This was a great spiritual victory for the church and the pastor at the time, Eugene Sloan. In 1990, with the help of then pastor Ramiro Campos, the work was moved to 401 East Liveoak in Altus. Another source indicates a man named Ray Douglas served as pastor in 1958 and early 1959.²⁵ While the total history may include some discrepancies, it could be that some men served as interim rather than as pastor, and that status was not noted.

The third early work in southwestern Oklahoma was started by the First Baptist Church of Hollis. Limited information indicates the work began in early 1958. The early pastors included M. H. Eglesias 1958; Napoleon Guarnero 1959; Eugene Sloan 1965; Ramon G. Medrano 1965-67; Larry Ortega 1969-69; Carl Simmonton 1969-72; and Lupe Rando 1972-73.²⁶ After leaving the Hollis work, Bro. Rando went to New Mexico, but later returned as pastor at the Frederick mission.²⁷ When the mission began in 1958 half the salary for Bro. Eglesias came from the church and half came from the Home Mission Board (now the North American Mission Board).²⁸ Little else is recorded regarding this early mission.

The Hispanic ministries during these years, in some ways, resembled a sleeping giant. The potential was building, but the greater part of the work had not awakened.

It was early in the 1970's that interest began to build in expanding the Hispanic work to other areas of the state. In preparation for new events, things began to happen at the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (BGCO). To understand this preparation period we must look at the changes in the convention's personnel and structure. Those changes, which will be described in the next chapter, set the stage for a growth in all ethnic missions. The focus of this particular writing will be only on the changes in the Hispanic ministries.

CHAPTER THREE

The Years of Expansion

As we open this new era, we first focus on the late 1960's and early 1970's. During these developing years, the mission structure of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma took a very organized form.

While T. B. Lackey was executive-director treasurer of the convention, Sam Scantlan was the state mission director. In 1938 Sam, known by many as "Dr. Sam" was a rural church missionary for the convention. Dr. Lackey asked Scantlan to come to the convention in 1944 as the first director of the newly-formed Department of Missions. Dr. Sam held that position until 1966.²⁹

During the Scantlan period, J. T. Roberts served under Dr. Sam as director of the work among National Baptists (the African-American work) and Bailey Sewell served as the director of the Hispanic work. When Sewell retired, Dr. Laddie Adams accepted the position of director to the Hispanics, and was followed in the position by Bob Haskins. In addition, John Brill had accepted the position once held by J. T. Roberts, that of director of the work for National Baptists. Therefore the mission structure in 1970 consisted of Dr. Roberts as state mission director, John Brill as director of work for National Baptists, and Dr. Bob Haskins the director of work among the Hispanics.³⁰

In 1972, Dr. Lackey retired as executive-director treasurer, and Dr. Joe L. Ingram accepted the position. In that same year, John Brill accepted the pastorate at First Baptist, Hominy, and Dr. Bob Lovejoy came on staff to accept Brill's position.

In 1973, Dr. Joe Ingram, executive-director treasurer of the BGCO, saw the need for a revamping of the mission structure and seized this opportunity to make major changes. What is sometimes called "the era of expansion" is best seen as beginning with these changes.

Dr. Ingram called Bob Haskins into his office and asked him to take over the department director's job. He also asked Haskins to keep the language missions position. This reduced the staff from three people to two. Previously there was a director, a second person working with the language missions (which was basically only Hispanic at this point), and a third person ministering to the African-Americans. Now Bob Haskins held both the director's position and the language work. This was a plan that helped open the door for tremendous positive changes. This also provided a smooth working relationship between Haskins and Bob Lovejoy. These two men served joyfully together for twenty years (1973-1993). These men basically formed a union of leadership that lasted until Bob Haskins was asked to accept the position of associate-executive director of the BGCO, and Bob Lovejoy retired. With these structural changes noted, our story now returns to the early 1970's.³¹

As previously stated, the number of Hispanic works was very limited when Bob Haskins became the director of missions and language work. That began to change quickly. Dr. Haskins was a man who had a keen sense of the needs in the state. He began diligently to increase the work among Spanish speaking people. Plans were made, goals were set, and the increase began. By 1971 the Hispanic preaching points

had increased from four to 12. Between 1971 and 1977 eleven other missions were established.

In 1974 there was a campaign that distributed over 1000 Spanish Bibles. This was the first time an organized effort of this nature was accomplished by the Hispanic members of the churches and missions.³²

A second major event was the goal set in 1976 to establish 20 new missions by 1980. This magnificent goal was almost accomplished. In those next three years, 19 missions were established. These included three in 1978, 12 in 1979, and four in 1980. Like every good effort, the campaign was well planned, extremely challenging, but realistically attainable. This three year period demonstrated how well the mission department was functioning.

The growth of the Hispanic work has continued into the present time, and with it, has provided a model for growth of other language groups among Oklahoma Baptists.

Other events included the establishing of the Spanish Camp at Falls Creek. Almost every year during the 1980's new records in attendance and decisions were set. Two good examples were in 1985 and 1986. In 1985 there were 233 registered people attending and 58 professions of faith. Daniel Caceres was the camp director that year. The following year, 1986, 248 registered from 19 churches. Hermindo Rios was that year's director.

In 1986 another distribution campaign was conducted. Over 2000 Spanish editions of the New Testament entitled *Good News America-God Loves You* were given to prospects. Thirty-four churches participated in the effort.³³

An additional blessing to the churches in this period was the Hispanic Women's Missionary Union (WMU). On March 29, 1981, the first State Hispanic Baptist WMU Conference was held at the First Mexican Baptist, Oklahoma City. Nila Murillo, the sister of BGCO mission worker Daniel Caceres, was the one most instrumental in starting the Hispanic WMU conferences.

In 1981, another major advancement occurred when the State Hispanic Fellowship was formed. This organization was the equivalent of a state association. The Hispanics now had an organized and fully functioning state entity. The first elected state fellowship officers were Victor Orta as president, William Fuentes as vice-president, and Rudy Ramirez as treasurer.³⁴

One of the greatest challenges of reaching Hispanics in Oklahoma for Jesus Christ was the tremendous land area of the state. Bob Haskins, Mission Director for the BGCO, conceived a plan that dealt directly with that problem. The state was divided for ministry into four distinct quadrants. Interstates 35 and 40 served nicely as the general dividing lines of those sections. Each section was to have a person called a "catalytic missionary" to direct the work in that area.

The first to be appointed as a catalytic missionary was Ramon Aleman, who was assigned to the northwest quadrant. Owing to work in the rural farming areas, this region was one of the earliest to have a major influx of Hispanics who moved in to establish permanent homes. At that time over fifty percent of the population was Spanish speaking. Aleman was already living in the area because he has begun mission work in the Panhandle area in 1980. Because of his expertise and abilities as a church planter, he was given the first position as catalytic missionary in 1982.

In 1984 Angel Murillo became the second catalytic missionary and was appointed to the southwest quadrant of Oklahoma. This was another area that was heavily populated by migrant Hispanic farm workers.

The third area to receive this unique mission worker was the southeastern quadrant with Daniel Caceres appointed to the position. Daniel served from 1988 until January 2002 when he was appointed as director of Baptist Hispanic work in Oklahoma. This required his move to Oklahoma City.

The final quadrant to receive a catalytic missionary was the northeastern region where Victor Orta was appointed in 1989. Thus, in ten years, the work among Hispanic Baptists became a well-defined and finely tuned organization that reached every area of the state.

It might be noted that when Bob Haskins became the director of language work almost all Hispanic work was being done by Anglos. These faithful people were often retired missionaries who had served in Spanish speaking parts of the world. These missionaries still retained a keen sense of serving the Lord, and they were still healthy, active, and available to serve. As Haskins pondered the matter, he became convinced that much of this work should also include Hispanic leaders. Few were available. The developing years with Haskins as director included an extensive effort to train Hispanic men to aid the Anglo leadership.³⁵

How Hispanics became the leaders is a story within itself, and too lengthy to include all the men in this writing. One example of how these men came is seen in the story of Ramon Aleman. He is best known for his work as the first catalytic missionary.

Prior to Aleman's coming, Sam Pace was the director of missions (DOM) of the Comanche-Cotton Association, which was centered in Lawton, Oklahoma. The time was the early 1980's and there was a deep need for a Hispanic pastor in the area.

Bob Haskins called Rafael Melian, the language director for the Louisiana Baptist Convention, regarding the matter. Bob knew Rafael from several state meetings they had attended together. Dr. Haskins told Melian he was looking for a Hispanic pastor for the Lawton area. Melian's response was that he had a seminary student, a "great guy", doing surveys in Louisiana as a Hispanic strategist, but he did not have the funds to pay him. Bob contacted Ramon Aleman and invited him to come to the Lawton area. When Aleman arrived, Sam Pace did not feel the Lord wanted Aleman for the area. As the Lord seemed to lead in the situation, Don Chambers, DOM of the Panhandle Association, called Haskins and said he wanted Aleman for his area. They had just started a Spanish speaking work at the First Baptist Church, Guymon, and were desperate for some help. So the Lord led Ramon Aleman to the Panhandle region. It was in the Lord's timing that Aleman was in the right location to become the first catalytic missionary in 1982.³⁶

The story of Joe Prickett also shows an example of the change from Anglo to Hispanic leadership. Oscar Romo, who at that time was the Director of the Language Missions Division of the Home Missions Board (now the North American Mission Board), called Bob Haskins and asked if there was a place to use Joe Prickett.

Joe was a single man at the time, and spoke fluent Spanish. The Enid Indian Church needed a pastor and Joe had gone there to serve for a period. The church, however, did not want a single pastor. The mission department of the BGCO

attempted to respond to Oscar Romo's request, but could not find a place for Joe in language work. Joe resigned from the Enid church, and got a job with the Department of Human Services in the Clinton area. That is where the Prickett family lived, and so Joe was simply going back home. Joe was a faithful man and deeply desired to be serving the Lord in some productive capacity. Since Joe spoke Spanish, it was not long until he got a work started at First Baptist, Clinton. The group first began meeting in a home. They had begun a ministry of providing food and clothing to Hispanic families from a building behind the church. Joe was able to get the work up to 12 to 16 people on a regular basis. The need for more help was evident. At that point Daniel Caceres was asked to step in and continue the work. Within one year, with Hispanic leadership in place, the congregation was approaching 100 in Sunday school attendance. It was out of this church that Mario Zamarron began his ministry. Mario came in November of 1981 as custodian at the Clinton church, was ordained by the Hispanic church, and became the pastor at Swan Lake. He later moved to his current work at Exchange Avenue.³⁷

Men such as Chuck Padillo, Oscar Riham, Tim Mascarena, Manuel Villegas, Angel Murillo, and others joined the growing number of Hispanic leadership across Oklahoma. Angel Murillo was the brother-in-law of Daniel Caceres. Angel's wife, Nila Murillo, was mentioned earlier as the one who started the Hispanic WMU in Oklahoma.

Angel Murillo came in 1981 from the largest church in Panama City, Panama. He was the one that God led to work with Sam Pace, DOM, in Lawton, Oklahoma. At the time of his arrival Angel did not speak English. His wife, Nila, was able to speak a little of the language. As often happens with missionaries going to foreign lands, it was their children that really helped with the translation into English. The missionaries of the Southern Baptist Convention often tell of how the children adapt so quickly to the foreign fields. In this case, the United States was Angel Murillo's foreign mission field for the Lord. So from Panama in Central America, to the United States in North America, a new missionary began to establish his work among the English speaking foreigners.³⁸

We read earlier of how the mission position in Lawton was still unfilled because Ramon Aleman accepted the call by Don Chambers to work in the Panhandle area of Oklahoma. Bob Haskins relates the story of how Murillo answered the call of God to come to the United States.

The one who really helped fill God's need at Lawton was the Murillo's oldest daughter Loyda. Miss Murillo was a student at Oklahoma Baptist University when Haskins first met her on campus. In the course of their conversation, she commented that her parents would really love to come serve the Lord in Oklahoma. Haskins told her the missions department was very concerned about getting someone for the Lawton area. Loyda said she would contact her father to see if he felt the Lord was in the matter. Angel was interested and Sam Pace "jumped" at the idea. Angel was well-known as a fantastic Bible teacher. Again, out of this humble beginning came one who would become the second catalytic missionary. Murillo became established in the Lawton area in 1981, and accepted the catalytic missionary position in 1984.³⁹

The many places and persons used by the Lord from the 1970's to the present in establishing Hispanic work is too numerous to mention. It is the purpose of this writing to, in some way, give the history of the more basic events that occurred. In

reality, every calling into God's work through the Hispanics is a story worth hearing many times over.

CHAPTER FOUR

From Here to Eternity

We now approach the present work and consider the plans for the future. While speculation on the future is not usually a portion of a written history, it is most fitting to include the current ideas of where the work of Hispanics might go.

The work in the 1980-1990's continued to expand under the leadership of Bob Haskins and Daniel Caceres. In 1996 the Indiana Baptist Convention contacted the BGCO to see if some help could be provided for the growing number of Spanish speaking people in their state. The methods of organizing language missions in Oklahoma had progressed nicely, and it was now time to use those methods to reach other lost language groups.

The idea of a partnership between the Hispanic work of Oklahoma and Indiana first came through a request received by Jack Comer a BGCO language mission consultant. Comer on receiving the request, asked the Indiana Baptists to send a representative to Oklahoma to discuss the matter. Daniel Caceres was seen as the best man in Oklahoma to aid them in this project. He had proven his worth while serving as catalytic missionary in southeastern Oklahoma. After much discussion and planning, Daniel Caceres went to Indiana in July 1997, and the result of this partnership was the establishing of 55 new Hispanic works in that state. Oklahoma Baptist's aided that project by supplying part of Caceres' salary. In January 2002, Daniel was asked by the BGCO to return to Oklahoma to accept the position of director of the Hispanic Baptist Missions in Oklahoma. What was done in Indiana was not only to establish new work, but to use the tested methods from Oklahoma to train leadership that could carry on the work after the partnership ended.⁴⁰

That basic framework of training leadership was now about to affect all language groups in Oklahoma. In September 1997, Ted Lam was asked to accept the position as BGCO Language Mission Specialist, taking the place of Bob Haskins. Dr. Haskins had moved to become the Associate Executive-Director of the BGCO. Ted Lam came from a successful pastorate at the International Church of Tulsa, which met at that time at Sequoyah Hills Baptist Church. Lam came with the goal of continuing and increasing the training of new leadership. Under Lam's direction, men of various language groups were trained to be the pastors. These pastors were trained to make new leaders, and then these newly prepared leaders were asked to start new works. Daniel Caceres, who had been a pastor, catalytic missionary, and denominational worker, retained his position as director of Hispanic work, and now focused more exclusively on being a church planter and with training workers.

With Daniel as the head of the Hispanic language missions, other new developments took place. During this period there were major changes in the general structure of the BGCO. One change was to revise various terms within the convention system. The convention was restructured under "team" divisions, and the language department fell under the leadership of the Church Outreach Team, often referred to

as the CORT Team. Dave Clippard, who was best known for his association with “Evangelism Explosion”, an outreach ministry out of Coral Ridge, Florida, was asked to accept the position of CORT Team Leader. It was during this time that the decision was made by Daniel Caceres to reduce the four quadrants to two divisions within the state.⁴¹

In 2003 Caceres asked Antonio Conchos to join the staff as his associate, and gave Conchos the opportunity of being in charge of both the southeast and southwestern areas of the state. Caceres took the northern half of Oklahoma as his section. This was a major change that could now be accomplished due to the reorganized structure of the Hispanic work.

Under Caceres’ leadership the state was organized into six Hispanic Fellowships. These fellowships are similar to Anglo Baptist associations, and each has its own board of directors. Therefore the Hispanic work now consisted of six fellowships and the one State Hispanic Baptist Association (similar to the BGCO). Each regional fellowship had four officers, which included a president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. The statewide Hispanic Baptist Association had only three elected leaders including a president, vice-president, and secretary-treasurer.⁴²

An example of this is the Metropolitan Hispanic Fellowship (MHF) in Oklahoma City which (as of this writing) consists of 23 churches and congregations. The MHF is incorporated and conducts its own legal business. It is not unusual for the number of congregations in each fellowship to increase annually, which is a blessing that quickly outdates this writing.

While the officers of the fellowships change often, the six Hispanic fellowships and their presidents, as of this writing, were KOINONIA Northeast Hispanic Fellowship, President Dr. Victor Orta; Metropolitan, Oklahoma City, President Jose Cifuentes; North Central (ALFA), President Cesar Garcia; Panhandle, President Moises Avalos; Southwestern, President Bernardo Crispin; and Southeastern, President Alejo Benito.

The current president of the State Hispanic Association of Oklahoma (ABHO) is Rigoberto Varela, and the treasurer is Saulo Flores. In 2006 the work load of Bro. Caceres was lessened, to some degree, with the appointment by the BGCO missions department of “consultants” who now work between the BGCO and each fellowship.⁴³

Most of the congregations started by these fellowships are first under the direction of, and supported by, a local church. This aids the individual work with continuity, credibility, and parental (church) guidance. The work among Hispanics has an excellent record of success and longevity due to the Southern Baptist churches acting as parent organizations. Unlike some mission starts (especially among Anglos), the Spanish speaking congregations can usually rely on the parent churches for continued support until the maturing process is completed. The umbrella support of the Anglo church protects the new work in a very loving and personal fashion. The church is actually investing in this new “child”, and will not want to see it fail. No parent wants to lose a child.

How does a new Hispanic work actually begin? Daniel Caceres answers that question by relating the five point process he uses in the work. The five steps are defined as **Discovering, Engaging, Equipping, Maturing, and Multiplying**.

Discovering the need requires the church planter assigned to any particular area to carefully consider the basic elements of the project. This includes analyzing the

place, the purpose, and finding or identifying a church that might be willing to parent the new group.

Engaging usually begins with a Bible study in or near the desired location. Daniel Caceres has discovered the number of weeks of this initial study may vary greatly. The goal is to create interest among the people from this Bible study, and start a preaching service within four to six weeks. That is not always possible. Another aspect used by Caceres is for him to openly “tithe” before all those attending as an example of what faithful people should do. Many Hispanics, as well as other groups, have little awareness of the concept of tithing. Along with the tithe, Daniel always inserts the idea and purpose of cooperative giving, which helps Hispanics realize the greatness of the work.

Equipping the work requires considerations of where the new group will meet, what equipment is needed to get the location ready for usage, and how the group will relate to the parent church. Having a partnering church is the most important aspect of this factor. In some cases, finding a partnering church can be difficult. The church must agree on the Hispanic work being something they, as a church, want to support. Equipment, space, and usually financial support must be committed by the church for a successful beginning to the venture.

While an Anglo pastor may like the idea of a mission group meeting in or near their facilities, it must have the church’s support. Conversely, if someone in the church desires a mission work to be started, the pastor and staff must be fully supportive of the project. In some cases, a particular church may see a need well before the convention, and may approach the BGCO with a request for a Hispanic (or other language ministry). All church starts should not overlook the consideration of seeking support and approval from a local church, the area Anglo association, and the state convention. In the case of Spanish speaking work in Oklahoma, the planning should also involve, when possible, the support and approval of the area Hispanic Baptist Fellowship. When a church requests help to begin a mission, it is usually a sign this is a “parent” who really desires to have a “child” to nurture and grow into adulthood. This type of commitment is usually well supported by the church for a longer period of time.

Maturing the group is the factor that requires the most difficult process. While getting the work started is often tedious, maturing the mission group requires the ability to grow the group, not just in numbers, but in Christian maturity. The Hispanic group must be taught the Word of God from a new perspective. Often a Hispanic group’s background, if they had a religious upbringing, is based on unfounded and unbiblical principles and traditions. Doctrine and theology must be drawn from the Bible in such a fashion that a more biblically correct life can be seen. The Anglo church, as well as the Hispanic pastor or mission leaders, must be capable and cautious to provide a life style that reflects Christ. For a “new” child to grow, the parent must never regard the mission as less than any other of its children. The new work must not only mature scripturally, but must understand the responsibility of witnessing and reaching others for Jesus Christ.

Multiplying is the end result of the maturing process. Once a mission is well established, it has the obligation to seek other people for Christ. It must also consider other locations to establish its influence. It is pleasing to see a “child” grow,

but the greatest joy is for this grown child to become a parent. There is nothing more satisfying to a mother church than to become a grandparent. Everyone likes to talk about their grandchildren.⁴⁴

While it is impossible to predict the future, the current ideas and plans of the BGCO Hispanic work can be shared. The mission partnership with the Indiana Baptist Convention from 1996-2000, was an interesting and educational process for Bro. Daniel Caceres. It was a hands-on process that increased his skills in preparation for what the future might hold.

By the late 1990's the BGCO Hispanic Missions had become not only a fully matured "convention", but a strong entity in regard to "foreign missions." It was now time to reach out to other locations beyond the United States and into other areas of the Americas.

In 2006, the Oklahoma Hispanic work expanded into Mexico. It began with missions being stated in the Mexican state of Guerrero. In only four years (2006-2010), 25 new church starts were established in that state. It cannot be over stated how this work is expanding.

The previous usual work would have been aided by an individual Anglo church. For example, for over 20 years one Oklahoma Baptist church has taken mission groups to a particular church in Mexico. While this is blessed of the Lord, after 20 years, there is still only one church. While other SBC conventions have established work in Mexico, they have primarily operated similar to that Oklahoma church. That is, they have focused on aiding already established work, and few new starts were being made.

Under the direction of Daniel Caceres, and with the support of BGCO's Executive-Director Treasurer, Dr. Anthony Jordan, the missions department, and Sam Porter, from the BGCO Partnership Mission office, new works have been, and are being, established in Mexico. The concepts are innovative and the progress is clearly seen.

Early in 2011, Church Planting Professor Hilario Rojah Sotelo, the church planting specialist for the Guerrero Baptist Convention (GBC), and Wilbur Martinez, president of the GBC, led a Mission Renacimiento conference and presented plans and strategy for planting 15 new churches in Acapulco by 2015.

The meeting was attended by 27 pastors and church leaders, with a total attendance of 43. It was reported that 100 tamales disappeared in 30 minutes. Sam Porter co-hosted the meeting. Porter told the group he will seek 15 BGCO churches to become partners with the 15 existing Baptist churches in Acapulco. The goal of this partnership is to strengthen these existing churches and then join them in establishing 15 new church plants in the next year. The desire is to see these 15 new works planted far before the 2015 goal. The city of Acapulco has over two-million people, and there are fewer than 500 Baptists worshipping there on any given Sunday.⁴⁵

The plans call for each partner church in Oklahoma to send small teams three or four times a year to perform various types of mission-strengthening events. By the time the plans were announced through the Baptist Messenger in March, 2011, four churches had already committed to partner in the project.⁴⁶

Daniel Caceres has been working diligently to assist in the venture. The Acapulco effort, called "Vision Fifteen", is only the beginning of what may be a major revival for Mexico.

One eventual goal is to have teams of church planters in each of the 32 Mexico states. Dr. Rue Scott, former mission strategist for the BGCO stated, “This is the best current mission movement in the world. If the plan succeeds in Mexico, it should work anywhere in the world.”⁴⁷

What has happened among the Hispanic Baptists in Oklahoma is only the beginning of what will continue from now until the Lord returns or we enter eternity. Even as you read this abbreviated history, perhaps the Lord is speaking to your heart. History is usually regarded as what has happened in the past. One aspect, however, must never be forgotten. You, the reader, may be called of the Lord to serve in a major missionary role in the future. We never know where we will be or how we will serve Him, until we surrender to His call. One day, you and your work may be the subject about which someone writes. I urge you to consider giving your future in total obedience. One day your life may be a sweet offering to God, and subsequently a recorded historical blessing to future generations.

Taped interview.

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