

**On-site visits to mega-churches in
Managua, Nicaragua, on February 19 & 26, 2012**

**By Clifton L. Holland, Director of PROLADES
Last updated on 18 May 2012**

**(1) Rivers of Living Water International Ministry -
Ministerio Internacional Ríos de Agua Viva**

Location: Sector de Rubenia, Colonia Omar Montealegre
4 cuadros arriba y 2 ½ cuadros al Lago de Managua
Managua, Nicaragua

Senior Pastor: Omar Duarte
Telephone: 2280-2613

E-mail: <http://www.ministerioriosdeaguaviva.net/contacto.html>

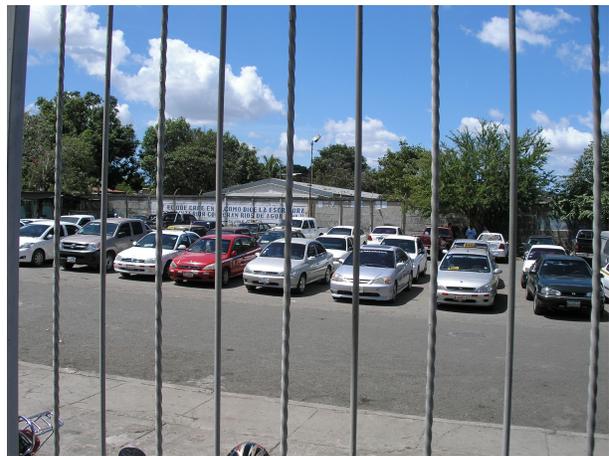
Internet: <http://ministerioriosdeaguaviva.net/horarios.html>

Sunday Services: Congregational Worship at 8:30 AM and 11:00 AM
Evening evangelistic service 7:00 PM



My colleague William E. Rodríguez, director of the Church History program in the School of Theology at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Nicaraguan Evangelical University, provided me with transportation and accompanied me on my visits to mega-churches in Managua on Sunday, February 19, 2012. We arrived at “Iglesia Ríos de Agua Viva” (also known as “Iglesia RAV” and “Ministerio Evangélico Ríos de Agua Viva”) about 10:00 AM and observed the last part of the first Sunday worship service, which began at 8:30 AM.

This church, with a large white dome that can be seen from a distance (see photo above), is located in an industrial area of Managua, which is surrounded by a residential area of lower middle-class to upper-lower class homes. Although there is a parking lot across the street from the church entrance where some of the more affluent members and visitors park their cars and minivans, most of those who attend arrive in city buses, in private buses that are rented by the church for this purpose, in taxis or by motorcycle. Those who live nearby also walk to the worship services. At both ends of the parking lot, which was managed by parking attendants and security guards, were street vendors who provided a variety of food and drink options to those who were arriving or leaving the church services.



The church’s sanctuary was packed with people of all ages, including many parents with small children; all the available seats were taken and many people were standing along the side walls of the sanctuary

as well as at the rear end of the building and at all the entrances (one at the back and four on each side). Everyone seemed to be paying attention to what was happening on the platform despite numerous distractions from crying babies, small children playing in the aisles, the heat and occasional street noise.







This church is described as Pentecostal-Charismatic and independent, but the governing pastor previously was affiliated with the Pentecostal Church of God, International Mission (Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, Misión Internacional) from Puerto Rico, which is similar in doctrine to the Assemblies of God. “Iglesia Ríos de Agua Viva ” was founded in 2005. Each of the church’s three Sunday worship service has about 3,000 people in attendance for a total of about 9,000 on any given Sunday. According to one of the elders of the church, Emilio René Reyes, every three months about 150 new members are baptized after attending preparatory classes. The church also owns and operates “Radio Maranatha,” which reaches most of the population of Managua and surrounding areas with daily broadcasts at 103.5 FM and 92.9 FM. The total membership of the mother church and its affiliated daughter churches, plus cell groups that meet in homes during the week, was estimated by Reyes to be 30,000 (he said “members” but this may be his estimate of total adherents).

**(2) Christian Center Apostolic Ministries -
Ministerios Apostolar Centro Cristiano**

Location: Residencial Bello Horizonte
Managua, Nicaragua

Pastors: Augusto César Marengo B. y Rosita de Marengo

Telephones:

E-mail: pastormarengo7@hotmail.com

Internet: <http://ministerioapostolar.org/> -

<http://www.youtube.com/user/pastormarengo>

Six Sunday Worship Services, beginning at 8:00 AM and continuing until 9:00 PM

This church, originally called “Centro Cristiano,” traces its history to 1978 when an evangelist known as “Pastor Smith” (a U.S. citizen) began holding services in an empty lot, located on the northeast side of the Rotonda de la Residencial Bello Horizonte in Managua. Later, Smith purchased a tent for his evangelistic and faith healing services, which were held nightly with about 500 people in attendance.









Currently, this church (founded in 1992 as “Ministerios Apostolar Centro Cristiano” (MACC) under the leadership of Apostle Augusto César Marengo and his wife Rosa Emilia (“Rosita”), is the mother church for 25 affiliated local churches in Nicaragua and several churches in other countries (Miami, Florida and Costa Rica). Pastor Marengo claims to have drawn crowds of up to 90,000 people for special events in public places, such as on 12 December 2004 at Plaza la Fe at El Malecón de Managua, for the 7th Prophetic Apostolic Event “Restoring our nation with the Lordship of Jesus Christ.” “Apostle Marengo” and his affiliated churches identify with the **New Apostolic Reformation** and he strongly emphasizes his “Apostolic calling” in his messages, writings and conversations.

After the worship service (Sunday, 19 February), William Ramírez and myself had a long conversation with Pastor Marengo and his wife Rosita in the church’s office while we enjoyed lunch together with food supplied from the church’s own kitchen, which also provides lunch for parishioners and guests who stay after the service for food and fellowship. The church’s website has a long written history of Marengo’s life and ministry at: <http://ministerioapostolar.org/historias.html>

The main auditorium seats about 1,500 people for each worship service, and we estimated the total Sunday attendance at about 9,000 people for the six services, which were reported to be filled to capacity although we only witnessed one of the worship services from 10:00 AM - 12:00 noon. The

schedule of Sunday worship services is reported to be as follows: 8:00 – 9:30 AM, 10:00 – 12:00 AM, 12:00 – 2:00 PM, 2:00 – 4:00 PM, 4:00 – 6:00 PM and 6:00 – 8:00 PM.

The expanded ministry of this mega-church is conducted by a team of 30 pastoral coordinators who are assigned to specific zones of the city where, during the week, an estimated 1,500 home cell groups are held in the Managua Metro Area. The attendance in these cell groups ranges from a half-dozen to 75 or more, according to the church's website: <http://ministerioapostolar.org/gruposfamiliares.html>

Marenco and his staff have proposed the building of a 20,000 seat auditorium in the near future in order to expand the work of MACC to better serve its faith community.



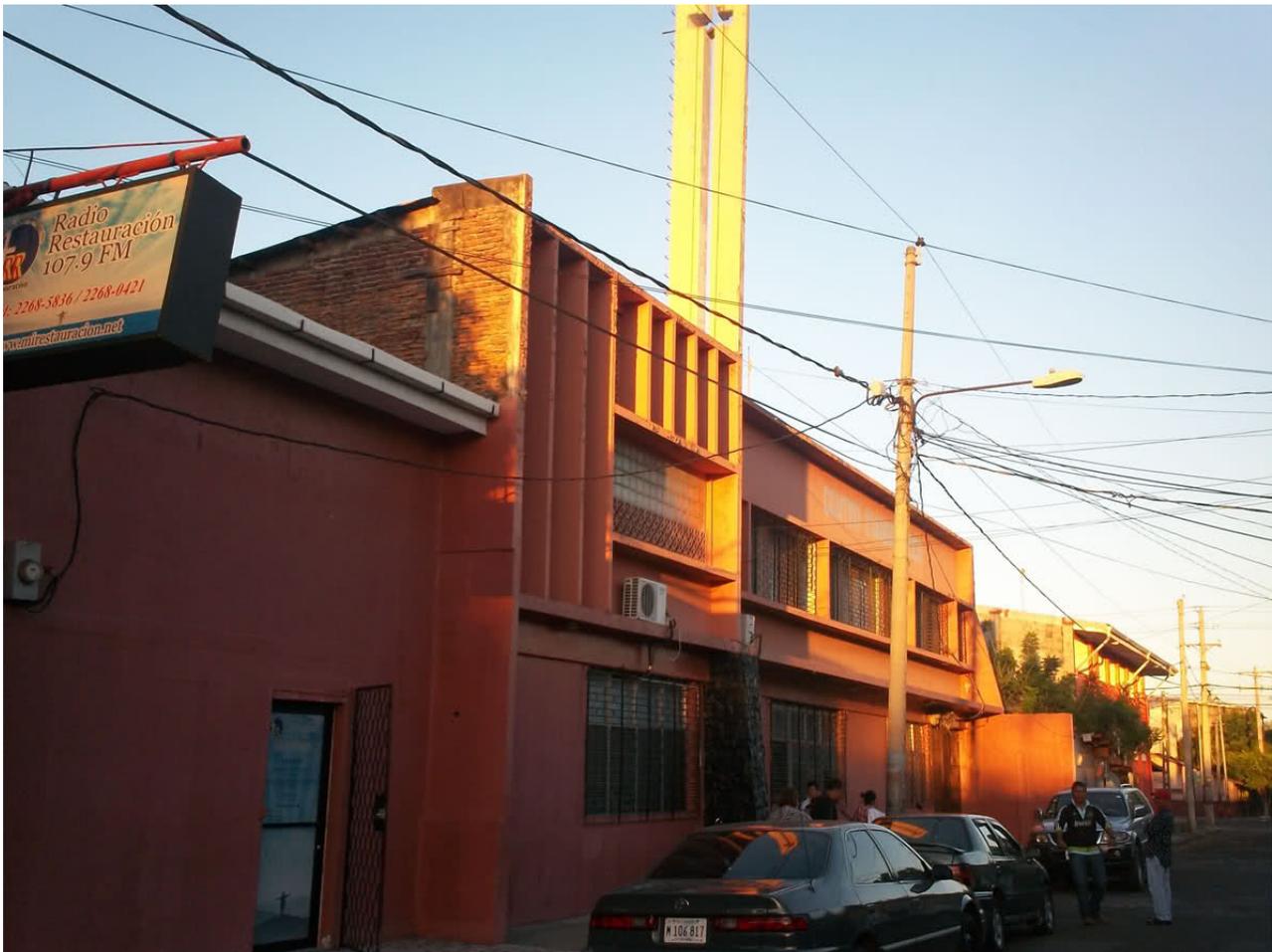
**(3) Assemblies of God Evangelistic Center -
Centro Evangelístico de las Asambleas de Dios**

Location: Colonia Javier Cuadras
Managua, Nicaragua

Pastor General: Olvidio Valladares
Telephone:
E-mail:

Internet: <http://www.cccasadedios.org/index-2.html>

Six Sunday Morning Worship Services: 7:00 – 9:00 AM; 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM;
11:00 AM – 1:00 PM; 2:00 – 4:00 PM; 4:00 – 6:00 PM; 6:00 – 8:00 PM.



We arrived at this church about 1:30 PM on Sunday, 19 February, at a time when there were only a few people in the sanctuary with a seating capacity of only about 1,000 people. However, we were able to converse with one of the seven pastors of the church, led by Pastor General Olvidio Valladares.

Each of the six Sunday worship services are led by a different pastor, beginning at 7:00-9:00 AM and ending at 6:00-8:00 PM. We interviewed Pastor Emery Molina, who is in charge of the 2:00-4:00 PM service. He gave us an overview of the attendance at each of the worship services, as follows.

7:00 - 9:00 AM led by Pastor Manuel Jiménez: about 1,000 people in attendance.

9:00 - 11:00 AM led by Pastor Norberto Avila; attendance of about 1,000.

11:00 AM – 1:00 PM led by Pastor Fátima Valdivía; attendance of about 1,000.

2:00 - 4:00 PM led by Pastor Emery Molina; attendance of about 400.

4:00 - 6:00 PM led by Pastor Israel Díaz; attendance of about 400.

6:00 - 8:00 PM led by Pastor Domingo Tijerino; attendance of about 400.

The total estimated attendance on a typical Sunday for all six worship services is about 4,200 people, according to Pastor Molina. The church also operates a primary and secondary school of the church property adjacent to the auditorium, and the classrooms are also used for the Sunday School.

**(4) Hosanna Family Renewal Community -
Comunidad de Renovación Familiar Hosanna**

Location: Rotonda Jean Paul Genie, 300 metros al Oeste **sobre la pista**
Managua, Nicaragua

Pastor General: Arsenio Herrera
Telephone: 2270-0093; FAX: 2270-5793
E-mail: hosanna@comunidadhosanna.net
Internet: <http://www.comunidadhosanna.info/>

Sunday Morning Worship Services: 8:00 – 10:00 AM; 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM.
Sunday Evening Service: 6:30 – 8:30 PM



This large church was built in 2003 on a hill with a view of Lake Managua by U.S. missionary Pastors David and Bonnie Spencer of the Assemblies of God, after having had a successful ministry in Panama City during the 1990s. However, after David Spencer (age 65) was diagnosed with severe liver failure and was scheduled to have a liver transplant in the USA, Assistant Pastor Arsenio Herrera (a Nicaraguan) was

appointed Pastor General and now leads this middle to upper-middle class congregation with an estimated 7,000 members.

I arrived by taxi at this well-known church at about 10:30 AM on Sunday, February 26, and had an opportunity of interviewing Mr. Carlos Tapia Zarruck, the Usher Coordinator, prior to the 11:00 AM worship service. He reported to me that the Rev. David Spencer was doing well after his liver transplant at a U.S. hospital but was not expected to return to Nicaragua anytime soon. Carlos stated that the three Sunday worship services had the following average attendance: 8:00-10:00 = 2,500 people; 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM = 2,800 people; and the evening service from 5:00 – 7:00 PM = 1,500 people. This gives a total estimated attendance of 6,800-7,000 people on any given Sunday. People throughout the auditorium are seated on metal folding chairs. In addition, the Saturday night Youth Service has an average attendance of 900 young people. During the week, there are about 600 “friendship circles” that meet in private homes through Managua, which are coordinated by seven pastors of “friendship circle networks.”



I was able to stay for the entire worship service, and afterward I was able to interview Pastor Arsenio Herrera for about 5-6 minutes. When the worship service began at 11:00 AM, the auditorium was only about one-quarter full. At the opening, the musical part of the service was very loud with congregational

singing accompanied by musical instruments; there was a popular worship style, with people singing and shouting the words of the songs, which were projected on several large viewing screens; some people did the “Pentecostal two-step” dance in front of their seats and in the aisles, while some also jumped up and down during the singing with their arms waving; it seems like everyone was enjoying the entertainment portion of the service. By 11:30 AM the auditorium was very full and the music and singing was milder and more worshipful. The offering preparation was very traditional without any undue emphasis on the giving of tithes and offerings (almost Baptist-like). Pastor Herrera preached a rather traditional Pentecostal sermon of about 45 minutes without a lot of shouting and drama.

According to Carlos Tapia, for the two Sunday morning worship services, about 800 people arrive by means of rented buses (about 10 regular size buses and six minibuses or minivans), while the majority arrive on city buses or in their own private vehicles. The church has two large parking lots, one on each side of the main auditorium. There is a separate educational building for Sunday school classes and other meetings, as well as a large meeting space on one side of the auditorium under the old large tent that was originally used for worship services while the main auditorium was under construction in 2002-2003.









Church Led by Missionary David Spencer Is Now Nicaragua's Largest

By Joan Wilson Carter in Managua, Nicaragua

Thursday, 31 July 2003 – *Charisma Magazine*

Hosanna Church, which recently dedicated a multimillion-dollar facility in Managua, leads hundreds to Christ weekly.

More than 3,000 people gathered in Managua, Nicaragua, for the recent dedication of Hosanna Church's multimillion-dollar sanctuary.

Sitting atop a hill overlooking Lake Managua, the facility is home to the largest evangelical center in the nation, which sees more than 500 decisions for Christ each week, regularly receives reports of miracles that occur during its TV program and hosts daily radio broadcasts.

At its helm is pastor David Spencer, who once fled the nation after becoming a target for the ruling Sandinista regime. Today he is described as a dynamic and motivational speaker who has helped win thousands to Christ in one of the world's poorest nations.

"David Spencer is the most impressive person I know," said Thomas Paino Jr., former pastor of Lakeview Christian Center in Indianapolis who helped build Hosanna Church. Spencer, who was translating for Paino at the dedication service in October, refused to translate the comment.

Impressive or not, Spencer is influential. Former Nicaragua President Arnoldo Alemán sought him out for prayer and counsel after Alemán was charged with laundering more than \$100 million of government funds. Spencer prayed daily with Alemán, who left office in 2002 and is currently under house arrest awaiting trial.

A son of U.S. missionaries, Spencer, 58, first came to Nicaragua with his parents in the 1960s, then returned in the 1980s to preach during the Sandinista war. Under scrutiny from the Marxist-Leninist regime, Spencer received death threats after he spoke before 20,000 people in the national stadium. After several deportations and a jailing, Spencer left Nicaragua in the late 1980s vowing not to return unless God gave the word.

In the early 1990s, after the defeat of the Sandinistas, Spencer was invited to Nicaragua to speak at a pastors conference. During the meeting some pastors told him they believed he was called to Nicaragua. Then leading a large church in Panama, Spencer determined that he would return only if God confirmed it.

A short time later two ministers separately told him they believed God wanted him to return to Nicaragua. Upon his return to Panama, Spencer said he began to sense God confirming their words during his own times of prayer.

Within two months Spencer and his wife, Bonnie, were on their way to Nicaragua. Before he arrived, Spencer called a real estate agent and asked her to check the price on a piece of land he had seen on a hill overlooking Lake Managua.

The owner demanded \$525,000 and a six-month "buy" period. If he did not complete the purchase in time, Spencer would forfeit all funds paid and lose the land. Spencer said that was the beginning of his walk of faith. Before then, he said, the largest amount of money he had ever received was \$20,000.

The first payment of \$60,000 arrived on time. Then the second payment of \$70,000 arrived on time. The third payment of \$150,000 was slow coming. At the last minute, he received a call from a donor offering \$100,000. Raising the balance didn't seem so daunting after that.

Since then, Spencer, who is on the board of directors of Paul Yonggi Cho's church in Korea, has purchased more land to build a prayer mountain, and bought a small radio station. Now he has his sights on starting a TV station, and he's searching for more property to build a school and preschool, and grow a farm.

And Spencer said he isn't afraid to ask God for more. "You know that Scripture 'Ask and you shall receive?' Well, what is the next word? It's 'seek and you shall find.'" he told Charisma. "It is fervent asking, fervent seeking and fervent knocking. It's perseverance. It's tenacity. If you are doing something that you can do alone it probably is not from the Lord."

Source: <http://www.charismamag.com/index.php/component/content/article/268-people-and-events/7867-church-led-by-missionary-david-spencer-is-now-nicaraguas-largest>

OVERVIEW

On-site research of Protestant Mega-churches in Managua, Nicaragua: Sunday, 19 & 26 February 2012

By Dr. Clifton L. Holland

IGLESIA	PASTOR GOBERNANTE	NO. DE ASIENTOS	NO. DE SERVICIOS	TOTAL DE ASISTENCIA ESTIMADO
(1) Ministerio Internacional Ríos de Agua Viva, Sector de Rubenia de Managua (independent Pentecostal)	Omar Duarte	3.000	3	8.500
(2) Ministerio Apostolar Centro Cristiano, Colonia Bello Horizonte (New Apostolic Reformation)	Augusto César Marengo	1.500	6	9.000
(3) Comunidad de Renovación Familiar Hosanna, Rotonda Jean Paul Genie, Managua (Pentecostal - Assemblies of God)	Arsenio Herrera (founded by David & Bonnie Spencer)	2.500	3	7.000
(4) Centro Evangelístico de las Asambleas de Dios, Colonia Javier Cuadras Montoya, Managua (Pentecostal-Assemblies of God)	Olvidio Valladares	2.000	3	4.200
TOTALES (4)		9.000	15	21.700

INFORMACION DE CONTACTO

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PROLADES

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