

A Research in Progress Report on Protestant Megachurches in Costa Rica

By Sally May (principal author) and Clifton L. Holland (editor)

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Part I: On-site visits to megachurches on 16/10/2011

by Dr. Clifton L. Holland and Sally May

(1) The Rose of Sharon Worldwide Christian Mission – Misión Cristiana Mundial La Rosa de Sarón

Location: Barrio Amón, Calle Central norte, on the main road to Tibás
San José, Costa Rica

Senior Pastor: José Luis Madrigal Chacón

Telephones: (506) 2223-6685/2221-2629

E-mail: rosaron@racsa.co.cr

Internet: <http://www.larosadesaron.com>

Sunday Services: 7.00 am Prayer Meeting; Congregational Worship 8.30 am and 10.30 am;
Evening evangelistic service 4.00 pm.



We attended La Rosa de Sarón in the middle of the first congregational worship service, which began at 8.30 am on Sunday, 16 October 2011. The church facility is a large two-story building located on a major city street, just to the north of the downtown area of San José. It has an underground (basement) parking area, and several attendants were waiting to help worshippers find a parking space. Several church members were also welcoming attendees at the door. There was a small cafeteria just to the right of the main entrance to the church, within the same building.

While we were in attendance, several male pastors addressed the audience from the raised platform, located on the Westside of the large auditorium. Bible quotes and the dates and times of church events were projected up onto a large screen. Although there were many people in attendance, because we arrived during the sermon the church had a fairly quiet atmosphere, but at the same time there was a lot of background chaos, with a lot of people walking around. On closer observation, I noted that there were several people studying their individual Bibles, while listening to the sermon. I also noted many young families attending this service. During the service the offering was taken. Many church attendants with collection bags on the end of long poles and moved down each aisle while congregants dropped their tithes and offerings into the bags. Singing occurred during the service and there was a band with several musical instruments, as well as a sound system. The service was being filmed by a cameraman for distribution via the Internet.





There was a lot of space on the ground floor of the sanctuary, as well as a large balcony, with a total seating capacity of about 3,000 people. We estimated the auditorium to be just under half full, approximately 1,380 persons. One of the church's elders (deacon) reported to us that, at the three main Sunday worship services, the first was normally about 50% full (1,500 approximately), the second service about 75% full (2,250 approximately), and the third service about 33% full (1,000 approximately). The total attendance on a typical Sunday was reported to be approximately 4,750-5,000 persons.

In addition, there were approximately ten Sunday school rooms in the same building, just removed from the main worship area, that were basic but full of children who had been divided by their age groups. I saw rooms containing the 8 and 9 year olds. The administrative offices were the other side of the main corridor at the back of the auditorium, as well as a small gift shop. I noted at least one security guard with a mobile radio who was stationed within the church, standing close but not directly in front of the administrative offices. A room off the side of the main worship area was filled with tithe cards, with names and dates of tithing on the cards. There was a church attendant in this room at all times.



At the back of the main worship area there was a desk on which one could pick up various administrative materials, for example, a sheet for the leaders of the weekly cell groups. This sheet notes when and where the groups are held, how many people attend, men, women, and children; how many converts were made and how many baptisms in water and baptisms in the Holy Spirit. There is also a column to note offerings, so perhaps this is also expected at the weekly cell group meetings, which are attended by thousands of church members in their local neighborhood.

There was also a small slip to fill out if you were taking one of the church buses, including the date, the route number, how many adults and children were taking the bus, and who the coordinator is on the specific bus. Outside the church we saw three or four parked school buses, which are part of a fleet of rented buses used to bring worshippers to and from the Sunday church services.

One of the elders (deacon) stated to us that, a few years ago, the church rented 10-15 buses to transport parishioners on a typical Sunday, but that this year there are fewer people in attendance and fewer buses are needed. He didn't seem to know why the overall attendance had declined this year compared to previous years.

(2) Oasis of Hope Assembly of God – Iglesia Asamblea de Dios “Oasis de Esperanza”

Location: City of Moravia, 200 meters north and 200 meters east of Banco de Costa Rica, in front of Plaza de Deportes Las Américas, Province of San José, Costa Rica.

Pastor: Apostle Raul Vargas

Telephone: (506) 2507-9800

E-mail: info@iglesiaoasis.net

Internet: <http://www.iglesiaoasis.net>

Sunday Services: 7.00 am, 10.00 am, and 1.00 pm.



Oasis of Hope had a very lively atmosphere as soon as we walked into the large church building, which had several different floors. Although it did not look very big from the outside, inside the church it was clearly a very large building, with chairs on the ground floor and a large balcony with leveled seating. The total seating capacity is approximately 2,500 people.



We arrived at the first part of the 10:00 am worship service that was predominantly singing. The church parking lot was full when we arrived, and it was hard to find a park space on the streets nearby, because they were crowded with cars of people trying to find a place to park in the area surrounding area the church. There were several local men directing traffic to where to park. We didn't see any public or rented buses bringing people in the church services.

Female greeters were stationed at the entrances to the main sanctuary, who women gave everyone who entered an envelope for the offering. Inside the entrance area there was an information desk, as well as several other desks where one could register with the church or join specific cell groups for married couples or families. There was also an area for women to breastfeed their babies.



The musical part of the service was led by a worship team of several musicians playing electric guitars, a clarinet, a saxophone and five or six singers. The song lyrics were projected onto a large screen at the front of the church. There were approximately six cameramen at this service filming from different angles, with one walking around.

At the front of the congregation by the main stage there were two women dancing and leading the singing. On the main stage the worship leaders were mainly singing, although one person, who I assume was a pastor, briefly spoke in tongues with no interpretation. The singing was very loud and joyful, with nearly everyone in attendance participating enthusiastically.

There seemed to be fewer children in attendance in the worship service than at Rosa de Sarón, but that may be because there was a large three-story building separated from the main auditorium, with at least ten Sunday school rooms and administrative offices.

We estimated that the worship service was about 75% full, with approximately 2,000 attendees. It was reported that the first service of the day was about 50% full (approximately 1,250 people), and the latter two services mostly 75% full, as above. This produces a total of about 5,250 attendees on any given Sunday.



Part II: On site visits to Mega-Churches on 20/11/2011.
by Dr. Clifton L. Holland and Sally May

(3) Centro Internacional Cristiano Pasión Por Las Almas

Location: Avenida 10 de San José, near Bansbach Music Store
Hospital District, San José, Costa Rica

Senior Pastor: William Magana

Telephones: (506) 2233-4454, 2221-9579, 2257-4362

E-Mail: pasionxporlasalmas@racsa.co.cr

Internet: <http://www.pasionporlasalmas.com>

Sunday Services: 7.30 am, 10.15 am & 4.00 pm



We arrived at Passion Por Las Almas around 8:30 am to experience the 7:30 am service, which ran until approximately 9:30 am. The building itself was large but simple and was really only comprised of one large space. There was a spacious balcony and ground floor area full of chairs, in front of a raised platform area. There was a small inside parking area at the west side of the Church building, which also was home to offices and toilets for the Church. There was some security presence in this area. A couple

of buildings further down the road the Church owned another building that housed a shop, canteen and radio station area, where it seemed that they were broadcasting their service live on radio.

The Church was extremely full for a 7:30 am service; there were people coming in throughout the service, many with their own personal Bibles. I could see no evidence of a Sunday school, and there were many young children in the service. Again in this Church there was a lot of singing, with a man and a woman leading the worship at the front, and lyrics projected onto large screens. There was one person filming the service, but we were told that it is not broadcast on the Internet.

We estimated that the 7:30 – 9:30 am worship service was nearly full, with approximately 2,000 attendees. It was reported that the second worship service (10:30 am - 12:30 pm) was normally full also, with approximately 2,000 people, while the 4:00 – 6:00 pm worship service is usually about 50% full, or about 1,000 attendees. The total estimated attendance at the three worship services is about 5,000 people on any given Sunday.



In a similar way to the other Churches that we visited, it seemed that there were mainly male pastors but many of the Church staff and the greeters were women. I felt that in this Church, more than the others visited, that people approached me asking if it was my first time at the Church. There seemed to be an emphasis on the offering. Everyone had envelopes for the offering, and female ushers carried around a big gold chest for people to place their tithes in. In addition, there was an area at the back of the Church,

where persons could line up and make a donation on their credit card. This seemed to be popular, with about ten persons in the line at one time. In the inside parking area there were places to buy DVDs and CDs related to the Church and Christianity. There were also certificates of baptism for people to pick up.

One of the pastors told us that there were no cell groups, but rather they encouraged family groups to sit down and study the Bible together during the week, which was in part co-coordinated by the Church radio station.





(4) Templo Bíblico de San José (Bible Temple of San José)

Location: Downtown San José, 2 blocks east of Central Park
San José, Costa Rica

Senior Pastor: Reynaldo Salazar

Telephones: (506) 2257-5506, 2222-9968

E-Mail: templo@racsa.co.cr

Internet: <http://templobiblico.com>

Sunday Services: 7.30am, 10.30am & 3.30pm.



The Temple of God is situated in the middle of downtown San José. The Church was an old building, with only about 800 wooden seats. We arrived towards the end of the 7.30 am service and experienced the beginning of the 10.30 am service. There was a large and quick turnover and the auditorium was full in each of these two services. There was a large ground floor area, with a raised platform at the front and space for a band. There was a small balcony that seated approximately 50 people. I noted that in this particular Church there were a lot of young adults and teenagers. There was also a good sound system and many people involved in the music. There was also a dance group that performed during the singing

at the beginning of the service. There were some young children in the service. The capacity of the church auditorium limits attendance to about 800 people for each Sunday worship service, which means that the total attendance on a given Sunday is about 2,400 people.







**Part III: On-site visits to mega-churches on 27/11/2011
by Dr. Clifton L. Holland and Sally May**

(5) Assemblies of God Christian Center
[Iglesia Asambleas de Dios "Centro Evangelistico"](#)

Location: Distrito de Zapote, Cantón de San José;
Vieja carretera a Zapote, diagonal a la Universidad Veritas.

Pastor Hugo Solis González

Telephone: 2280-0151

E-mail: info@centroevangelistico.net

Internet: <http://centroevangelistico.net>

Sunday services: 7:30 am, 10:00 am and 5:00 pm



The Centro Evangelístico has a large auditorium in an affluent suburb of San José, with a large parking lot with attendants and a school building on the site. The auditorium is richly decorated, with three

balconies. The seating capacity is approximately 2,000. The 7:30 am and the 4:00 pm services usually attract about 1,000 people each, with the 10:00 am service attracting nearly 2,000. The total attendance on a typical Sunday at the three worship services is approximately 4,000 people.



There were mostly female greeters in the auditorium, but typically a male pastor. The worship, while we were in attendance, was mainly singing, although we did hear a pastor speak for some time. Many worshippers arrived with personal Bibles. The main stage boasted a big band, with electric guitars, piano and drums.

There did not seem to be a lot of children present in the sanctuary but as mentioned above there was a large school building on the site, which may have been acting as a Sunday school.





(6) Kingdom Takers / MANA Ministries

Eagles Nest Apostolic Mission - Misión Apostólica "Nido de Aguilas" (MANA)
(MANA Internacional / Kingdom Takers Church -
formerly known as the International Charismatic Mission - MCI)

Location: Distrito de La Uruca, Cantón de San José

Senior Pastor, Apostle Guido Luis Núñez

Administrative Pastor, Alejandro Guell

Telephone: 2222-0606

E-mail: Alejandro.guell@gmail.com

Internet: <http://www.kingdomtakers.com/biografia.html>

Sunday services: 8:00 am, 10:00 am and 4.00 pm



The Kingdom Takers Church is located in an industrial area of the city, and is a former warehouse. The sanctuary is a large space with a stage and sound system at the front. A bookstore and a soda are located at the entrance of the Church. The warehouse can seat up to 5,000 people, but the Sunday we attended they had laid out approximately 1,800 plastic chairs. It was estimated that the 8:00 am and 4:00 pm services attract about 1,000 people each, and the 10:00 am service attracts about 1,800 people. The total attendance on a typical Sunday at all three worship services is approximately 3,800 people. However, the administrative pastor reported to us that the Saturday night youth rally normally fills the

auditorium, with about 4,500 attendees, many of whom arrive in rented buses from different parts of the San José metropolitan area.

The sanctuary was filled with plastic white chairs and on the walls had banners representing the other MANA Churches in Mexico, Honduras and other places in Costa Rica. There were only 50 or so cars parked outside on the street with a few parking attendants. The congregation was mainly comprised of young adults and young families. There was lots of graffiti artwork and colourful decorations, reflecting the young nature of the congregation. It looked like the Church had a good sound system set up, and there was a drum set on stage. However, at the time that we were attending the apostle was giving a sermon. There were two cameras filming the service.







(7) City of God International - Ciudad de Dios Internacional
(Affiliated with Brethren in Christ Church, USA)

Location: Distrito de Hatillo, Cantón de San José:
Rotonda Rancho de Guanacaste, de la bomba Texaco frente al
Centro Comercial Plaza América, 50 metros norte y 300 metros este.

Pastor Dr. Alex Alvarado
Telephone: 2254-8922
E-mail: info@ciudaddedios.net
Internet: <http://ciudaddedios.net>

Sunday services: 9:00 am and 11:00 am



The City of God Church has been in existence for thirty years, but it has been at this site in Hatillo for only seven years. The building is an old factory, with a smaller sanctuary built inside. The space also has several shops and a soda, ample indoor and outdoor parking, and places to sign up for activities and groups. The Church is located in a lower-middle class area, and the congregation is comprised of the same socio-economic group. There are many offices and other areas around the sanctuary, including

Sunday school rooms. For the amount of people in attendance there were not many cars parked on the site, perhaps as many as 60.



We arrived for the 9:00 am service, which was nearly completely full. The sanctuary seats approximately 1,250 in metal folding chairs, with a total attendance on a typical Sunday at the two worship services being between 2,000-2,500 people. We heard the senior pastor speak briefly, followed by a woman who gave Church announcements, which were aided by multimedia presentations projected onto the wall behind the stage. This mainly involved news about coming events.

I could see no large musical group or sound system as in the other Churches. There were mainly female greeters standing by the many entrances to the sanctuary. When we arrived at the Church the offering was being taken. Worshippers approached the stage area and there were several women collecting the offering in baskets.



**(8) Abundant Life Christian Community -
Comunidad Cristiana "Vida Abundante"
(Federacion de Iglesias Vida Abundante - FIVA)**

Location: San Antonio de Coronado, San José: del cruce Trinidad de Moravia-Coronado
(Mall Don Pancho), 800 metros este carretera principal (ruta 102)

Pastor Ricardo Salazar

Teléfono: 2229-9205

E-mail: info@vida.cr

Internet: <http://www.vida.cr/>

Sunday services: 8:00 am, 10:30 am and 5:00 pm



Vida Abudante in Coronado has a very large property, with several buildings as well as several parking lots with parking attendants. The main Church auditorium is surrounded by a Christian school with a sports area, and other administration buildings and Sunday School classrooms. The auditorium is attractive with a large stage, and mid-sized balcony area. The total seating holds approximately 2,100 people in metal folding chairs. It is estimated that 1,000 people each attend the 8:00 am and 5:00 pm

worship services, whereas about 1,800 attend the 10:30 am service, which means that the total attendance is approximately 3,800 on an average Sunday.



The worship, which at the time we attended mainly involved singing, was being led by a female worship team, and there were female greeters. A male pastor appeared on the stage later. The congregation was comprised of middle-aged persons, and young couples and families. People continued to arrive during the hour that we were at the Church. There were some children, but I would assume there was a Sunday School functioning in one of the other buildings.

There were three large viewing screens in the sanctuary and smaller ones in the balcony. The worship team sang for around 45 minutes. Multi-media announcements were then made on the screens, for children, youth and adult weekend trips and groups. Following this the offering was taken, with volunteers walking around collecting cash offerings and tithing envelopes. On this Sunday there was a guest speaker, a pastor from their sister Church in New York State.





SUMMARY REPORT

Field research on Evangelical Megachurches in the San José Metro Area
conducted by Dr. Clifton L. Holland and Sally May

October-November 2011

CHURCH	PASTOR	SEATING CAPACITY	NO. OF WORSHIP SERVICES	TOTAL ESTIMATED ATTENDANCE
(1) Oasis of Hope Assembly of God	Raul Vargas	2,500	3	5,250
(2) Rose of Sharon Christian Mission, independent Pentecostal	José Luis Madrigal Chacón	3,000	3	5,000
(3) Passion for Souls Christian Center, independent Pentecostal	William Magana	2,000	3	5,000
(4) Evangelistic Center of Zapote, Assembly of God	Hugo Solís	2,000	3	4,000
(5) Kingdom Takers - Maná Ministries, independent Charismatic	Guido Luis Núñez	1,800	3	3,800
(6) Abundant Life Christian Community, independent neo-Pentecostal	Ricardo Salazar	2,100	3	3,800
(7) City of God International, affiliated with Brethren in Christ Church in USA	Alex Alvarado	1,250	2	2,500
(8) Bible Temple, affiliated with Costa Rican Bible Church Association (neo-Pentecostal)	Reynaldo Salazar	800	3	2,400
TOTALES (8)		15,450	23	31,750