



Gracias Jesus

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The first week of February I had the honor of traveling to Mexico to visit the CGGC work there, which is one of our newest fields. I met Caleb and Christina Acosta, Directors of Latino Ministries for the CGGC, at the airport in Mexico City. We also met up with a group of folks from the Midwest Region as well as a couple individuals from the Great Lakes Region.

Author

The weekly eNews is provided by CGGC Executive Director Lance Finley



Pastor Israel Gonzalez Cristobal

Half of our week was spent in Mexico City with Pastor Emigdio Sanchez who pastors Iglesia Nueva Vida Mexico with his lovely wife Ana. This congregation has also started an outreach in Toluca, west of Mexico City. The second half of our week was spent in the mountainous state of Hidalgo, north of Mexico City. Pastor Israel Gonzalez Cristobal pastors two churches in near the village of Dothu along with his lovely wife Maribel.

As with most of my experiences in other cultures in foreign countries, this was a rich experience full of learning. I always find that my faith is stretched through these experiences and my understanding of God's kingdom always expands because of how we see Him working in other cultures.

Here are a few reflections:

1. Cities like Mexico City are strategically important to Gospel advancement in our world. Mexico City is the world's 10th largest city with nearly 24 million people. It's not lost on me that many of our works outside the U.S. have established works in or near cities while the majority of our work in the U.S. is in more rural areas. While I know our brothers and sisters in Mexico City feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the work, their presence in the city is an important base for the work that God wants to continue to do in Mexico City. It's so good to see our brothers and sisters establishing vital, Gospel-advancing works in the city, amidst all of the challenges and opportunities that come with urban life.
2. The need for partnership is great. Pastor Travis Bodden, director of the Midwest Region, brought along a team of folks from various churches across that region. One of the main purposes for their experience was to explore the possibility for partnerships between local congregations in the U.S. and this new work in Mexico. It's so encouraging to see local congregations taking a long

view of missions: looking to make an investment in one place over the course of several years. These kind of partnerships take time to develop, but the ministry potential is enormous. Several folks on this trip were committed to improving their Spanish speaking skills to further encourage and advance the work God was calling them to do through these kinds of partnership. Where in the world are you and your congregation committing to partner with for the next 5, 10, or even 20 years to see the Gospel of Jesus Christ demonstrated and proclaimed?

3. The leadership in our Mexico churches take reproduction and multiplication seriously. I was so encouraged to see our pastors there investing deeply in a few folks who were going and doing the same. They are developing leaders and the ministry is growing and expanding. Each of these young congregations were already establishing new works in other areas to continue to see the Good News of Jesus Christ demonstrated and proclaimed throughout their country. We need to learn from our brothers and sisters in other cultures on this point.

One last experience from my trip that sums up the experience. On Sunday morning we had the privilege to worship with our brothers and sisters at Nueva Vida in Mexico City. At the end of the service, Pastor Emigdio invited our team up front and invited the entire congregation to come up and offer prayer for us. Our Latino brothers and sisters often pray out loud simultaneously during moments like this – it can be a little overwhelming for those who are more accustomed to quiet moments of congregational prayer. One brother approached me, laid his hand upon my shoulder and began to pray out loud in Spanish. My Spanish is extremely limited – think Taco Bell Spanish and you get the breadth of my bi-lingual skills (or lack thereof). As my brother prayed for me, I began to pray for him. Neither one of us knew one another, neither one of us could understand the other, but we both understood that Jesus had made us brothers and that was enough for us.



Left to right: Pastor Ana, Pastor Emigdio, Caleb Acosta

As the prayer time began to slow, I found myself just offering thanks to Jesus, just simply praying the words “thank you Jesus” over and over again as it seemed like the only appropriate response at that moment. Thank you Jesus for the privilege of experiences like this. Thank you Jesus for this dear man who is my brother because of what you have done to make us brothers. Thank you Jesus. Thank you Jesus. Thank you Jesus.

It was at this point that I heard my dear brother praying the words “Gracias Jesus” over and over again. It was one of the most poignant moments of the entire trip for me. Two men from different cultures, who speak different languages, who have no other reason to know one another other than the fact that Jesus has redeemed us, given us new identities and made us brothers in His family. The only appropriate response to a moment like this was to offer thanks to the one who accomplished the great work to make it possible. Thank You Jesus! Gracias Jesus.

I got a little glimpse of heaven that morning as we joined the multitude of voices, languages, peoples and cultures that surround the throne giving thanksgiving and praise to the exalted Son who sits upon the throne! Thank You Jesus. Gracias Jesus.

Christ's Peace,

Lance

