

## CHAPTER 8

### INSIDE THE EVANGELICAL DENOMINATIONS OF GUATEMALA: THE LEADERS SPEAK

#### **The Major Denominations Interviewed**

Both raw facts and descriptive statistics show relationships among church growth factors, but they do not link them conclusively in cause and effect roles. The following information is taken from interviews with the recognized leadership of Guatemala's largest or most typical denominations. The summaries are generally organized by the fastest growing groups. Rapid expansion of churches likely indicates that their leaders understand their denomination's dynamics and effectively have implemented advantageous strategies and methodologies. Some denominations with moderate growth have experienced a high degree of success in the past, but recently have faced new challenges that decelerated their growth. The leadership of each denomination offered insight into some of the problems that plague their church and the Evangelical Church at large. Other denominations are growing slower than the general birth rate, but even so offer useful perspectives from hard lessons of the past that have diminished the power of their ministry. A glimpse into the windows of denominations reveals their leadership's understanding of their contribution to the overall evangelical community. These patterns illuminate the causes for current growth and give effective solutions to the common challenges of Guatemala's evangelical churches.

Figure 8.1

**A Summary of the Major Denominations of Guatemala  
and Other Typical Groups**

Church	Begin Year	Person Interview	1990 Comm'ty	2001 Comm'ty <sup>1</sup>	NetGrowth 1990-2001	Adj. % Grow <sup>2</sup>	Chur ches	Primary Constituenc	Type
Assembly of God	1936	Orlando Pinzon	225,000	600,540	167%	102%	1,825	Rural and medium	Pentecostal
Church of God-FG	1932	Roberto Sosa	187,000	487,984	161%	98%	1,834	Rural Indian and Ladino	Pentecostal
Prince of Peace	1950	Not avail. for inter	170,000	179,038	5%	-20%	?	Rural Indian and Ladino	Neo-Pentecostal
CAM	1899	Steve Sywulka	145,950	175,849	20%	-9%	1,400	Indian and Ladino	Traditional
Elim	1962	Mynor Giron <sup>3</sup>	60,000	105,435	76%	33%	?	Ladinos	Neo-Pentecostal
Nazarene	1902		35,300	102,345	190%	120%		Rural	Pentecostal
Presbyterian	1896	Fernando Mazariegos	65,567	65,800	0%	-23%	ca 500	varied	Traditional
Bethany	1970	Efraín Avelar	21,600	60,000	178%	110%	120	Medium size Ladino towns	Neo-Pentecostal
Baptists All			49,500	75,648	53%	16%			Traditional
K'ekchíConv		Samuel Cucul	13,076 <sup>4</sup>	30,000	129%	74%	90	Rural K'ekchí	Traditional
LadinoConv	1946	Rosalío Ramírez	21,249 <sup>5</sup>	28,398	34%	1%	45	Low Class Ladino	Traditional
El Shaddai	1983	Alberto Benítez		15,000			26	Upper middle class	Neo-Pentecostal
Familia de Dios	1990	Rigoberto Gálvez		8,000			8	Middle Class	Neo-Pentecostal
Mennonites (Capital)	1976	Carlos Rodas		1,000		?	8	Low class Ladinos	Traditional

<sup>1</sup> Data are from the demographic study. Other data of corresponding groups come from the interviews of K'ekchí Baptists, El Shaddai, Familia de Dios and Mennonites.

<sup>2</sup> 1990 community figure times 1.32 gives adjusted figure to accommodate the 32% general population growth from 1990 to 2001. For a denomination to maintain even with the general population growth, it must have grown by 32% in this period. Greater than zero signifies the denomination is gaining relative ground to the general population growth, and less than zero signifies the opposite.

<sup>3</sup> Giron is no longer with Elim, but was part of the leadership of the church until 1998. The Central Elim did not grant an interview.

<sup>4</sup> Interpolation from the unpublished report by Frank Johnson, "Baptist Growth Among the K'ekchí People of Guatemala: An Update" (Guatemala, 29 October 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Community equals membership times 2.5= 34,325. Data from *1991 Southern Baptist Annual* (Nashville: Executive Committee, SBC, 1991), 138.

Denominations with sustained rapid growth demonstrate that they understand and implement effective principles of leadership, growth strategy, discipleship, church

organization, and training. The Pentecostal Assembly of God is the largest denomination in Guatemala and has enjoyed a steady and rapid growth since the early 1950s. Over the past eleven years, it has exceeded the general population growth rate by 102%. The denomination has churches throughout the country and has worked well with both Ladino and Indian lower classes. The SEPAL team interviewed the animated and visionary Superintendent of the Assembly of God, Orlando Herrera Pinzon (Appendix 8.1).<sup>1</sup>

The second largest denomination is the Church of God-Whole Gospel. It has grown steadily since the 1950s. Over the past eleven years, this church has exceeded the general population growth rate by 98%. It originated in the Indian areas of El Quiché and has enjoyed tremendous success among rural Indians. The denomination has a strong presence throughout the country, in cities, as well as rural towns. It continues to have a large Indian base, but as the church has grown, it has built a large constituency of Ladinos. The SEPAL team interviewed the superintendent of the Church of God-Whole Gospel, Roberto Aldana Sosa.

The second fastest growing denomination in Guatemala is the Neo-pentecostal Bethany Church, which was founded in Quetzaltenango in 1970 by Efraín Avelar. Over the past eleven years, Bethany has exceeded the general population growth rate by 110%. This study shows that Bethany has approximately 60,000 people associated with their churches.<sup>2</sup> Although some of this growth is likely migration from other denominations,

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<sup>1</sup> Context of the quotes are in sections of Appendix 8, ranging from Appendix 8.1 through 8.11. Each interview is placed in alphabetical order according to denomination. The interviews are composed of numbered questions with the corresponding responses. The citation in the body of the paper contains the Appendix number followed by a number. The number refers to the text under the corresponding question number. For example, (Appendix 8.1, 4) signifies the Assembly of God interview with the text under question 4.

<sup>2</sup> As stated in other parts of the paper, the Bethany church figure is an approximation due to the reporting of the names of individual congregations, rather than the name of the denomination. Bethany is a common name among older congregations and in rural areas some ignorant adherents of a church only

Bethany is an attractive and charismatic church that is inspired and driven by Avelar. The majority of Bethany's churches are in the western part of Guatemala, but they are beginning to branch out into other parts of the country. They normally work in cities or large towns.

Another influential and fast growing Neo-pentecostal group is El Shaddai. It is an upper-middle class church centered in Guatemala City with missions in indigenous and Ladino areas in various parts of the Interior. Although relatively new and small, it works among diverse cultures in Guatemala. SEPAL interviewed one of the pastors of the Central Church, Oscar Alberto Benítez.

The K'ekchí Baptist Association has taken a path of work and growth distinctively different from the Ladino Baptists. They are characterized as rural, poor, visionary, and effective. Their expansion has exceeded the general population growth rate by 74% over the past eleven years. They are led by the low-keyed, but able, Samuel Cucul. This is the only entirely Indian Church interviewed.

Churches that maintained a moderate growth rate close to the general population growth are the Central American Mission (CAM), Familia de Dios, and the Ladino Baptists from the Guatemalan Baptist Convention. It is possible that the Elim Church is on par with the population rate as well, but since 1998, they have suffered a division that the comparative eleven year time span does not reflect entirely. They have had negative growth since 1998. CAM is the second oldest denomination in Guatemala. It has a long tradition of aggressive evangelism and growth. Over the past eleven years, this has slowed down considerably. CAM has enjoyed an expansive and groundbreaking work in

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know and report the congregational name. Although this figure is adjusted to reflect this problem, this researcher considers 60,000 adherents as guide to rank it within the total evangelical context.

the Indian areas of Western Guatemala. They also have strong works in Guatemala City and expansive, lower to middle-class works in the Interior. They reach a wide spectrum of cultures in all types of communities.

The Familia de Dios is a Neo-pentecostal church that focuses primarily in Guatemala City. It is a middle-class church that concentrates on cell concepts for discipleship and growth.

The Ladino sector of the Guatemalan Convention of Baptist Churches functions parallel to the K'ekchí Baptists and is part of the same Baptist entity. The groups are separated for purposes of this study. Baptist Ladino work is strongest in the Capital and is stable in the West of Guatemala.

The Elim Church declined an interview, but SEPAL was pleased to interview Mynor Giron, the senior pastor of the Elohim Church. Giron offered insight into the world of the once fastest growing Elim Church. He was a part of the Central Elim leadership until shortly after the death of the amazing Dr. Ríos Paredes in 1998, the founder of Elim.

The denominations that are not growing as fast as the general population are: the Presbyterians, Mennonites in the Capital, Prince of Peace, and Calvary. The latter two were unavailable for interviews.

Each leader had his own unique style and experience, and the Spanish to English translation of the interviews attempts to preserve this style. For this researcher, it was an honor to interview these exemplary leaders. Some have a persona, confidence, and spirituality that written words cannot capture. Many have leadership skills that go beyond

mere strategies or abilities as they use a God-given ethos to inspire and motivate others.

Interviews in their entirety are in Appendix 8.

### **The Centrality of Leadership in Church Growth and Development**

Purposeful and Defined Leadership are the Keys to Motivated Churches

The distinguishing characteristic of the Neo-pentecostal churches is not their theology nor their worship form, but their consistently strong leadership. It is centered in an individual who is "anointed by God." Typically, he has a clear vision and ardently communicates it to others. Efraín Avelar described this kind of leadership:

I believe that the leader of a movement should be a visionary man, non-conformed, unsatisfied with what he has reached, and always should pursue more. The function of the leader is to prepare leadership around him, because every church is as strong or as weak as its leader. If the leadership of the church is strong, the church is going to be strong. If the leadership of the church is weak, the church is going to be weak (Appendix 8.2, 14).

Mynor Giron, a Neo-pentecostal apostle and a disciple of Elim's founder, Dr. Ríos Paredes, understood the centrality of leadership within a balanced perspective.

We say that everything depends on God, but there is human participation. We put a lot of importance on leadership, and we do a lot of preparation of leaders. We prepare leaders and send them out to preach immediately to our congregations, rural areas, or to places where something is only starting. We have an expression that helps to balance us: "It's urgent to preach the Gospel, but not so much to send just any one" (Appendix 8.5, 14).

Growing churches have clear purposes and immediate areas of service for lay leaders. Leadership is not about positions or titles, but rather it is about preparation,

action, and service. Roberto Sosa of the fast growing Church of God, similarly practices the same principles that Giron espoused.

We put a lot of emphasis on leadership and we invest a lot in the preparation of leaders. We prepare leaders and send them to immediately preach in our congregations, into mission areas or places where things are just getting started, jails, hospitals, parks, and streets (Appendix 8.4, 14).

When the leaders of the slower growing or declining churches mentioned the area of leadership, they did not respond with clear, crisp answers and emphasis on leadership, as did the leaders of the faster growing denominations. Lack of leadership and lack of definition are poor qualities of a leader in any culture.

#### Leadership Issues and Slow Growth

Fernando Mazariegos of the Presbyterian Church, noted that lack of planning directly affects leadership production. He recognized that lack of planning and spontaneity have had dire effects as it yielded a shortage of leaders.

I think the church has unplanned diversity. Much of it is very spontaneous as it forms and generates leadership. We have had many holes. Imagine, we belong to a generation that has a gap of 25 years without ordaining a pastor . . . from within the Central Presbyter--it's chaotic. It's terrible! It's decadent! There have been very few formal strategies, and we have sinned by being spontaneous (Appendix 8.11, 17).

Conflicting notions of leadership between the leader and followers create tensions. In some cases, these tensions are attributed to differing concepts of leadership between Indian and Ladino cultures. In Indian areas in particular, CAM suffers from a high degree of legalism and tradition cultivated by the static nature of the Indian culture.

This directly retards the growth of the church. Steve Sywulka noted that CAM continues to plant more missions, but because of member losses the church has not grown significantly in ten years (Appendix 8.3, 26). He astutely recognizes the importance of leadership, but legalism and tradition stifle new leadership.

In the Mayan culture, the process of leadership within the community, the cultural process of leadership, is by stages. One passes a certain age. He occupies a certain position and later he moves up. There is great respect toward the elderly. Since fifty to a hundred years ago this has been a problem because the young people leave to study and return with new ideas and enthusiasm. The leadership has not wanted to give them a place, because they have not passed through this process to win the right of leadership. This conflict began long ago, and there is not an easy answer.

That is why many begin as workers, and continue as workers, gaining experience and respect, until ten or fifteen years later, they become pastors because they have earned that position. There are churches that do not have the vision for the same structure. They want the people to go through that long process to become leaders. It is not a formal process; it is a cultural process. There are other churches who have a vision for new leaders. They send their students and help them economically, but there are few of these churches (Appendix 8.3, 17).

Many of these leadership challenges arise from the contrasts between Mayan and Ladino culture. In Ladino culture, leadership is centered on a strong, central pastor. Mayan churches, however, use the concept of collective leadership, which is gained by age and experience. Within the Indian sector of the CAM church, local culture has standardized the leadership process where Indian culture flourishes. Neo-pentecostal leadership style is the antithesis of Indian leadership style, and some "progressives," or Ladinoized CAM members, are leaving the Indian style churches for Neo-pentecostal churches.

### Dynamic Spiritual Leadership Inspires

The fastest growing churches have both strong, sacrificial role models and extraordinary interventions of God at key times in the life of the church. The fastest growing denominations celebrate and remember God's intervention in the life of the church. The groups such as the Assembly of God and Church of God are well organized with a strong, solid structure in place to keep the operations of the church advancing. Important as it is, they do not value this as a centerpiece for growth. Always under the surface of plans is the memory of recent divine intervention and manifestations of God. In contrast, the Ladino Baptists and Mennonites spoke of programs or doctrine and theology class. The Presbyterian leadership spoke of divine intervention as two sides of an ugly schism dialogued through their differences. As such, the growing denominations are more mystic than slower growing denominations. This is not to say that none of the mystical groups, such as the Pentecostals and Neo-pentecostals, believe in organization and that the traditional churches shun the work of the Holy Spirit. Each group displays and lives what their teachings emphasize.

The growing Pentecostal churches have supernatural defining moments in their history. Leaders publicly acknowledge and make known the works of God. They remember and use these to inspire their members to achieve more in the present. This is similar to the Jewish remembrances of the miracles of God that delivered them from Egypt. In the early days of the Elim Church, God performed many signs and wonders. Ríos Paredes was an unusually effective leader who displayed confidence, dependence on God, and expectation for His direct intervention. This ethos was contagious to others and became the norm for the Elim leadership. The church had unusual beginnings that

marked the leadership for life. Giron related an incredible event that propelled the Elim church into exponential growth and national recognition.

A spiritual retreat comes to my mind where the Holy Spirit baptized 638 people. It was a tremendous thing in glory. I remember that on that occasion the firemen came because the neighbors called to put out a blaze that had reached the roof of the tent. The non-Christians of that place saw that the flames had reached all of the church. As a result of that, they called the nearest fire department, who asked the people, "Where's the fire?" But there was no fire. The neighbors saw that there was a fire, but it was something spiritual. After explaining to them that something spiritual was happening, and they saw the multitudes praising the Lord, all of them gave themselves to Jesus Christ.

There were many miracles, healings; many supernatural things. It was impossible for someone to be there and not realize that there was clear evidence that God was moving in that place (Appendix 8.5 2).

. . . In that way the word went out to other churches, to other pastors that were looking for what they should adhere to, and the result was Elim, Elim, Elim. And that is how it was growing. We never worried about having good organization. Everything was of the Lord, and the Lord. Very mystical . . . Its growth was something abnormal. In a period of approximately fifteen years of being a small, local church, it came to have close to a thousand six hundred national and international churches (Appendix 8.5 2-3).

Sacrifice has made El Shaddai the church it is today, and that ethos has been passed on to others. This Neo-pentecostal church had humble beginnings, but a vast vision. God miraculously grew the congregation. They sacrificed dearly to purchase their property in Guatemala City, where they erected a large tent. Benítez related this story:

In 1994, the Lord visited us. There was a pouring out of the Holy Spirit in the church. The people left the church literally drunk, and the congregation of 2,500 members grew in a year to 7,000, in 1999. We began to open churches in Boston; Toronto; Washington, D.C.; Mexico; Venezuela; Peru and Chile (Appendix 8.6, 21).

The El Shaddai Church recently sent out "an average leader" to Villa Nueva, and the church grew to 1,200 members within two years.

Similar stories came from the Church of God, which emphasizes speaking in tongues and external manifestations of the Spirit. Sosa alluded to this as he related the supernatural visitation that propelled the church forward. "On the thirteenth of April, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit came for the first time in Totonicapan, with the same evidences from Acts chapter two. A church member, Eleodora Son Turnil, still lives there. She spoke in tongues that night . . . [and for three days] she did not speak Quiché or Spanish" (Appendix 8.1, 3). Similarly, the Familia de Dios Church remembers the supernatural ways that the early ministry grew and how God moved many people to give money, a radio and TV station, and funds for a Bible Institute and property. Healings and miracles also occurred. Gálvez summarized, "It has been the grace of God. We have seen how God has given, without us having asked. We have watched ourselves and tried to work responsibly" (Familia de Dios, 14).

Experiential religion can have its negatives and can lead to abuses. Pinzon confronted one aspect of this as he cited excesses that must be corrected.

Many of our people are carnal because they go after emotions rather than the Word of God. . . . But today we see that people spend two hours in church jumping, dancing, singing, and breaking their ear drums. Also, they finish the service tired and sweaty. But the question is: where are the people at the altar crying for repentance? What did all this lead to? It is nothing more than emotion. . . . Where is the solidity of the Word? . . . This really is troubling in Guatemala because many churches are putting aside the Word of God and substituting ideas of singing in its place. There is no time left to preach the Word. If one looks at the New Testament, the Word is what took first place. It was the *kerygma* that Paul wanted to preach. What Peter wanted to accomplish was the reconciliation of man with God (Appendix 8.1, 25).

An unbalanced emphasis on the experiential leads to a false sense of spirituality where a people judge themselves and other Christians by their external emotional states. This leads to spiritual pride and blindness as to God's work in others. Sadly, non-pentecostal groups have been sneered at by supposedly more spiritual individuals. Mazariegos related this, "Because normally as Presbyterians, we talk a lot and then they attack us and say that we don't have the Holy Spirit, that we are cold churches, that we are dead churches, [and] that we go against the current" (Appendix 8.11 27).

#### On Abuse of Power

A mature leader recognizes the potential for abuses and tries to maintain balance in his leadership. A strong, central leader motivates people to accomplish impossible tasks. Centralized power has the advantage that one person can make immediate decisions quickly to produce results with able leaders. On the other hand, centralized power tempts leaders to step over moral guidelines as they justify their actions. A strong leader can move unwittingly from being a motivator and exhorter to a manipulator. Avelar (Bethany) recognized the risks as he stated,

We are talking about a monarchical system. That is, a system where the pastor can develop his vision without limitations . . . I have seen that the pastoral system undoubtedly functions for the development of the church, because the leader has the opportunity to develop his vision without great limitations. Of course, there are risks. There is the risk that the leader will become a dictator . . . (Appendix 8.2, 14).

Pinzon (Assembly) identified the abuse of strong, central power in more detail:

I believe it is more because there is a charismatic leader who has the gift of manipulating the masses. The people hear this person and they do not question him. They accept it. Why? Because they are often manipulated by what they call the "Rhema" of God, a personal revelation, and this is new (Appendix 8.1, 26).

### Growing Denominations Look for Emerging Leaders

Growing denominations know how to identify, motivate and put leaders to work. The rural Baptist K'ekchí stated simply that, "You have to see how the church members carry out their responsibilities" (Appendix 8.8, 15). Contrasting from the primitive, rural K'ekchís, the sophisticated upper class city church, El Shaddai, recognized the same principle, but stated it as, "What gives them their title of being ministers is their fruit, their qualities, their testimony, their work, and their character. Then, we begin to observe them. We call them to be ordained ministers and they are very good, or we send them to open churches with outside missionaries" (Appendix 8.6, 13). Similarly, Rigoberto Alvarado, of the Familia de Dios Church, explained that they also identify their leaders and put them into service. "Leadership springs up from those that get involved in the different areas or departments of service within the same congregation. . . . One can see who is maturing and who has the vocation of being a leader and is moving up the ladder to be a pastor, evangelist, or some other minister" (Appendix 8.7, 9).

### Growing Denominations Cultivate Effective Leaders

Leaders are not just found, but they are trained, encouraged, and put into practical work by all the growing denominations. These denominations are very deliberate in this as demonstrated by the El Shaddai and Bethany churches. Avelar spoke of the importance of developing leadership and delegating responsibility to the younger leaders (Appendix 8.2, 14). Benítez expanded this thought in his context:

Number one is service; giving people opportunities. It is very important. We, as pastors, have to give opportunities for the people to work. What we do is cell groups, family groups, or house groups. There, one begins as

an assistant or only as a member. Later a help; and later an assistant to the leader. [Later those with proven character] have to go through the training center. . . . That has happened through the years. It is not months. It is a lot of patience. To have a good, solid leader requires many years (Appendix 8.6, 14).

### On Mentors

Great leadership produces desired results. A book or a leadership course cannot make a leader. Learning to be an effective leader comes best from the long process of working with a good role model. The growing denominations demonstrate that leadership is comprised of vision, sacrifice, and a constant example. The Assembly of God Church had key leaders fifty years ago who are still remembered as wonderful examples. Pinzon related that early workers walked up to three days in order to participate in a new mission. Dedication marked early leaders and set a high norm for those who followed. Pinzon recalled,

I believe what has contributed most to the organization has been the spirit with which the Assembly of God has grown. I have been working in the Assembly of God for twenty-six years, since I was 18 years old. I remember when I entered the Bible school, they nurtured us to be obedient and to give our heart to the work of the Lord. The pastorate grows with the mentality of being a worker, not a "Reverend." The worker obeys. He does not expect from others, but he gives. If we had a spirit of "Reverend," we would not have the organization we have, because a lot of sacrifice is required (Appendix 8.1, 2).

Strong sacrificial leadership leaves its imprints upon those who follow and later are in front of the helm. Virtually all the leaders interviewed cited examples who had left a permanent impression upon them as a leader.

How does one teach someone to love God, to expect great miracles, or to thirst after the Word of God? Seminaries, books, and courses have a place, but dynamic

leaders have been mentored by other great men of God. The following example demonstrates why Mynor Giron (Elim) is a great leader who loves the Word.

Doctor Othoniel Ríos was a minister who loved the Word of God like few men of God that I have known. His love, interest, and study of the Word gave him much revelation of it (Appendix 8.5 2). He always studied the Bible. The curious thing is that after a specific study, we experienced it in practice. That is to say, that in some way the Spirit made us experience the truths that we studied. That made it so that the doctrine that we studied was internalized. Personally, I learned the movement of the Spirit before discovering it in the Bible. I saw the gifts working and, later, the description of them in the Word; so it was easy to learn it. . . . he was zealous with his studies. . . . He was a true lover of the Word of God, and he taught me to love the Word; and I bless him for that (Appendix 8.5 5).

Not only are the actions of the leader important, but his attitudes are as well. The K'ekchí Baptists years ago had godly role models who left a permanent impression, even long after their departure from Guatemala. A high level of dedication and call continues within the current K'ekchí Baptists. The riches these rural pastors lack in salary are far outweighed by the riches they possess in dedication. Santiago Basagui stated,

[Even] if one does not have a complete salary, he is always working. He never thinks, "I am not a pastor, because I am only part-time." He is working. Here among the K'ekchí, we do not talk about part-time or full-time. We give them around Q400 or Q500 monthly.<sup>3</sup> They are satisfied to receive it. They are working hard, visiting the church members day and night, caring for the missions, the same as those that are full-time. There is almost no difference. The K'ekchís work enthusiastically, not for their salary. If they are called by God, they are called by God (Appendix 8.8, 7-8).

#### Defined, Committed and Accountable

The growing denominations have definite expectations for their leaders. In Guatemala, these denominations have an ever increasing number of full-time pastors

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<sup>3</sup>Equal to US\$50-\$60.

(particularly in the Ladino sector). Their responsibilities to their church and missions demand full-time commitment to their denomination to prepare and implement.

Two-thirds of the Church of God pastors are full-time and the percentage is increasing (Appendix 8.4 8). Sosa clearly and unhesitatingly stated the explicit relationship of a church to a pastor. His response indicated that he understands and advances this relationship.

It has to be a church that at least worthily supports a pastor, in the first place. In the second place, it has to be a congregation that can gather a work team. In the third place, it has to be a church with a work plan, with some projection, with some well-defined goals. And it has to be a church that has adequate land to build their own installations (Appendix 8.4, 2).

Other strong denominations also have a high level of full-time pastors. The Assembly of God is most impressive. All of their pastors are full-time. Pinzon stated that "they are either a pastor or they are not" (Appendix 8.1, 8). Likewise, El Shaddai expects a high percentage of pastors to be full-time (Appendix 8.6, 6). CAM has clear norms and training requirements to qualify as a pastor, and these are well known in their denomination. Half of their pastors are full-time (Appendix 8.3, 14,15). More than half of Elim pastors are full-time. All of these groups have educational requirements or preparation in the context of the denomination.

Lack of preparation and lack of definition has had disastrous effects as cited by Oscar Benítez of El Shaddai.

One of the primary errors is naming leaders that have not been consistent. There was a lot of change in leadership. Pastors were pastors, then, the next day, they were nothing. Leaders were leaders, and now they are nothing. Those errors we have corrected; being more careful in putting the correct person so that he be committed for a lifetime (Appendix 8.6, 33). These corrections have been in the form of defined expectations and training requirements for all pastors (Appendix 8.6, 13).

As a contrast to these clearly defined expectations and responsibilities of pastors of the growing denominations, the slower growing or decaying denominations reflected passiveness with regard to requirements for their pastors. The interview with the Ladino Baptists left the impression that there have been no defined expectations in place for years (Appendix 8.9, 11, 13-14). The leadership equated theological education with leadership production. The Ladino Baptist seminary has struggled for years and is not well attended. This passive attitude toward qualifying pastors among the Ladino Baptists was seen also among the Mennonites (Appendix 8.10, 10, 11).

There is a subtle attitude among the plateaued and decaying denominations in regard to theological education. They assume doctrine and cognitive concepts taught through a theological institution will make a man into a leader. Some of the plateaued denominations have suffered from models in the past that build an ecclesiastical structure in order to presumably increase church growth, rather than producing a structure that responds and anticipates church growth. In some denominations, such as CAM, Ladino Baptists, and to a lesser degree, the Presbyterians, missionaries propelled the growth of the initial work, but later, for various factors, retarded the work. Rosalío Ramírez identified dynamics that have put Ladino Baptists in their current predicament.

In the first stage of the work, we could depend on the help of many foreign missionaries. I believe that the influence was very strong in the sense that a school [of thought] was brought. Certain models were brought, and we were certainly influenced by those examples. . . . The model was not perfect in everything. . . . I consider that one of the things not taken care of, because they thought they were our mentors, was leadership. I would say that the missionary tried to be the center of the work. And naturally, that is part of the negative aspect (Appendix 8.9, 22).

## Leadership in Growing Denominations

The growing denominations recognize that leaders are best made through examples, leadership schools, and actively training, and selecting the most capable candidates. They recognize that strong and effective leadership attracts individuals with similar qualities. They actively seek out potential leaders, give them role models who do great things, and then, expect great things from them. When a denomination is relatively small and new, the example and energy of the first founders of the work set the tone for subsequent leadership. Most traditional denominations falsely equate theological training with making a leader. If the denomination is fortunate, it has at least a succession of leaders who follow a good example, although they may not understand the leadership process. As times change and an organization grows, the ethos of the founder slowly diffuses as emerging leaders no longer have an extended relationship with the founder. In order to assure a continual supply of good leaders, an organization takes steps to develop emerging leaders. To varying degrees, all of the growing denominations understand these dynamics, and they have high expectations and opportunities for new leaders. Figure 8.2 summarizes factors of government style, mentoring, and accountability that are described in this chapter.

Figure 8.2

**Characteristics of Leadership in Major Denominations**

Denomination	% Full Time Pastors	Government Style	Level of Accountability of Pastors to Denomin.	Strong Mentors
Assembly of God	100%	Centralized denom. Authoritative pastor	High	Yes
Church of God-FG	75%	Centralized denom. Authoritative pastor	Moderate	Yes
CAM	50%	Organized denom. Pastor and Elder rule	Moderate	Yes
Prince of Peace	?	Centralized denom. Authoritative pastor		
Elim	?	Authoritative pastor		
Nazarene				
Presbyterian	10%	Synods vary. Centralized denom. Elder rule		
Bethany	?	Centralized in Apostle	Moderate	
Baptist				
K'ekchi	?	Denomin. strong Pastor and congregational rule	Moderate	Yes
Ladino	10%	Diffused denom. Congregational rule	Low	No
El Shaddai	100%	Centralized in Apostle	High	Yes
Familia de Dios	100%	Centralized in Pastor	High	
Mennonites (Capital)	20%	Diffuse	Low	No

**Effective Leadership: Training and Accountability**

When asked what various denominations do to train their leadership, most respondents recognized the profound importance of training pastors and leaders. The fastest growing denominations emphasized formal leadership training on pastoral, lay, youth, and women's levels. They have high expectations and insist on personal preparation and development. For example, the Church of God, in the Western part of Guatemala, requires that all pastors graduate from their seminary. They also insist that within at least one year Sunday School teachers receive training in their seminary in Quetzaltenango. Orlando Pinzon put the role of training in perspective, "When people have better leadership abilities, the presbyters send them to the Bible Institute. The Institute does not make leaders, it only refines them" (Appendix 8.1, 2). Growing

denominations are determined in assuring leadership training. For example, Pinzon related the seriousness of their training as they heavily invest in their training programs (Appendix 8.1, 14).

The Assembly of God not only has requirements for their pastors' education, but the denomination assures that pastors can fulfill these requirements. They have twenty-eight "Decentralized Institutes" located throughout the Republic.

The K'ekchí Baptists have expectations for their pastors. Four times a year, they have a week of training in each region, and at the end of each month, pastors come together for training. All growing denominations have high expectations or requirements for pastors. These denominations have well defined and geographically accessible pastoral training provided for their leaders.

Accountability is a part of the culture in growing denominations. These groups directly deal with sin and slothfulness among leaders. One example is that the Assembly of God insists that pastors file a monthly report on goals and statistics to the district offices. They must also file a yearly report. If they do not file reports within a certain time period, the pastor's ordination is revoked.

There is a subtle difference in the attitudes between the fastest growing groups and the others. For example, Mazariegos admits that they have struggled in the past with their training and orientation. The interview revealed that pastoral education has concentrated in the area of doctrine and knowledge. The Presbyterian Church has made a concerted effort to educate their pastors in the past few years in order to reclaim their identity and uniqueness as Presbyterians. The focus of educating the church in doctrine undoubtedly has contributed to the Presbyterians understanding basic Christian doctrine.

It has also bolstered them in the area of Christian ethics and lifestyle. The findings of this research bear witness to this effect. Pure doctrinal or theological training does not in itself create leaders that can grow a church numerically, however.

Ladino Baptists in practice take a passive approach to theological education, even as they assume that such education does create effective leaders. Ramírez stated, "Local pastors and the leaders have the responsibility to take advantage of preparing themselves [in theological studies] or else the situation stays the same. There, I believe that a wise leader takes advantage of that impulse that those projects give" (Appendix 8.9, 5). Offering opportunities is not the same as expecting or insisting that pastors prepare themselves. Lack of accountability is couched in a culture of only offering opportunities to others and the results are obvious (Appendix 8.9, 8).

The slow growth rate of the Mennonites is not a mystery as they do not preoccupy themselves with growth. "[The Mennonite church] has grown slowly. [Community] service to other people concerns us more than having congregational growth" (Appendix 8.10, 4).

#### A Summary of Growing Denominations and Training

- ◆ They understand that training polishes leaders. It does not make them.
- ◆ They are determined to invest in leaders.
- ◆ They have accessible, wide spread, and continual training.
- ◆ They insist upon continual training and accountability.
- ◆ They maintain a balance between training for knowledge and training for skills.

### Strategy and Methods of the Largest Churches

Strategies and methodologies are tools, that in able hands, help to accomplish specific goals. Just as good tools in the hand of a master craftsman are used to produce a work of art, those same tools in the hands of a novice produce an extraordinary amount of sawdust. Good strategies and methodologies in the hands of a visionary, adept leader produce mature, fruitful Christians. They grow healthy churches, expand the leadership base, and establish new missions. The same methods in the hands of a poor leader, produce less than desired results.

#### A Christ-Like Spirit

Oscar Benítez recognized that tools are not an end in themselves, but Christian character lies behind a solid ministry, as he states, "Methods. It is easy to invent them. For example, here we applied all the methods to evangelize. But [there is more]: it is the preaching of the Word, good preaching of the Word . . . faithfulness, integrity, pastoring the people, discipling, visiting people, and ministering to them" (Appendix 8.6, 22).

Methodologies driven by a faithful spirit, and a clear vision, yield fruit. The Assembly of God Church demonstrates effective methodologies linked to a strong spirit of service. When asked what factor contributed most to church growth, Pinzon's broad answer demonstrated an inseparable union between methods and the spirit of the worker. This spirit is evident in a humble, determined person who pays a steep price to see the lost come to Christ.

We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit, a primary part of the work of evangelism. When I began the work in 1975, I went to study at the institute. I finished the first year and they took me to a town where there was no church. There was nothing. They simply took me and told me, "This is your town," without sustenance or anything. It was by faith, and

they had prepared me in the institute to do it. There was a church in Huehuetenango, where the pastor promised to give me only my food. I was eighteen years old. I walked eight kilometers. I preached, evangelized, and worked there fourteen years.

God allowed me to open the work, put up a church building, and leave behind around 300 believers. Various churches were planted by that mother church. That is the spirit in which our institutes are driven, to go and open works. None of our great pastors today with large congregations started their ministry in an established church, instead, they started by opening a work. When any of our leaders are presented before a new group of pastors, he will talk about his experience as a worker that started from the bottom. He is not going to be like the REVEREND that they put in there because he is a theologian, or because he is a teacher but because he started from the bottom (Appendix 8.1, 5).

### Multiple Routes to Effective Results

The denominational leaders that were interviewed leaned toward a particular mode of thought and work. Some synthesize new models as they learn from the Bible, from their context, and from the lessons of other groups. Still others follow a vision from models that were handed down from missionaries or charismatic leaders of the past. Some follow a central leader and his vision, as they advance toward their goals. Regardless of how effective denominations derive their methodologies, leadership starts with visions and plans. They then implement their methods and grow. Others have no clear direction, apply inconsistent methodology, and they do not grow.

### *Synthesizing New Models from Other Contexts*

Efraín Avelar explained many reasons behind the growth of the Bethany Church. No one reason is the silver bullet for church growth. He demonstrated an amazing ability to learn from others and to adapt according to his situation. Bethany's growth is related to church government, worship form, and constant discipleship through cell groups. Avelar

touched on deliberate qualities they sought to have in their church. They sought to make "church" attractive by concentrating on the worship style, preaching style, and deliberate elimination of the perception of legalism that raises barriers to those outside the church. These foci attracted people into the church. They also assured that the church was in the community, making a difference through their cell groups, aggressive evangelism, and heavy use of communications medium. Avelar's strong leadership through a monarchical government assures the completion of strategies.

Avelar demonstrates his ability to copy other systems, as outlined by Peter Wagner or Paul Cho. He shows the rare quality of a great leader who synthesizes something new from past experiences and present circumstances.

We were working with family groups in the Cho system, but we changed to homogeneous groups. Although we had family groups in the church, we already had some homogeneous groups. In the family groups, the idea is that the family meets, but we observed that, apart from family groups, we had youth groups and women's groups. We began to see that these groups grew more than the family groups. That is, these were the homogeneous groups, and they developed more than the heterogeneous groups (Appendix 8.2, 6).

El Shaddai Church effectively reaches the upper classes. They have demonstrated vision, faith and creativity in their work. Their mastery of the media was demonstrated in the *Jesus es Señor* campaign, which they sponsored in the early 1990s. They emphasized the basics of sound and competent preaching of the Word, discipleship, evangelism, and working in depth through family groups, "because it pushes one to have a consistency in discipleship and practice of what the student or disciple learns" (Appendix 8.6, 23). El Shaddai leadership evaluates and adapts other systems.

We began to learn about spiritual warfare. The Lord confirmed [this] with other international ministers like Peter Wagner and Dr. Cho. We began to learn other things, and we began to see what spiritual warfare is. We have to fight against Satan and his demons. *Jesus is Lord of Guatemala* began to advance when we began to do spiritual warfare. We moved here with one thousand people. That was in 1990. In 1992, we had two thousand people. In 1993, we had three thousand people . . . (Appendix 8.6, 21).

The leadership of the Familia de Dios Church grasps the complexity of growth strategies and methods. The first attraction to this church is the excellent, positive, biblical preaching of pastor Luis Fernando Solares. Methods do not stop with just the famous orator.

The church has grown because of various factors, not only one. First, there was a revival or a [spiritual] explosion in Guatemala in general. In the second place, there was an influence of mass media. I already mentioned the television program. There has been a radio station since the beginning that has preached the Gospel [and] has been another factor. Third, the form of preaching also influences. Despite the fact that we are a Neopentecostal church, we have put a lot of emphasis on the Bible. I am Neopentecostal, but I have theological formation and Pastor Solares also has Biblical, theological formation. We have a seminary, and we have a theological library which the majority of Neopentecostal churches do not have. So, that is another factor. Also, we have houses with Bible studies or family groups. Also, ministries have been diversified. We have counseling twenty-four hours a day by telephone--twelve hours by person. Last we have a visitation and an evangelistic department. All of that has contributed (Appendix 8.7, 13).

### ***Modeling an Established Vision***

Since the mid 1960s, there has been an unusual movement among the K'ekch'ís with the Baptists, Presbyterians, Mennonites, and Nazarenes. There are 30,000 K'ekch'í Baptists (Appendix 8.8, 5). The Central Presbyterian Synod is 45% K'ekch'í (Appendix 8.11 3). There are 6,000 Mennonites (Appendix 8.10, brief), and nearly 13,076<sup>4</sup> Nazarene K'ekch'ís. The K'ekch'í Baptists have experienced a continual growth since the

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<sup>4</sup>Interpolation from the unpublished report. Frank Johnson, "Baptist Growth Among the K'ekch'í People of Guatemala: An Update" (Guatemala, 29 October 1997).

late 1970s. Samuel Cucul understands that this growth comes from God's grace, hard work, and doing things that work. It seems that a good system was started years ago by missionaries, and this system and ethic have since continued. The concrete thought style of the K'ekchí concerns itself with finding what works and implementing it. Theory is not a priority. Cucul stated they "almost do not use methodologies" (Appendix 8.8, 4). They grow because of the missionary spirit, vision, and sacrifice that was implanted by the founding missionaries. They continue many of the successful patterns of the original missionaries. Cucul stated:

One reason that the K'ekchí Baptist Association is growing is because it is working with fifteen K'ekchí missionaries. The K'ekchí missionaries are going to the villages where there are no Christians. They go to visit, to evangelize, and to have services in schools or on farms. That is how all the missionaries are. The Christians in our churches are working with the people that accept Christ. That is why the K'ekchí Baptist Association is growing, as well as the churches. The churches open missions. [Before being able to be a member of the K'ekchí Baptist Association, the church must have at least one mission] (Appendix 8.8, 2).

Sywulka reported a similar mindset in different Mayan language groups with the successful CAM work. Able mentors established good patterns and the new disciples carried the work from there. The CAM psyche that lives to evangelize and establish churches was evident in Sywulka's own words:

The pioneer missionaries brought the vision and were always forming disciples on a personal level. If they found a young man with a certain capacity, they took him with them on their trips. That is how they were taught, by pure practice, and that is how national leadership was raised, with a vision to go preach and to establish churches (Appendix 8.3, 9).

Since the beginning, these same nationals very quickly started to work as workers, pastors, and evangelists. Therefore, the greatest part of our churches has not been from foreign missionaries, but the majority are from national origin (Appendix 8.3, 8).

### *Following the Central Leader*

During the 1980s and early 1990s the Elim Church, under the powerful leadership of Dr. Othoniel Ríos Paredes, was the fastest growing church and began to dominate the evangelical landscape. After his death in 1998, the church split into several factions. Interviews with pastors and demographic data of this study indicate that many of these churches once experienced much higher attendance than they do today.<sup>5</sup> Elim was governed by a strong, central leader who apparently did not leave behind sufficient structure and leadership to successfully carry on the work. Church growth was linked to the vision, energies, and leadership of one individual. Divorced from its founder, the signs, wonders, and direction of the movement have stalled.

The SEPAL team was unable to obtain an interview with the leadership of the Prince of Peace Church. They are similar to Elim in that they are Neo-pentecostal whose drive came from a central leader, rather than an organizational leadership. Prince of Peace is declining in membership partly due to the inability of one person to fill the position and function of the deceased founder, José María Muñoz.

### *Patterns for Slow Growth*

The Ladino Baptists, Presbyterians, and Mennonites have had slow or declining numerical growth in the 1990s. A reading of entire interviews gives the reader a better contextual clue for some causes. Excerpts of the interviews indicate passiveness toward leadership responsibilities as compared to the high expectations that the faster growing denominations have had of their pastors.

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<sup>5</sup> The survey of 55 Elim or Miel (a faction of Elim) indicates that 20% report membership larger than actual church attendance. This is unusual reporting, as most denominations regularly report attendance larger than membership. Coupled with the recent division in Elim after the death of Ríos Paredes, as well as the resulting decrease in adherents, corroborate with our observations made in the pastoral survey.

In the Spanish area, the growth is very influenced by events. It is very noticeable when we see our statistics that when we have had an evangelistic event, such as national crusades, the growth curve rises. There is a normal growth, but that really is very low. I divided the Spanish area from the K'ekchí area in this answer, because I believe that the K'ekchí segment maintains a more accelerated growth. In some way, they were taught to do mission work by themselves. There is a constant moving toward those objectives of mission advancement (Appendix 8.9, 3).

Large events can produce fruit, but the challenge is to preserve the fruit and to make more leaders. This challenge requires much effort, but as strange as it may seem, church history demonstrates that solely sound doctrine will not produce church growth. There are many more factors, previously discussed, that if not present, the church will not grow as demonstrated by the Mennonite Church in Guatemala City.

**SEPAL:** You mentioned congregational growth. What do you believe have been the reasons that have helped to accelerate growth in some way?

**Rodas:** One of the basic reasons, I believe, is the type of gospel that is preached. The Gospels of peace, justice, and love are preached. We focus on Jesus' idea of helping and loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. Then, logically, we think that, through the identification of love and unity, the church will grow. It has been slow growth up until now (Appendix 8.10, 5).

Functionally, in Guatemala when social ministries are heavily emphasized, aggressive evangelism and church growth decline. The most evangelistic and fastest growing denominations carry out social ministries through strong churches and individual Christians. When the church operates on the premise that changing society begins by changing hearts, rather than changing hearts through changing society, the church grows and people are transformed. Both social ministry and evangelism are part of the Gospel. The priority given to these two linked facets of the Gospel determine future growth and health of a denomination.

### The Christian Media at Work

The media of radio has had a profound influence upon the Gospel in Guatemala. It exposes non-Christians to Christian culture, evangelism, and Biblical teachings. Nearly 92% of evangelicals and a large portion of Catholics listen to this kind of media.<sup>6</sup> The radio has a profound, cross cultural, cross-denominational influence as it is broadcast in many Indian languages and to very remote areas. In Guatemala, CAM has been the pioneer of Christian radio. Steve Sywulka explained the results of Cultural Radio TGN.

The radio has been one of the instruments that God has used for the growth of the church. When the radio was founded in 1950, evangelicals were 3% of the population. The radio, because of being varied cultural quality, has reached a large area even entering into areas where evangelicals have not been. Thousands of people have come to the Lord because of the doors opened for the Gospel. People that had listened to the radio later went to a church. There is no doubt [that the radio prepared people to be more open to the Gospel]. But apart from that, the radio has had a triple purpose: to evangelize, edify, and educate. We have always had an evangelistic and an educational role (Appendix 8.3, 20-21).

CAM has the most extensive broadcasting into Indian languages. The Church relies upon radio as a means of reaching illiterates as well as in the training of semi-literate pastors. Sywulka states that the CAM church broadcasts to approximately fifteen languages (Appendix 8.3, 24).

Christian radio is also an important media used by most Neo-pentecostal churches. Familia de Dios started indirectly as a result of the radio ministry of Luis Fernando Solares, who is adept at broadcasting. The senior pastor of the Prince of Peace Church, José María Muñoz, became even more well known through his radio broadcasts.

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<sup>6</sup>n=2098 evangelicals responding to the question with 1855 responding affirmatively. Catholics responding to the question with 1328 answering affirmatively: n Catholics = 10,346.

Likewise, the leader of the Elim church was a gifted sports announcer who used his talents on radio. Both Bethany and El Shaddai have radio programs. The K'ekchí Baptists have their own station in K'ekchí. Interestingly, the two largest denominations, the Assembly of God and the Church of God have not relied heavily upon radio, even though individual churches may have their stations (Appendix 8.1, 23).

### Direct Evangelism: The Engine to Church Growth

The mark of the Evangelical Church of Guatemala has been its unrelenting evangelism. All churches who evangelize consistently grow numerically. Evangelism creates converts and leaders. This is fundamental. When churches lose their evangelistic zeal, they lose their edge for growth. As the growth rate of the Evangelical Church in Guatemala has plateaued within the past ten years, it seems that evangelism has been waning among some groups. Many small churches look inward and have internal conflicts. Effective evangelization must be coupled to a healthy church that looks outside of itself and focuses on the lost world. Avelar of Bethany Church spoke to this issue.

Another very important aspect that I consider for the development of the church is to have a system of evangelization. Because what happens is that many pastors want their churches to grow, but they do not pay the price. Churches are not going to grow simply by having Sunday services. . . . The parochial church has inherited the concept from the Roman Catholic church that, in some way, is projected to the evangelical church. It is to open the church on Sundays and preach. The people come, listen to the sermon, and return to their house, but they never produce anything for the Kingdom of God.

The apostolic concept of the church today is not the church that is focused on itself, but it is the church that is focused outwardly, where the potential of the church rests in the lay leaders who do the work of the ministry. Today, the lay leaders are those that are trained in the church and the

pastor transmits to them his vision. They go on the streets, open cell groups, and the people are won to Christ. Really, the churches that are going to develop as mega-churches or churches of growth are those that have that mentality (Appendix 8.2, 15).

### **Immediate, Consistent and Organized Discipleship Distinguish Growing Churches**

One of motivating reasons to broaden this study from a simple evangelical count to a census that measures the depth of Christian commitment is that a disturbingly high amount of evangelicals appear to live a double life. This study shows that between 25% to 42% of evangelicals are actually Christian.<sup>7</sup> It is much easier to teach a person a program of evangelism than to teach him how to live like Christ in the real world. Steve Sywulka expressed a common concern of most evangelical leaders:

There is an enormous lack of teaching and application to life. But it is equal among the Central American, Assembly of God, and Presbyterians. Some have perhaps a little more teaching than others, but in all, there is a great deficiency. There is not a lot of commitment. That is the great challenge to me, because for the Evangelical Church in Guatemala, it is not so much evangelism, because that is the church's strength, but it is knowledge and practical application to life that is lacking (Appendix 8.3, 30).

Most leaders recognize that the church must do a better job at making disciples. This simply means putting the Bible to practice in real life. Some churches are better at making disciples, such as the Presbyterian Church (whose members score high on ethics), Bethany, and the Church of God. Roberto Sosa offered keen insight into the situation of making disciples.

**SEPAL:** You mentioned the discipleship that you have in the church, but is this the preparation that you give to the new believers?

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 6 of this study.

**Sosa:** Only in the first phase, previous to baptism. Then the second, the third and fourth phase are follow-up. The problem, if you permit me, is that I think that what has happened in the church is like what can happen in a baseball game. We have had a lot of success in winning people to Christ, like a baseball team that bats a lot of hits and puts men on bases. In the best of cases, they are given some education after the basics for baptism. . . But there we do not follow up on them. A baseball team can put fifteen, twenty, or thirty men on base, but if they do not score, the game is lost. So, the truth is that the Christian should know Christ and consolidate himself in faith and be baptized. Then, receive the stages of formation, of basic training, followed-up by a real training for him to serve God for the ministry. Then, send him to serve the local church and to serve other churches. If the people do not have that complete process, I think that we are not doing the whole job. Rick Warren says that the success of a church is not measured by those that enter, but by those that leave. He means that those that enter the church are trained in the church and go into ministry (Appendix 8.4, 16).

Currently, the churches that work with discipleship groups, with family groups, are those that are experiencing greater growth. I personally have the criteria that, if a church is healthy, it grows. None of us, as parents, have to pull our children's ears in order for them to grow. They grow by themselves, because they are healthy. When they do not grow, it is because they are sick. . . The problem for me has been when churches do not grow. That is a sin, because I already repented, for not having given emphasis and training to leaders to disciple adequately. That is one of the great errors that we as a church have made. We are going to re-enforce the discipleship program (Appendix 8.4, 28).

Sosa understands that discipleship is more than attaining cognitive biblical information. It must lead to general discipline in life. The struggle that all churches have is to first build a knowledge base on God's Word, and then to apply that knowledge through the power of the Holy Spirit to everyday life. El Shaddai has a thorough program to assure that believers have the knowledge to be good disciples. Oscar Benítez explained that all new converts in the church aggressively are followed up by special discipleship teams and the new convert immediately begins a five-week intensive discipleship. Next, the new disciple is encouraged to get involved in his accredited Christian training center (Appendix 8.6, 13, 15).

Pinzon of the Assembly of God explained their system for dealing with new believers. They recognize that making disciples involves teaching, learning, experience, and practice. The Assembly of God Church is one of the few denominations that heavily invests in Sunday School and gives it a primary role in the discipleship process.

**Pinzon:** We have an integral department of evangelism in the churches. We have created and have large amounts of literature that we use for new believers in order to mature them. We have a plan that is based in five words: prayer, filling of the Holy Spirit, evangelism, discipleship and consolidation.

**17. SEPAL:** What you mean by "consolidation"?

**Pinzon:** That people are confirmed in the faith and that they turn into soul winners. It is a complete program.

**18. SEPAL:** How long does it take?

**Pinzon:** It depends upon the situation within the church. The program has twenty-four lessons which are separate from doctrinal training that we have every Thursday. We're constantly teaching these lessons (Appendix 8.1, 16-18).

Making disciples is not just a course, but an ongoing process as Gálvez of the Familia de Dios recognizes. They constantly emphasize the basics in special classes. Periodically, they emphasize more formal training in the church Bible institute. Many mega-churches or Neo-Pentecostal churches commonly have their own Bible institutes and seminaries to train and mobilize the new Christians (Appendix 8.7, 8).

Both Giron and Ramírez recognize the importance of making disciples. They illustrate the sad picture of what happens when this is not done thoroughly. Currently Elim is recovering from the fragmentation that caused it to lose members to other denominations.

Another error was the lack of consolidation or the care of the sheep. Due to the multitude of people it was an almost impossible job to take care of

every one of them. So many of them went to other congregations or they stopped walking in the Gospel (Appendix 8.5, 10).

Over the years this researcher has often heard Ladino Baptists complaining that the Pentecostals robbed their sheep. This has to do with the quality of disciples rather than the aggressiveness of the proselyters. Ramírez pinpointed the relationship between leadership and discipleship.

I believe that our greatest problems are in two specific areas: discipleship and leadership. Because there is no conservation of fruit [this indicates that] there is no correct understanding of what is in essence discipleship, because discipleship is not only giving initial lessons to a new believer. We have to see discipleship as more integral. But we have not come to the understanding that discipleship is important. There is no conscious effort from the active leadership to keep and disciple new believers. On the other hand, leadership is personality motivated and our leaders do not have the tools to do their work well. And that results in a work that stops in its tracks (Appendix 8.9, 18).

Weak disciples do not live the kind of Christian life that the Bible prescribes. As described in Chapter 6, Christian Attitudes and Actions are difficult to measure on a large scale. Lateral exchange of members between denominations is a remarkable phenomenon in Guatemala. Pinzon identified the problem well as he stated,

In Guatemala there is a lot of rivalry between organizations. The thing is this: you'll see that there are many mega-churches today. But go and make an evaluation of these and find out where these members came from. If they're not from Prince of Peace, then they will be from the Central American Church, Presbyterian, or Assembly. But there are very few who are converted through evangelistic work. This is not growth. An example: I have a church of 100 members. Fifty of them leave the church to form another group at the end of the block. That's not growth. They simply divided and now there are two churches with 50 people. . . . They leave from Calvary and then go to the Assembly. They leave from the Assembly and go to Elim. They leave Elim and then go to Shaddai. They leave Shaddai and go to King of Kings. They leave King of Kings and go somewhere else. This is a transfer of persons.

*But why does this is happen? Because there is not a solidity in the Word of God. [Emphasis mine] Many people go around looking for emotions rather than the Word of God (Appendix 8.1, 24).*

Making disciples is one of the great challenges for any church. It requires purposeful ministry to assure that new converts are consolidated in the faith. Making disciples is a combination of mentoring, teaching them how to live and grow and teaching the norms of the faith or denomination. A cognitive disciple has much biblical information but has difficulty in multiplying himself. An experiential disciple is tied to emotions or fads and can drift in the faith. Well grounded disciples have human examples and knowledge for living the Christian life. They practice applying the Christian life, guided by mentors and the Word.

### **Mayan Needs**

#### Language and Literacy

The majority of denominations look to the task of evangelizing Indians as a language and a literacy challenge. Indeed this is true. The message of the Gospel must be understood in order to accept or reject it. All leaders express a special concern and challenge in this area. Many are concerned about the low level of Bible knowledge, which is directly related to illiteracy in the Interior of the Republic.<sup>8</sup>

The Church of God has a large constituency of rural Indian members, especially of the Quiché group. They are the largest denomination within the Quiché and have a successful track record of producing leaders. Sosa recognized that rural Indians lack general education and literacy, and proposed a link between literacy and discipleship.

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<sup>8</sup>See Appendix 8.1, 20; Appendix 8.6, 3,10; Appendix 8.7 5-7; Appendix 8.5 3,7; Appendix 8.3, 6-9; Appendix 8.11 7-10, 15, 24; and Appendix 8.9, 11.

We are very lazy about reading and we must change that. It is difficult for the people to read. They have to be motivated to love reading. . . . I hope we take advantage of that circumstance in order to propose to ourselves that there be no one in our churches that does not know how to read. But, that is a life-long process. It seems to me that it is always going to be an obstacle (Appendix 8.1, 16).

The Familia de Dios Church is strong within the Capital and has significant works within the Interior of Guatemala, including several Indian areas. Gálvez succinctly identified some of the underlying reasons on how illiteracy directly affects leadership.

The problem is not only the local [educational] system, but the whole system that we live in here in Guatemala. We have difficulty with the different dialects. We have difficulty that everything is centralized in Guatemala City and it is much easier to study formally here [in the Capital]. The churches have followed that same pattern.

We should do everything possible to give some type of training to our pastors in the Interior. . . . They do not know how to read or write well, and their preparation makes discipleship and teaching difficult. The majority of pastors have not made it to the sixth grade of basic education. It is difficult for us and for them to have access to have a better level of [secular] education (Appendix 8.7, 6).

Most denominations work to raise the general level of theological preparation of their pastors. They have formal, well-known programs and institutions to this end, but one of their challenges is that of illiteracy. The Church of God leadership wants to increase the general level of secular and theological education of their pastors. Currently, the majority of their pastors have a sixth grade education. Prior to the late 1980s, many pastors could barely read and "did not have basic knowledge of hermeneutics, counseling. They had nothing" (Appendix 8.4, 11). The pastors of the Church of God are average, in the sense of their secular education. Their leadership has the goal of having all of their pastors complete at least two years of high school and that later their pastors be at least graduates in Bible or graduates in Theology.

When presenting the question of training in an Indian context to Fernando Mazariegos, he immediately linked it to literacy and a cultural way of thinking. His understanding of the relationship of literacy and the challenges of the Indian culture demonstrated a deep comprehension of the realities of rural Guatemalan life and Indian cultures. The further away that churches are from civilization, the greater the incidence of illiteracy. Mazariegos maintains that translating the Bible in K'ekchí did not solve the problem. Most monolingual K'ekchí are totally illiterate. Mazariegos (Presbyterian) asserted that the church has a special responsibility to its members because national education in rural areas has failed continually.

Prior to the signing of the Peace Accords [1998], [governmental literacy] projects were practically drowning the children in the interior of the country. For them, first grade was not first grade, but it was a year of learning Spanish. This was a mistake on the part of the Ministry of Education because they were teaching a language to the children in which they could not think. They think according to their culture, and after one year of learning Spanish, to enter into the second year [in Spanish] was an injustice. So the presbyters began to understand the situation and today they have Christian education projects that are a part of the mission of the church. This is where I say that it is an element of the mission that we think about as part of an integral Gospel: teaching them to read. This is not part of secular life, it is part of the ministry and part of spirituality that we can have. But there are still many illiterate people in our churches and it is worrisome (Appendix 8.11, 15).

Giron (Elim) voiced the opinion of many pastors that this researcher hears. He said that the government consistently has failed in education in the Interior. Now for the spiritual welfare of the Church, the Church must take on the primary role of literacy training. The Church must educate and change people's mentality to help the nation out of its material and spiritual poverty (Appendix 8.5, 13).

The Baptist K'ekchí leadership linked understanding of the Bible to literacy. The divine literacy program apparently is more effective than the government's program.

**Cucul:** Years ago, certain missionaries taught us little by little the Word of God. Then, there were three missionary wives that took a lot of time to teach the pastors their vowels and consonants so they could read the Word of God. It was very slow work, but it gave us the ability to know the doctrine of the Bible.

**12. SEPAL:** But are there still many pastors that do not know how to read?

**Cucul:** Yes. From time to time, the pastors go to a place and pray that God will teach them how to read. Then, after a short time, some can read and study and teach the people what he can read in the Bible. All of our pastors attend the pastor conferences to study a few books of the Bible. Later, they return to their churches to teach what they learned (Appendix 8.8, 11-12).

#### Non-Literate Training

The problem of illiteracy in Guatemala will exist for generations. Under ideal conditions when the church and the government both seriously undertake the problem, there will be substantial improvements in society and in the church. Several denominations are successful in working with illiterates. They do a fine job of making disciples under less than ideal conditions. CAM is the most experienced church in Indian work and Sywulka offered practical ways that leaders have been helped in the past. These methods include living examples, simple institutes, cassettes, and radio.

The first missionaries, the pioneers, brought the vision of preparation of leaders even when there was not a formal Bible Institute. *The pioneer missionaries brought the vision and were always forming disciples on a personal level. If they found a young man with a certain capacity, they took him with them on their trips. That is how they were taught, by pure practice, and that is how national leadership was raised* [Emphasis mine] (Appendix 8.3, 9).

**16. SEPAL:** What measures are you taking to help pastors who cannot, or barely, read?

**Sywulka:** The method that is most often used involves brief institutes that move from place to place, and others that are established at the same site, but meet every fifteen days. Various institutes that we have in Huehuetenango are in Mam and Kanjobal, one in the east and one in San Marcos, that meet every two weeks. As it is very flexible, some get involved enthusiastically and commit themselves, and go through the whole program more or less in an orderly way.

For those who are less formal or illiterate, we have some programs on cassettes and radios. These programs are a great blessing in that sense . . . Many people have been molded through these programs. Many pastors have told us that they prepare their sermons on the basis of what they hear on the radio (Appendix 8.3, 16).

#### Unique Cultural Issues

Each Mayan group is a unique culture, though they are Guatemalan. Mazariegos shares some fascinating insights on the K'ekchí. The following quote gives insight into the importance of understanding each Mayan culture to contextualize the acceptance and propagation of the Gospel:

**Mazariegos:** In 1963 or 1964 the K'ekchís evangelized in a certain way where they would do it by family, contrary to the western mentality. I visited several K'ekchí Churches and saw a church with 300 to 350 people. I said to Agustin Rax, "Hey, how many members do you have here?" He said to me, "Well, we have somewhere between 40 or 50 members." I said, "You're pulling my leg!" So with more of a Hebrew concept, they tell us that a member is my wife, my children, and myself. And this is more biblical than the statistics that says I'm a member, my wife is a member, my children are members. In this way statistics make us more individualized. But for them, one family is a member. So the wife evangelizes other non-Christian women. The husband evangelizes other non-Christian men and the children evangelize other children . . . So there was a growth that was not just spontaneous, but the whole family went out to evangelize. This method is more open and has been more effective than other traditional methods such as "The ABC Steps" or "The Four Spiritual Laws" (Appendix 8.11, 6).

**7. SEPAL:** This phenomenon of evangelizing by family, is it just within the K'ekchí or is it within other Indian groups also?

**Mazariegos:** Yes, it is more common with the K'ekchí. Others like the Kanjobal have done it, but mainly it's among the K'ekchí. This is a good model, including to see how they have grown over the years. For example, they took a very dedicated person from the church. All of the church committed themselves to work this person's land and took him to another town for six months and said to him, "Here, you have to plant your church." So this method of evangelization and opening new churches was more than sending a seminary student. It was to send someone for a vocation. Of course there are mistakes. But the growth began to be spontaneous, and today the K'ekchís continue to grow and expand in such a strong way that currently there are five K'ekchí presbyters (Appendix 8.11, 7).

### On the Role of Missionaries

The Guatemalan Evangelical Church has had flourishing and independent leadership for quite a few years. In light of the maturing national church and the ever changing strategies of missions, most leaders were asked questions related to their personal experience with foreign missionaries in Guatemala and their opinions on the roles, if any, of missionaries in the future. Most have had positive experiences as they shared similar stories.<sup>9</sup> Bethany, Elim, and Familia de Dios have had no foreign missionary involvement. Sosa's (Church of God) comments were representative of the churches that have had missionary involvement.

I believe that they brought us an important part. The work has grown in a ninety-eight or ninety-nine percent because of the work of the national worker. If they had not brought the message to us, there would not have been national workers. So, I believe that the work of the North American missionaries is very important. They committed errors and, perhaps, we have committed more errors than they have. But they gave the best of themselves (Appendix 8.4, 23).

Giron admired the sacrifices of the past but knows that the present counts. As the church has grown, the role of missionaries must be changing. "I think that American missionaries did a

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<sup>9</sup> Appendix 8.1, 29; Appendix 8.4, 20-21; Appendix 8.3, 6-9; Appendix 8.5, 23; Appendix 8.8, 11; Appendix 8.9, 22.

work worthy of a crown for eternity. But now, the time has come to prepare missionaries from Latin America" (Appendix 8.5, 23). Most large denominations are gearing to this end. Most that have had positive experiences with missionaries in the past look for changing the role of the missionary to a resource person or a specialist (Appendix 8.11, 27). Some typical comments are:

I think that future missionaries for Guatemala will have only a role to help in the national work (Assembly of God, Appendix 8.1, 32).

The goal is what I mentioned a little while ago: not dependence, but interdependence. I believe that the United States has a lot to give us such as their economic resources. (Church of God, Appendix 8.4, 20).

The missionary in these times should be a person that multiplies leaders. Not so much the man that comes to evangelize, although he has to evangelize, because if he is a Christian, he is going to evangelize. I see more a missionary in a formation of leaders . . . That is how I see it, really, because we have to admit that Guatemala is said to be one of the most evangelized countries. It is not the job of a missionary to come and do everything, because there are people here who are capable of doing a lot. We see many times that the missionary has some resources . . . of knowledge or of material resources that he should share with the national work in a way that helps some need. These resources are vital to the objective of growth (Ladino Baptist, Appendix 8.9, 23).

Bethany is a wholly Guatemalan church and logically does not see a major future role for missionaries. Likewise, the Neo-pentecostal Familia de Dios is Guatemalan in origin and Gálvez states, "I believe that missionaries no longer have much to do, because the missionary functions, precisely, where Christ has not been preached. . . . We are responsible to do it" (Appendix 8.7, 17). Because the interviewer is this missionary researcher, Gálvez likely tempered his answer with:

But, since everyone does not have that same vision to go to the departments and do missions, maybe it should be done by foreign missionaries. So, it should be more to the places in the Interior and the desolate places. It should be more our responsibility to go to Guatemala and not to wait for [foreign missionaries] to come (Appendix 8.7, 17).

Undaunted by the presence of a missionary, Sywulka, himself the son of CAM missionaries states:

We have almost finished the work that we have proposed: the whole Bible in Mam, Chuj, and Kanjobal. The whole Bible in Chuj of San Sebastián and Jacalteco is being finished. In the area where we have worked we have the Scriptures, almost complete, and where there are other missions. We have, therefore, not seen the need to enter there. The Mam, Kanjobal, and Chuj churches are already very strong, and have their own institutions. We have seen that there is not much need for foreign missionaries (Appendix 8.3, 12).

There are inherent problems of perspective that collide due to North American culture and experience. Benítez stated that they always have had differences with North American missionaries due to the "strong culture" and the different form of government (Appendix 8.6, 25-26). Mazariegos expounded upon some of the problems that come from well meaning North American missionaries with many resources.

[There] has been a certain hegemony that sometimes the church in the United States has toward us. . . . A huge amount of money enters Guatemala from the church of the United States and it tugs and pulls. I give something to you. I demand something of you. I give something to you. I manipulate you. So the church in the United States with its influx of money, and to a degree, knowing what's happening came and said, "Oh no! Poor Indians, now we have to help the Indians more. And the Indians were so exploited by the Ladinos!" This influx . . . brought about corruption and division. It causes some to fall and look at the church as, "How much can I take from it?" and not, "How much can I help it?" (Appendix 8.11, 23).

Figure 8.3

### Missionary Involvement in Major Denominations

Denomination	Adjusted 10 year Growth Rate	% Full Time Pastors	Current N. American Families	Peak of N. American Missionary Families	Guatemalan Foreign Missinaries Supported by Guatemalans
Assembly of God	102%	100%	10, (Appendix 8.1, 30)	13, (Appendix 8.1, 31)	5, (Assembly, 33)
Church of God-FG	98%	75%	2?, (Appendix 8.4, 21)		5, (Appendix 8.4, 22)
CAM	-9%	50%	55, (Appendix 8.3, 10)	100, (Appdix 8.3, 10)	
Prince of Peace	-20%	?			
Elim	33%	?			
Nazarene	120%				
Presbyterian	-23%	10%			
Bethany	110%	?	0, (Appendix 8.2, 17)	0, (Appendix 8.2, 17)	
Baptist	16%				
K'ekchi	74%	?	3 and 3 Mam	5 and 2 Mam	0 foreign,(Appdix 8.8, 2)
Ladino	1%	10%	8	14	
El Shaddai		100%		?, (Appendix 8.6, 26)	5, (Appendix 8.6, 24)
Familia de Dios		100%	0, (Appendix 8.7, 16)	0, (Appendix 8.7, 16)	0, help some families (Appendix 8.7, 15)
Mennonites		20%	?	?	?

A denomination demonstrates maturity when it begins to develop missions programs and turns from being a receiving to a sending organization. All growing denominations have some form of local church planters or internal missionaries. Less have internal cross cultural missionaries. Figure 8.3 summarizes the supply of foreign missionaries that some denominations have had in Guatemala and the number of external missionaries that various Guatemalan denominations currently send or entirely support. Most of this mission support is new in the church of Guatemala, having occurred within the past five years or less.

### On Syncretism and Legalism

Syncretism and a general compromise of Christian beliefs lead to lifestyles that are contradictory with Christianity. In most of the interviews, denominational leaders expressed concern regarding the existing Christian lifestyle and the mixture with the

background Guatemalan culture. Recognizing this as a problem is one matter; but identifying its root causes proves to be more difficult. Most denominational leaders recognize the reality of syncretism, with Pinzon describing the situation best:

Whether we like it or not, we have a Catholic background. Our people have inherited these things and it is difficult for them to get rid of them. We're not talking about doctrine; we're talking about customs. Many of our people are carnal because they go after emotions rather than the Word of God . . . We're not against the emotional aspect but it must never take the place of the Word (Appendix 8.1, 25).

The causes for syncretism and related issues are more difficult to identify. There are many sub-cultures and situations that are unique to each denomination. Pinzon (Assembly) ultimately looks at syncretism as a matter of leadership and personal decision (Appendix 8.1, 26).

Related to syncretism, is the problem of legalism which is prevalent in many rural churches. Although Pinzon spoke to the issue from the Assembly of God perspective, his observations are true for most rural churches.

There was a legalism ever since the beginning of the work. It wasn't something that was done on purpose, but that is how our fathers were taught: this is sin, that is sin, sin, sin, sin. This formed a certain type of new doctrine. We have not wanted to tear this up by the roots, but we are in a process to teach our new pastors how legalism damages the church. We teach them the difference between doctrine and culture; what are central truths and what are not central. It is a process (Appendix 8.1, 28).

### **The Message of the Denominational Leaders**

Church growth is directly tied to leadership, vision, planning, expectations, and training new leaders. These are the human factors. God's power and hand upon a usable vessel are indispensable. Church growth is both a spiritual and human endeavor.

Effective leaders are not born overnight, and all growing denominations invest in leaders for tomorrow's work. The fastest growing denominations have strong, sacrificial role models who infuse vision into others. Key leaders in the strongest denominations have a clear sense of call, or anointing, as well as an unshakable belief in God's guiding hand upon them. They look for emerging leaders, invest in them, expect much of them and put them quickly into the work of the Lord. The solid denominations invest in leaders and understand that training polishes leaders. They copy, adapt, invent, or import methodologies that create desired effects. They have church government and programs that fit well with the local culture.

Growing denominations have been successful because of an unrelenting spirit of evangelism. This has been the primary focus since the entry of Protestant missionaries in the late part of the nineteenth century. Aggressive evangelism is now part of the culture of growing evangelical churches. They preach a simple Gospel with eternal consequences. All growing denominations invest in evangelism and it comes in many forms: personal evangelism, evangelism through radio, evangelism through the print media, city-wide crusades, medical-evangelistic campaigns and occasionally nation-wide media blitzes. These forms together create a sustained evangelistic presence.

Growing denominations are just as concerned about making disciples as they are in making converts. Most denominations struggle with discipleship but continually improve their methods as they mature new dependent Christians into serving Christians. All new Christians are expected to advance in their service to the Lord through their church. Growing denominations have accessible, wide-spread, continual training, and a

high level of accountability. They balance training for knowledge and training for skills. Making disciples is purposeful, and involves teaching, learning, practice, and experience.

All denominations recognize special challenges as they work with the Mayan culture. These are language, culture, and illiteracy. Low literacy levels among Mayan groups presents a barrier to knowledge of the Word that adversely affects a solid foundation in Christ. The combination of the pull of Mayan culture and traditions, with a lack of solid Bible knowledge, create conditions that spawn widespread syncretism of Mayanism with Christianity. Solutions range from active literacy training to Chronological Bible Storying to careful discipleship. Growing groups recognize these special challenges, and address them.

Most growing denominations gratefully acknowledge the sacrifices of North American missionaries in the past. Today some denominations are growing from a receiving organization to a people who send the blessings of God to other nations.