

LATIN AMERICAN SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROGRAM -
PROGRAMA LATINOAMERICANO DE ESTUDIOS SOCIORRELIGIOSOS
(PROLADES)

**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
RELIGION IN COSTA RICA**

SECOND EDITION

By Clifton L. Holland, Director of PROLADES

Last revised on 14 June 2020

PROLADES

Apartado 86-5000, Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica
Telephone (506) 8820-7023; E-mail: prolades1@gmail.com
Internet: <http://www.prolades.com/>

© 2018-2020, Clifton L. Holland, PROLADES
All rights reserved

CONTENTS

Country Overview	5
Current Religious Situation	8
Overview of Social, Religious and Political Development	9
The Roman Catholic Church	15
The Protestant Movement	20
Other Religions	91
Independent Western Roman Catholic-derived groups	
Eastern Orthodox Jurisdictions	
Marginal Christian Groups	
Non-Christian Religions	
Those with no religious affiliation (“nones)	97
Sources	97

Religion in Costa Rica

Country Overview

Called the “Switzerland of the Americas,” Costa Rica is located in Central America, between Nicaragua to the northwest and Panama to the southeast. The country is bordered by the Pacific Ocean on the west and by the Caribbean Sea on the east. This largely mountainous country, about the size of West Virginia, was home to 5.1 million people in June 2020, two-thirds of whom live in the fertile Central Valley where the country’s largest cities are found: San José (the capital since 1838), Cartago, Heredia and Alajuela. The San Jose Metropolitan Area, with an estimated 2.15 million inhabitants, is the nation’s largest urban agglomeration, comprising areas of high population density surrounding the capital city.



The country has an area of 19,730 square miles and is divided administratively into seven provinces: San José, Alajuela, Cartago, Heredia, Guanacaste, Puntarenas y Limón. The major geographical regions of the country are: Central Valley, Northern Pacific (Province of Guanacaste), Central Pacific, Southern Pacific (Brunca), Atlantic Huetar (Province of Limón) and Northern Huetar (Plains of San Carlos). The national territory is also divided by the Central Mountain Range that extends from the northwest to the southeast, which for centuries made transportation and communications difficult between the two coasts.

The highest point in the country is Chirripó Peak (12,500 feet above sea level), located in the Talamanca Mountains that divide the Atlantic Huetar from the Southern Pacific regions. There are six volcanoes in the Central Mountain Range, some of which are active, such as the highest one, Volcán Irazú, at 11,260 feet above sea level.

Two of the nation's most important cities, San José and Cartago, are located only a few miles from Volcán Irazú, to the west and south respectively. The first well-documented historical eruption occurred in 1723 during the Spanish colonial period, and frequent explosive eruptions have occurred since, with the last major eruption in December of 1994. This volcano became very active during 1963-1965, which caused severe damage to the environment and to nearby cities and towns due to ashfall and lahar flows (a violent type of mudflow or debris flow composed of pyroclastic material, rocky debris and water) that destroyed hundreds of homes. More recently Volcán Turrialba (10,958 feet above sea level), located 6.4 miles east of Volcán Irazú, began showing signs of activity in 2006 and new phreatic activity (steam-blast eruption) began in January 2010; its previous major eruption occurred in 1866. This volcano maintained a passive emission of ash and gas into early 2018 that created clouds extending to about 3,000 feet and with winds dispersed the volcanic ash to several communities in San José and vicinity, and also to some areas of the nearby province of Heredia.

Costa Rica is home to a rich variety of plants and animals. While the country has only about 0.1 percent of the world's landmass, it contains about five percent of the world's biodiversity. Around 25 percent of the country's land area is in protected national parks and ecological areas, which is the largest percentage of protected areas in the world.

Costa Rica has the highest percentage of immigrants in Central America, according to the study *Labor Market and Social Policies*, conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, published 8 November 2017): <http://qcostarica.com/costa-rica-has-highest-percentage-of-immigrants/>. The immigrant population tripled between 1984 and 2000 and continued to increase later, although, at a slower rate, the research states that Costa Rica had about 411,408 people born abroad in 2015, 40 percent more than in 2000. The foreign-born population covers all people who have ever migrated from their country of birth to their current country of residence.

The total population of Costa Rica (4,301,712) as of June 2010 (2011 census) was 72.8 percent urban and registered 385,900 legal immigrants (or 9.0 percent), not counting illegals. Labor migration to Costa Rica has been mainly determined by its stable political climate, good socio-economic conditions relative to neighboring countries, which share a common language and labor market opportunities especially for low-skilled people. The continual demand for unskilled labor in agriculture, construction, tourism and domestic service, along with networks of Nicaraguan emigrants developed over time in those sectors, has maintained a high influx of workers from Nicaragua during the last three decades. Immigrants from Nicaragua represent three quarters (74.5 percent) of all people born abroad, those from Colombia (4.3 percent), followed by Spain (4.2 percent), the USA (4.1 percent), and Panama (2.4 percent). Other

nationalities with significant communities in Costa Rica are from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, El Salvador and Venezuela. For several decades there has been a remarkable migratory movement of Europeans (especially Spaniards, Bulgarians, Russians, Ukrainians, Swiss and Swedish) and Asians (Chinese, Taiwanese, Koreans and Japanese) who have settled in the country, which have been attracted by its political stability, business opportunities, an alternative way of life and a mild climate.

Costa Rica has many refugees and illegal immigrants, most of whom are from Nicaragua and Colombia. It's believed by some researchers that up to 10 percent of the country's population, or about 500,000 people, are Nicaraguans, some of whom migrate to the country for seasonal work as illegals. As the only democratic country in the region, Costa Rica has many refugees who fled dictatorships and wars in nearby Latin American countries over the last four decades. See the study "Nicaragua: Channeling the Future," produced by students at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University (17 June 2017):

<https://cronkite.asu.edu/buffett/nicaragua/for-many-nicaraguans-seeking-work-costa-rica-is-the-choice/>

According to the 2011 census, the ethnic composition of Costa Rica was 66.0 percent Pure White (Castizo), 14.0 percent Mestizo, 9.0 percent immigrants, 7.0 percent Mulatto (mainly West Indian heritage), 2.5 percent Amerindian, 1.0 percent Black, 0.2% Asian, and 0.9% other. According to a human genome project, the average Costa Rican in the Central Valley is 68 percent European, 29 percent Amerindian and three percent African-American (mainly West Indian heritage). Costa Rica is home to about 107,500 Indigenous or Native American people, most of whom live in designated reservations. There are eight Indigenous ethnic groups: Quitirrisi, Matambu, Maleku, Bribri, Cabécar, Guaymi, Boruca and Terraba.

The most common European ancestry is Spanish, although there are many with Italian, German, English, Dutch, Portuguese, Polish and Irish ancestry. The country also has a large Jewish community. Most Afro-Costa Ricans in the country speak Creole English and descend from 19th century black Jamaican and West Indian immigrants.

Costa Rica is a republic with 72 years (1948-2020) of uninterrupted democracy, which makes it one of the most stable countries in Latin America. The nation has been able to avoid the widespread violence that has plagued most Latin American countries because of its strong democratic traditions since the 1948 Civil War.

The government of Costa Rica operates as a presidential representative democracy, which means the country is led by politicians who are elected to represent the interests of the general population. These politicians may also belong to a number of political parties, which may work separately to achieve their political goals or may form coalitions blocs. The Constitution of Costa Rica, officially approved in 1949, establishes executive, legislative, and judicial branches to carry out the responsibilities of government.

The republic is governed by three powers: the executive responsibilities are vested in a president, legislative power is vested on the Legislative Assembly, and judicial power is vested in the Supreme Court. There are two vice presidents as well as a cabinet designated by the president. The president, vice presidents, and 57 Legislative Assembly delegates are elected for four-year terms.

After Costa Rica abolished its military in 1948, the budget previously dedicated to the military was used to provide for public security, education and culture. During 1996, the Ministry of Public Security established the Public Force (*Fuerza Pública*), which reorganized and eliminated the Civil Guard, Rural Assistance Guard and Frontier Guards as separate entities; they are now

under the Ministry and operate on a geographic command basis performing ground security, law enforcement, counter-narcotics and border patrol functions.

Outside the *Fuerza Pública*, there is a small Special Forces Unit, the *Unidad Especial de Intervencion* (UEI) or Special Intervention Unit, that trains with special forces of Israel and its namesake in Spain and other democratic nations; but is not part of the main police forces, rather it is part of the Intelligence and Security Directorate (DIS), which reports directly to the Minister of the Presidency.

The central government offers tax exemptions for those who are willing to invest in the country. Several global high-tech corporations have established processing plants for the export market, including the microchip manufacturer Intel, the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmith-Kline, and the consumer products company Procter & Gamble. In 2006, Intel's microprocessor facility alone was responsible for 20 percent of Costa Rican exports and 4.9 percent of the country's GDP. Trade with South East Asia and Russia boomed during 2004 and 2005, and the country obtained full Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) membership in 2007 after becoming an observer in 2004.

Since the mid-1990s, pharmaceuticals, financial outsourcing, software development and ecotourism have become the prime industries in Costa Rica's economy. High levels of education among its residents make the country an attractive investing location. Since 1999, tourism has earned more foreign exchange than the combined exports of the country's three main cash crops: bananas, pineapple and coffee. Coffee production has played a key role in Costa Rica's history and economy and by 2006 was the third cash crop export. The largest coffee growing areas are in the provinces of San José, Alajuela, Heredia, Puntarenas and Cartago.

Current Religious Situation

While the nation's Constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as the State religion and requires that the State contribute to its maintenance, it also prohibits the State from impeding the free exercise of other religions that do not violate universal morality or proper behavior.

The numerical growth and geographical expansion of independent Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, Protestant denominations, marginal Christian groups, and non-Christian religions in Costa Rica is largely a phenomenon of the post-World War II era, which also witnessed a decline in Catholic Mass attendance and in the observance of older Catholic traditions.

Although the **Roman Catholic Church** remains the dominant religion of Costa Rica, the growth of new religious movements during the twentieth century—especially among Protestants since the 1960s—has led to the current situation of religious pluralism, which is demonstrated by the following polls. According to a national public opinion poll by CID-Gallup in August 2009, the Catholic population was 71.0 percent, Protestant 20.0 percent, “other religions” 2.0 percent, and those with “no religion/no response” 8.0 percent. An August-September 2008 public opinion poll by Simer S.A. on the Greater Metropolitan Area (GMA), which includes the cities of San José, Cartago, Heredia and Alajuela in the Central Valley, reported that Catholic adherents were 47.2 percent, Protestants 24.1 percent, other religions 1.7 percent, and those with no religious affiliation (or no response) 26.9 percent. A comparison of these two polls reveals that Protestant adherents and those with no religion have a stronger presence in GMA than in the rest of the country, whereas Catholic adherents are stronger in smaller and more rural population areas.

The Pew Research Center (Washington, DC), which conducted a public opinion poll between October 2013 and February 2014 among all Latin American countries (published in November 2014), reported the following data on religious affiliation in Costa Rica: Roman Catholic 62.0 percent, Protestant 25.0 percent, “other religions” 2.0 percent, and “none” 9.0 percent.

A more recent public opinion poll by Latinobarómetro (Santiago, Chile), in September 2018, revealed the following about religious affiliation in Costa Rica: Roman Catholic 54.5 percent, Protestant 27.7 percent, “other religions” 4.7 percent, and “no religion/no response” 15.8 percent.

In four years, 2014-2018, the Roman Catholic population decreased from 62.0 percent to 54.5 percent (a decline of 7.5 percent), the Protestant population increased from 25.0 percent to 27.7 percent (+2.7 percent), “other religions” increased from 2.0 percent to 4.7 percent (+2.7 percent), while those with “no religion/no response” increased from 9.0 percent to 14.7 percent (+5.7 percent).

Since 1983, the size of the Catholic population declined from 84.9 percent to 54.5 percent in 2018 (a decrease of 30.4 percent), whereas the Protestant population increased from 8.6 percent to 27.7 percent (+19.1 percent); adherents of “other religions” increased from 2.0 percent to 4.7 percent (+2.7 percent), while those with “no religious affiliation” and those who did not answer the question increased from 4.5 percent to 15.8 percent (+11.3 percent). Reasons for this significant change in religious affiliation will be discussed later.

Historical Overview of Political and Social Development

European discovery of Costa Rica was made by Christopher Columbus during his fourth voyage to the Americas in 1502, when he sailed from Honduras to Panama and anchored briefly off the Caribbean coast of a land that was later called the “Rich Coast” due to its lush tropical vegetation. However, it was on the Pacific coast that the Spanish conquistadors first explored the territory of Costa Rica: Gáspar de Espinosa, accompanied by Hernán Ponce de León and Juan de Castañeda, in 1519, and Gil González Dávila in 1522. Participating in the later expedition was the **Spanish Roman Catholic priest, Diego de Agüero**, who became the first foreign religious worker to visit present-day Costa Rica and Nicaragua. After exploring the Nicoya Peninsula (extending southeast from the northwestern territory of Costa Rica), the Spaniards established a temporary settlement among the Chorotega people, where the priest claimed to have converted and baptized about 6,000 individuals—although neither the Spaniards nor the Chorotegas understood each other’s language. The first Roman Catholic chapel in Costa Rica was built in 1544 in the village of Nicoya during the administration of the first governor, Diego Gutiérrez. **In 1560, Franciscan (*Orden de San Francis* – St. Francis of Assis) friar Juan de Estrada Rávago arrived in Costa Rica from Granada, Nicaragua**, and he and his fellow Franciscans are credited with advancing the “evangelization” of Amerindians in Costa Rica by the cross and sword. Some of the Amerindians who were conquered by the Spanish were forced to live in “reducciones” (organized communities) near the mission stations, where they were given religious instruction and used as laborers by the missionaries, while other captives were distributed among the Spanish colonists as slave labor.

The first Catholic church in Costa Rica was built in 1544 in Villa de Nicoya, during the administration of the first governor, Diego Gutiérrez. The second Catholic church was founded between 1554 and 1556 in the town of Chomes, also on the Nicoya Peninsula. *In 1560, Juan de Estrada Rávago, a Franciscan Friar, arrived in Costa Rica from Nicaragua, accompanied by 300 well-equipped men.* In May 1561, Father Estrada was named the Vicar of Costa Rica and to

fulfill this responsibility he began to evangelize, build and consolidate the mission he was given, with the help of Friar Pedro de Betanzos, a Franciscan missionary. Friar Martín de Bonilla arrived in 1562 with the conquistador Juan Vázquez de Coronado who founded the colonial capital in Cartago in 1564. During that year, Franciscan friars Lorenzo de Bienvenida, Diego de Salinas and Melchor Salazar arrived in Costa Rica, accompanied by Friar Martín de Bonilla. They founded a Franciscan convent in Cartago in 1565.

Padre Estrada and the other Franciscans are credited with the first wide-spread evangelization of the Amerindians in Costa Rica. During the Spanish colonial period, the Franciscans evangelized the country with the help of occasional Dominican (*Orden de Predicadores*, O.P – Order of Preachers of St. Dominique) and *Mercedario* (*Orden de Nuestra Señora de la Merced* – Order of Our Lady of Mercy) brothers, whose religious orders were not formally established and their mission was transitory.

In addition to the Chorotegas, Costa Rica was inhabited by several other Amerindian groups: the Huetares in the Central Valley and Caribbean coast, and the Bruncas in the southern region along the Pacific coast. Although scholars disagree about the size of the indigenous population in Costa Rica at the beginning of the Spanish Conquest, some early records (1569) indicate that there were probably no more than 30,000 Chibchan-speaking peoples present in 1502. Many of the Amerindians later died of disease or warfare at the hands of the Spaniards, which led to a decline in the total population. By 1611, the entire population of Costa Rica was reported as 15,000, including Amerindians, Spaniards, and *mestizos*.

During the Spanish colonial period, Costa Rica became a nation of small farmers because there were no significant mineral resources to exploit, such as gold and silver. Therefore, the colonists turned to producing sufficient food products for their own survival, as well as to producing goods for export to other Spanish colonies. The socioeconomic elite of the era were the principal families of the **colonial capital of Cartago (founded in 1563)** who traced their lineage to the Spanish conquistadors, and who controlled the cattle ranches of Guanacaste on the Pacific coast and the cacao producing areas around Matina on the Caribbean coast. These families monopolized the wholesale and retail trade in Costa Rica, and they dominated civil, military and ecclesiastical life.

The 18th century in Costa Rica produced an increasing racial mixture of whites, blacks and Amerindians, which created today's majority *mestizo* population. This new *mestizo* peasantry began to populate other parts of the Central Valley, in particular the fertile land around Heredia (founded in 1706), San José (founded in 1736) and Alajuela (founded in 1782), where local chapels were constructed and administered by the few Catholic priests then in Costa Rica.

Although, during the colonial period (1519-1821), Spaniards and Roman Catholicism dominated the social and religious life of Costa Rica, beginning in the mid-1800s some ethnic, racial and religious diversity appeared. The first Protestant worship services were conducted in San José during the 1840s among English-speaking foreigners, who were mainly American, British, and German citizens. This congregation eventually became the nondenominational Church of the Good Shepherd, now Episcopalian. During the mid-1800s, indentured servants were imported from mainland China to provide laborers for the growing coffee industry, and they brought their ancient religious beliefs and practices with them. During the late 1800s, additional Chinese laborers arrived in Costa Rica, along with Asian Indians and Afro-American immigrants from the British-controlled West Indies, particularly Jamaica, to help with railroad construction and banana industry development on the Caribbean coast. Most of the Asian Indians were Hindus, and the majority of the black West Indians were English-speaking Protestants upon their

arrival; the latter established the first Baptist, Methodist and Anglican churches on the Caribbean coast.

Costa Rica became independent of Spain in 1821 and was a member of the Central American Federation from 1824 to 1838 when that federation was dissolved. The Captaincy General of Guatemala (established in 1529) declared its independence from Spain on 15 September 1821, which included a region stretching from the southern border of Mexico to the border of the Province of Panama (part of the Republic of Colombia). In 1824, this region declared itself to be a new nation, known as the Central American Federation, with its capital in Guatemala City. However, the transition to statehood was far from smooth, because the other constituent provinces of the old Captaincy General of Guatemala (El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica) had national aspirations that were often at odds with the central government in Guatemala City. When established, the new nation was immersed in political chaos, which continued until 1838 with almost permanent civil war between liberal and conservative factions.

Following the collapse of the Central American Federation in 1838, liberal political parties continued to struggle with conservative ones for control of the Costa Rican government until the 1940s, when new political options and ideologies appeared on the national stage. During the 1800s, Costa Ricans became more conscious of the larger world and the need to strengthen their economy by exporting goods to North America and Europe, and by importing goods to make their lives easier. During the late-1800s, coffee production and exportation became the country's leading industry, and the capital of San José became a showcase for the newly-found prosperity: elaborate new public buildings, hotels, churches, homes, parks and monuments were constructed, including the impressive National Theater (1897) that was inspired by the design of the Paris Opera House after construction was completed in 1875.

Since the mid-1940s, two major political ideologies have dominated Costa Rican politics: the center-right **Calderonista movement** (founded by Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia, President from 1940-1944, based on Social Christian Catholic ideology) and the center-left **Social Democrat movement** (founded in 1951 by José "Pepe" Figueres who was President for three terms: 1948-1949, 1953-1958 and 1970-1974). Now, the **Social Christian Unity Party** (PUSC, conservative) represents the former, and the **National Liberation Party** (PLN, liberal) represents the latter. Between 1950 and 1990, the PLN won more presidential elections than PUSC, but during the period 1998-2006 PUSC won two presidential elections, under **Miguel Ángel Rodríguez Echeverría** (1998-2002) and **Dr. Abel Pacheco de la Espriella** (2002-2006). Democracy, peace, stability, and economic growth and development have characterized this nation since 1950.

Dr. Oscar Arias Sánchez (Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Essex, England, in 1974) of the PLN served as president from 1986-1990 and won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1987 for proposing the "Arias Peace Plan" (also known as "Esquipulas II"). The presidents of Central America signed this peace proposal in August of 1987, thereby ending a series of armed conflicts in the region between Marxist-led insurgents and democratically-elected governments during an ugly era of the Cold War in Central America.

After a Constitutional reform was approved in 2005 that permitted the reelection of former presidents, **Dr. Oscar Arias Sánchez** ran again on the PLN ticket and won the presidency in 2006, which was the first time in 36 years that such a thing had happened. Arias' opponent in the 2006 election was economist Ottón Solís Fallas of the **Citizen's Action Party** (PAC), a center-left party composed mainly of PLN dissidents who strongly opposed the PLN's neoliberal "free trade" policies with the U.S. government.

Laura Chinchilla Miranda of PLN won the 2009 presidential election and served from May 2010 to May 2014. She was one of two vice-presidents in Óscar Arias Sánchez' second administration's Minister of Justice. Chinchilla was the governing PLN candidate for President in the 2010 general election, where she won with 46.8 percent of the vote on 7 February. She was the eighth woman president of a Latin American country and the first woman to become President of Costa Rica.

Chinchilla was expected to give continuity to the previous administration's pro-free trade policies. She was considered a social conservative because of her opposition to gay marriage, but she stated publicly the need for a legal framework to provide fundamental rights to same-sex couples. Also, she supported maintaining the country's prohibition of abortion under most circumstances.

Chinchilla's political platform emphasized anti-crime legislation in response to Costa Rica's growing concerns over public safety. In 2010, the country had a high crime rate in practically all categories of crimes, which contributed to harming the perception of the state as guarantor of justice and security.

Added to this was the economic insecurity caused by the international financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 that had damaged the Costa Rican economy. Attending these circumstances, President Chinchilla structured a government plan based on human security and with a comprehensive security approach, which contemplated four key components: (1) Economic security and competitiveness; (2) Social security and welfare; (3) Citizen security and social peace; and (4) Environmental security and development.

Chinchilla graduated from the University of Costa Rica and received a master's degree in public policy from Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Prior to entering politics, Chinchilla worked as an NGO consultant in Latin America and Africa, specializing in judicial reform and public security issues. She went on to serve in the José María Figueres Olsen administration (1994-1998) as vice-minister for public security (1994-1996) and minister of public security (1996-1998). From 2002 to 2006, she served in the National Assembly as a deputy for the province of San José. The former-President currently teaches at Georgetown University and is co-chair of the Inter-American Dialogue think tank, also located in Washington, DC.

Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera, a distinguished history professor at the University of Costa Rica and formerly a member of the PLN, won the 2013 presidential election and served from May 2014 to May 2018 under the PAC banner. Solís led the field in the 2014 presidential election, and won the presidency in a landslide election, earning more votes than any presidential candidate in the history of the nation. Solís has a long academic and political career, culminating in his election as the first President of Costa Rica to be a member of the center-left PAC. Although PAC won only 13 of the 57 available legislative seats, it was able to form a ruling coalition.

Solís studied history at the University of Costa Rica, where he earned a Licenciante degree with academic honors in 1979. He later earned a master's degree in Latin American Studies at Tulane University in New Orleans. Solís has held various academic and consulting positions. Between 1981 and 1987, he was an associate professor at the University of Costa Rica. In addition, he was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Michigan from 1983 to 1985. During the first Arias administration (1986-1990) he became director of the Center for Peace and Reconciliation in Costa Rica. From 1992 to 1995, Solís worked with the Academic Council of the United Nations System. Starting in 1999, Solís worked for Florida International University as coordinator in the Center for the Administration of Justice and as a researcher for the Latin American and Caribbean Center, where he analyzed political and social events in Latin America.

Like most members of PAC, Solís identified himself as a progressive. His *Plan Rescate*, or *Rescue Plan*, outlined his political beliefs, which focused on three central issues: anti-corruption, economic growth, and reducing income inequality. Solís claimed that economic neo-liberalism has created too much income inequality for Costa Rica. Past governments have avoided collecting taxes on large companies and high-income earners, which leads to budget deficits that Solís claimed his administration would fix through better enforcement. Banks should not encourage exports at the expense of income growth among the poor, according to Solís. He believes that economic liberalization has generally harmed women more than men because they have traditionally had less access to higher-income jobs. Part of that liberalization, he claimed, included ignoring the financial and growth needs of the agricultural industry.

Solís supported environmental protections, which he believes Costa Rica has forgotten. As such, Solís believes that water must be safeguarded from private development and mismanagement, something that has caused water shortages in many of the country's municipalities. Solís claimed that he would prosecute violators of the Water Resources Management Bill.

Although Solís is a Catholic, he supported the separation of church and state despite Catholicism being the country's official religion. With regard to ethical issues, he also supported civil unions and in-vitro fertilization. In addition, Solís supported increased LGBT rights. In May 2014, he ordered that a “rainbow flag” be flown over the Presidential office building as a show of solidarity with gays on International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia.

Public schools and health services virtually ground to a halt across the country on 26-27 April 2016 as a result of the “Mother of All Strikes.” The strike, organized by union groups, began with a march on the Legislative Assembly by an estimated 40,000 demonstrators. It was focused on a 16-point list of demands that included respect for labor rights, opposition to cuts to the public health service (part of the national Social Security system, CCSS), defense of the education budget, opposition to sales and income tax increases, and a demand that the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes, among other things.

In May 2016, the Costa Rican government requested an advisory opinion from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights regarding same-sex marriage—which was not recognized in Costa Rica—and transgender rights. As a signatory to the American Convention on Human Rights (1969), Costa Rica was bound to abide by the court’s ruling. When the court ruled in January 2018 that its signatory countries must permit same-sex marriage, the Costa Rican government began taking steps to comply. Those actions had an immediate and immense impact on the Costa Rican presidential election, which was underway.

Beginning in May 2017, Solís came under a cloud of suspicion after a report accused him of corruption for allegedly accelerating the legal process of Chinese cement imports in favor of businessman and owner of Sinocem, Juan Carlos Bolaños, in a case known as *Cementazo*. In May 2018, the Public Prosecutor of Costa Rica dismissed the charges against him.

Despite the *Cementazo* controversy, Solís was followed by another PAC leader, **Carlos Alvarado Quesada**, for the presidential term 2018-2021. Alvarado previously served as Minister of Labor and Social Security during the Presidency of Luis Guillermo Solís. Alvarado has a Bachelor's degree in communication and a Master's degree in political science from the University of Costa Rica, as well as a Master's degree in development studies from the University of Sussex, England.

The 2017 presidential campaign was hotly contested between Carlos Alvarado of PAC and **Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz** (no relation between the two) of the **National Restoration Party** (PRN – *Partido de Restauración Nacional*), founded in 2005 mostly by dissidents from the right-wing **Costa Rican Renewal Party** (PRC - *Partido Renovación Costarricense*), founded in 1995

by evangelical pastor and lawyer Justo Orozco Álvarez. Former PRC deputy **Carlos Luis Avendaño**, founder of the PRN, successfully returned to Congress for the 2010-2014 period for the PRN; even though in the past he had personal differences with Justo Orozco (then PRC's only deputy), both were able to work together in Congress to support the same agenda, mainly the conservative views of the evangelical community (against abortion, same-sex marriage, in vitro fertilization, and the use of the Ministry of Public Education's approved sex education manuals in the public schools). The PRN's candidate in the 2014 presidential election was Carlos Avendaño. In the 2014 congressional election, Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz, representing San José province, was elected to the only seat in the Legislative Assembly won by the PRN.

In the 2018 Costa Rican general elections, the PRN won 14 of the 57 seats in the Legislative Assembly and its presidential candidate, Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz, won 29.4 percent of the votes in the first round and 39.2 percent in the second round, compared to 21 percent of the votes in the first round for Carlos Alvarado, who won the second round with 60.6 percent of the votes. The election results were a clear victory for PAC's progressive agenda and a clear defeat for the PRN's conservative Christian agenda.

On 1 April 2018, Carlos Alvarado won the presidential election by promising to allow gay marriage and protecting the country's reputation for tolerance of diversity; he was sworn into office on 8 May 2018 when he became the youngest president (at age 38) in the modern history of Costa Rica. His new vice-president, Epsy Campbell, became the country's first Afro-Costa Rican to serve in that role. His opponent Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz had vowed to restore what he called "traditional family values" by preventing gay marriage and restricting women's access to abortions, which appealed strongly to both conservative Catholics and evangelicals but not to the mainstream of more progressive voters.

The news article reproduced below illustrates the contemporary battle in many Latin American countries between the conservative and the progressive agendas of major political parties. Conservative Catholics and evangelicals have found a common cause in an agenda of "traditional family values," which includes opposition to abortion, same-sex marriage, in vitro fertilization, and the use of approved sex education manuals in the public schools that are pro-LGBT. Since evangelicals, in particular, believe that their concept of "traditional family values" is based on the teaching of the Bible, their support for conservative political parties, in the case of Costa Rica, has come into conflict with the country's Electoral Code that prohibits the use of religion in propaganda in favor of any particular political party or candidate.

The Tico Times (8 March 2018). One day after Costa Rica's **Supreme Elections Tribunal (TSE)** ordered Catholic and evangelical churches to stop making political pronouncements in the midst of the country's heated election cycle, evangelical leaders are pushing back. The daily *La Nación* reported that Juan Carlos Retana, lawyer for the **Costa Rican Evangelical Alliance**, has announced he will promote a bill to limit the interpretation of Article 136 of the country's Electoral Code, which prohibits the use of religion in propaganda in favor of any specific party or candidate.

The lawyer criticized the Elections Tribunal ruling, arguing that the text "says, basically, that only mentioning God and conscience induces someone to vote [a certain way]. It's not... that they castrate us as believers simply for using the word God in a phrase related to political issues," Retana told the daily. "I believe we must limit the actions that, in my opinion, the Supreme Elections Tribunal has violated" with its ruling.

In the ruling he referred to, released Tuesday, the TSE indicated that a document distributed by Catholic leaders and evangelical pastors before the first round of the country's presidential elections on Feb. 4 constituted "a threat to the free exercise of the right to vote."

The document in question was circulated in January, when the candidacy of evangelical preacher and then-legislator (Fabricio Alvarado) began to gather steam thanks to his pronouncements against gay marriage. It was published during a day of prayer and called on the Costa Rican population to “meditate before God and their consciences their vote for president, vice president and legislators.”

“TSE magistrates determined that the joint statement mixed political and election activity terms with religious expressions, which, through their combination, represented a threat to the free exercise of the right to vote,” the TSE ruling stated.

Costa Rica’s Election Code states that “any form of propaganda that, based on people’s religious beliefs or invoking religious motivations, incites the citizenry in general or specific citizens to adhere to or separate from any party or candidate, is prohibited.”

Source: <http://www.ticotimes.net/2018/03/08/evangelical-alliance-lawyer-costa-rica-should-reduce-limits-on-religious-propaganda>

The Roman Catholic Church

Until the mid-1800s, the **Roman Catholic Church** of Costa Rica was administered as part of the Episcopal Province of León, Nicaragua, founded in 1534. However, in 1850, Pope Pius IX created an independent bishopric (diocese) in Costa Rica and appointed Dr. Anselmo Llorente y Lafuente (a Costa Rican) as its first bishop. In 1852, the government signed a Concordat with the Holy See in Rome, by which the jurisdiction of church property and its temporal rights were transferred to the civil authorities. The first Catholic seminary was established for training local priests in 1878, and the Diocese of San José was elevated to an Archdiocese in 1921.

Juan Primitivo Próspero Fernández Oreamuno, President from 1882 to 1885, implemented measures that sought to undermine the power of the Catholic Church; he withdrew the Concordat with the Holy See, expelled the Jesuits and the German Bishop Bernardo Augusto Thiel Hoffman (1880-1901) from the country, and in 1884 passed laws that placed cemeteries under state control, introduced civil marriage and legalized divorce. It was not until the administration of **President Rafael Ángel del Socorro Calderón Guardia** (1940-1944) that the anti-clerical laws of 1884 and 1894 were repealed, which prohibited religious instruction in the public schools and the presence of religious orders in Costa Rica.

For centuries Catholic religious life was centered in the old cathedral of the nation’s colonial capital and in the shrine of “Our Lady of the Angels,” both located in Cartago, where the faithful believe that a small statue of the Virgin Mary and Child mysteriously appeared to a *pardo* woman (of mixed Indian and Negro blood), known today as Juana Pereira, in 1635. However, the veneration of the hand-carved stone statue of the Black Madonna, known as *La Negrita*, at “Our Lady of the Angels” chapel was not popular outside of Cartago until the Catholic hierarchy began to promote this in the 1880s. After 1926, when “Our Lady of the Angels” became the nation’s Patron Saint, the most important religious holiday in Costa Rica has been on August 2nd, the Virgin of the Angels Day. Beginning the previous day, tens of thousands of Catholics of all ages participate in an all-night pilgrimage by walking from their home towns to the *Basilica de Nuestra Señora de Los Ángeles* in Cartago. Annually, during the morning of August 2nd, the nation’s Catholic clergy, led by the archbishop, conduct a special ceremony in honor of the Virgin Mary in the large plaza facing the Basilica, where great crowds of Catholics and some foreign tourists typically gather. The small statue of the Black Madonna is believed to have great healing powers, which is demonstrated by the presence of thousands of small replicas of body parts (housed in glass-covered display cases) that people have given to the Basilica as a testimony of their alleged miraculous healing after making a pilgrimage and praying before the altar.

Historically, the Costa Rican Catholic Church has suffered from a lack of economic resources, as was true in other Central American countries, because it depended of the tithes of a relatively small and poor population. Even in the mid-1970s, the Catholic Church was small and poor as an organization in Costa Rica, with only about 350 priests to attend to the spiritual needs of about 1.9 million parishioners, which is about one priest for every 5,429 Catholics. Although the Archdiocese of San José reported one priest for an average of 3,000 Catholics, many remote parishes were not as well off: Tilarán had one priest for every 7,600 people and San Isidro de El General had one priest for every 8,700 people. Although the majority of the diocesan priests were Costa Ricans, nearly all the “religious priests” (members of religious orders) were foreign-born, mainly from Spain, Germany, Italy and the USA.

Although nationally the priest-to-population ratio was about 1:3,955 Catholics in 1999, this was a marked improvement over the mid-1970s. Part of this change was due to the improved operation of the Central Seminary (*Seminario Mayor*) in Paso Ancho (a suburb of the nation’s capital) for the preparation of diocesan priests, and there are various seminary programs operated by religious orders for the training of religious priests. However, in 2004, the large Archdiocese of San José, with a reported population of 1,621,800 parishioners, only had a total of 395 priests (diocesan and religious), which is an average of one priest for 4,105 Catholics. This is about the same proportion of priests-to-population as existed in the archdiocese in 1949.

Several diverse tensions arose within the Costa Rican Catholic Church during the 1960s and following years, which resulted from challenges posed by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Medellín (Colombia) in 1968, Latin American Liberation Theology, and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement. These powerful new currents polarized Catholic bishops, priests (diocesan and religious), lay brothers and sisters (members of religious orders), and the laity in general into various factions. **Traditionalists** wanted the Church to remain as it was prior to the reforms approved by the Second Vatican Council (mid-1960s). **Reformers** generally supported the Church’s modern, post-Vatican II stance. **Progressives**, inspired by reforms approved at the Vatican II and Medellín conferences, sought to implement the new vision for “a preferential option for the poor” through social and political action aimed at transforming Costa Rican society and establishing greater social justice through peaceful democratic means. **Radicals** adopted the Marxist-inspired Liberation Theology and advocated violent revolution by the people in neighboring Nicaragua as a means of overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship and creating a Socialist State that would serve the poor marginalized masses. **Charismatic agents** sought to transform the spiritual and communal life of Catholics by means of the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit (including the “baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues”), rather than by political and social activism.

The origin and development of the **Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR)** movement in Costa Rica during the early 1970s had a strong impact on many Catholics, although it also created a great deal of controversy. Opponents denounced it as the “pentecostalization” of the Church. The visits by several Catholic Charismatic leaders to Costa Rica, such as Dominican priest Francis MacNutt, Catholic laywoman Barbara Shlemon (RN), and other members of MacNutt’s team in 1970-1971, preceded by the visit an Evangelical Charismatic pastor from Argentina, Juan Carlos Ortiz of the Assemblies of God, in 1969, resulted in the birth an ecumenical Charismatic movement that removed some of the previous barriers to fellowship that existed between Catholics and Evangelicals. In July of 1973, Father Francis Corbett visited Costa Rica and spoke to numerous groups, which further impacted the development of the CCR in this nation.

One of the significant events that marked the beginning of the ecumenical phase of the Charismatic Renewal movement among university students was a conference held at Camp Roblealto in San José de la Montaña in Heredia, where Father MacNutt spoke to and prayed for students in July 1971, which greatly impacted their lives and motivated a few students to form fellowship groups and Bible study groups to share their Charismatic Renewal experiences with others.

Following the July 1971 visit by members of MacNutt's team, the leadership of the CCR in Costa Rica was assumed by Padre Reinaldo Pol Iparaguirre, who initially welcomed Catholics as well as Evangelicals to CCR activities held in Catholic institutions and private homes. In addition, a group of university students, Catholics and Evangelicals, who were influenced by MacNutt's ministry, founded the Agape Coffee House ministry in May 1972 in San Pedro, Montes de Oca, near the University of Costa Rica campus. This ecumenical coffee house ministry had a strong impact on scores of university students who became active Charismatics until it was closed sometime in 1974.

An additional influence that encouraged the development of the CCR in Costa Rica was the visit of Father Francis Corbett, a Charismatic parish priest from the USA, in January-February and July of 1973. In February of that year, Father Corbett participated in an ecumenical youth retreat at Camp Roblealto, where scores of high school and university students were impacted by the CCR movement. Many of them returned to their homes, parishes and campuses having experienced Charismatic renewal. It was in the days following this retreat at Camp Roblealto that Father Corbett spoke during Mass at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Barrio México, where those who had attended the camp first met the group that eventually became the "official" Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Costa Rica in 1972, led by a Catholic couple – José Miguel and Silvina Arias – and José Miguel's sister, Sor Cecilia Arias of the Sisters of Charity. Father Corbett also attended other meetings during those few days and prayed over people to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Arias family provided key leadership to the CCR and Padre Pol, who was a very close assistant to Archbishop Carlos Humberto Rodríguez Quirós (1960-1979), joined the group later.

In addition to the ecumenical Agape group in San Pedro, two other small Charismatic communities were also formed about this time in the San José metro area: the Shekinah group met in Barrio Escalante (mostly Catholics) and another group met in the Hatillo-Desamparados area and was ecumenical in composition. For about six months, all these "communities" met together every Monday in a general gathering for prayer and fellowship that held them together and was supposed to continue to strengthen the Charismatic experience. These meetings were held at the chapel of Colegio St. Francis in Moravia and were open to newcomers, both Catholics and Evangelicals. The Agape group continues to function today in the area of Sabanilla-San Ramón de Tres Ríos, but its name was changed in 1977 to "Comunidad Arbol de Vida" (Tree of Life Community), which is modeled after the "World of God Community" in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

However, by the mid-1970s, Catholic and Evangelical Charismatics went their separate ways, due mainly to restrictions placed on ecumenical cooperation between the two groups by the Catholic hierarchy, which placed a strong emphasis on different practices of popular piety that had fallen into relative disuse after Vatican II, such as rosaries, pilgrimages, novenas, etc. All this Catholic reaction was favored by the style of the new Pope, John Paul II (elected in 1978), who, contrary to Paul VI, was very favorable to traditional piety and to promoting Marian devotion. After Bishop Román Arrieta, until then of the Diocese of Tilarán, became the Archbishop of San José in 1979, he gave support to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, but he also made sure that it was strictly Catholic. Although he supported ecumenism in theory, he often spoke against

“fundamentalist sects” and discouraged specific expressions of ecumenism in his archdiocese. However, he did endorse the *Comunidad Agape* as an “official” ecumenical group within his archdiocese.

Charismatic Catholics have made a significant contribution to church renewal in Costa Rica by opening an opportunity for greater participation by the laity in church activities, including hundreds of home Bible study and prayer groups that were established throughout the country, especially in the San José metro area. This movement deepened the faith and commitment of tens of thousands of Catholics and led to liturgical changes in worship services and to greater spiritual vitality in the daily lives of believers, mainly among the middle and upper classes.

The CCR in Costa Rica was mainly an effort led by Catholic laypeople with the participation of a few Catholic priests and nuns, such as Padre Pol. In 1982, an estimated 25,000 people attended a CCR celebration at the National Stadium in San José, which was reported to be the largest Charismatic gathering in the history of Costa Rica.

During 2000-2001, the popular radio ministry of diocesan priest Minor de Jesús Calvo and the Charismatic format of “Radio María de Guadalupe” in San José worked to the advantage of the Catholic Church. However, the Charismatic appeal and fundraising success of Radio María, along with the growing popularity of “Padre Minor,” was perceived as a threat by the Catholic hierarchy. Consequently, in 2001, the Archbishop of San José removed Padre Minor from his position as director of Radio Maria and the station was disbanded, which created a serious crisis for the Catholic Church. Many Catholics who supported Padre Minor became angry at the Archbishop for forcing him to resign from this independent ministry, which had been founded and developed by Padre Minor and his business associates using similar programming and promotional tactics as Evangelicals in their successful radio and television ministries in Costa Rica and elsewhere. In 2005, Padre Minor and his chief financial partner, businessman Omar Chaves, were tried and convicted of fraud and corruption in the administration of Radio María funds and began serving long prison terms (12-15 years).

After Padre Minor disappeared from public view in 2001, the Catholic Church seemed satisfied to continue its traditional programming on Radio Fides, the Church’s official station. However, the Catholic public expressed disappointment and disillusionment with the treatment received by Padre Minor and with the loss of the inspirational format of Radio Maria, which had a special appeal to tens of thousands of listeners, especially charismatic Catholics.

In 2002, the Episcopal Conference of Costa Rica (CECOR) consisted of the Archdiocese of San José and six dioceses with 284 parishes, which were served by 561 diocesan priests and 192 religious priests, for a total of 753. In July 2002, Monseñor Hugo Barrantes Ureña was appointed as Archbishop of San José. In May 2005, the Diocese of Cartago was created. Monseñor José Rafael Quirós Quirós was appointed Archbishop of San José in July 2013 by Pope Francis, after the retirement of the former Archbishop. In 2015, CECOR reported that the Archdiocese of San José and its seven dioceses had 295 parishes that were served by 756 priests (diocesan and religious), 440 lay brothers and 769 nuns. The Catholic University of Costa Rica (*Universidad Católica de Costa Rica Anselmo Llorente y Lafuente*) was founded in 1993 in San Vicente de Moravia, located 12 miles northeast of downtown San José.

The numerical growth and geographical expansion of independent Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, Protestant denominations and independent churches, marginal Christian groups, and non-Christian religions in Costa Rica is largely a phenomenon of the post-World War II era, which also witnessed a decline in Catholic Mass attendance and in the observance of older Catholic traditions.

Although the **Roman Catholic Church** remains the dominant religion of Costa Rica, the growth of new religious movements during the 20th century—especially among Protestants since the 1960s—has led to the current situation of religious pluralism, which is demonstrated by the following public opinion polls taken between 1983 and 2017. According to a national public opinion poll by ICCR in June 1983, the Catholic population was 84.9 percent, Protestants were 8.6 percent, “other religions” were 2.0 percent, and those with no religious affiliation (or no answer) were 4.5 percent. By July 1999, according to a poll by CID-Gallup, the Catholic population had declined to 74.0 percent of the population, Protestants had increased to 16.0 percent, those affiliated with “other religions” were 3.0 percent, and those with no religious affiliation (or no answer) had increased to 7.0 percent. An August-September 2008 public opinion poll by Simer, S.A., on the Greater Metropolitan Area (GMA), which includes the cities of San José, Cartago, Heredia and Alajuela in the Central Valley, reported the following statistics:

COUNTRY	CATHOLIC	PROTESTANT	OTHERS	NONE
COSTA RICA	47.2%	24.1%	1.7%	26.9%

The trend reported for the period 1983 to 1999 continued during the next 17 years (2000 to 2017), with the Catholic population declining (from 74.0 percent to 57.0 percent) and the Protestant population increasing (from 16.0 percent to 25.0 percent), while those affiliated with “other religions” remained steady at about 2.0 percent; and those with no religious affiliation (or no response) increased from 7.0 percent to 16.0 percent between 1999 and 2017. Although no more recent polls were taken of the GMA (centered in the City of San José) since 2008, we can assume that Catholic adherents continued to decline, while Protestant adherents continued to increase, in GMA between 2008 and 2017; those in the “none” category no doubt continued to increase as well, which is due to the secularization of Costa Rican society (Holland, Clifton L. *Public Opinion Polls on Religious Affiliation in Costa Rica, 1983-2017*).

These same trends can be seen across Latin America from 1910 to the present, as has been documented for the period 1910-2014 by the Pew Research Center, *Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region* (Washington, DC: November 2014) and by the polling company Latinobarómetro, *El Papa Francisco y la Religión en Chile y América Latina: Latinobarómetro 1995-2017* (Santiago, Chile: Latinobarómetro, January 2018). See these documents for a detailed discussion about why the Catholic population has declined and the Protestant population and the “non-affiliated” have increased in Latin America, especially since the 1960s. Also, see *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America*, edited by Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary (Rutgers University Press, 2007).

The Protestant Movement

The earliest Protestant missionary efforts in Costa Rica took place in the 1880s among English-speaking West Indians (Afro-Caribbean peoples), who came from the British West Indies to work on the construction of a railroad (1870-1890) between the capital city of San José in the Central Valley and Port Limón on the Caribbean coast. Many of these laborers remained on the Caribbean coast to work in railroad maintenance, agriculture (cacao and banana plantations), fishing, and other endeavors, and they brought their own belief systems with them: **Myalism** (an Afro-Caribbean religious system), **Obeah** (African witchcraft or “black magic”), **Pocomania** (also known as “Pocomia,” “Pukumina” and “Revivalism”), the **Native Baptist movement** (both of the latter groups were Afro-Caribbean adaptations of Protestant Christianity in Jamaica during the 1800s), and **Protestantism**. Regarding the latter, the **Jamaican Baptist Missionary Society** sent its first worker to Costa Rica in 1887, the **British Methodists** in 1894, the **Anglicans** in 1896, the **Seventh-Day Adventists** in 1903, and **The Salvation Army** in 1907.

The first Protestant worship services were conducted in San José, the nation’s capital, in the 1840s among English-speaking foreigners, mainly American, British and German citizens. The first Protestant chapel, **Church of the Good Shepherd**, was constructed in San José in 1865 to serve the expatriate community. Although this church was founded as a nondenominational worship center, in 1896 it became part of the **Anglican Communion**.

The activities of the **British and Foreign Bible Society**, beginning in 1845, and the **American Bible Society** (1890s) in San José and other major cities helped to promote Bible reading among Costa Ricans, and to strengthen the resolve of early Protestants to maintain their faith in an environment of religious intolerance created by Roman Catholics.

The first Protestant mission agency (nondenominational) to work in the Central Valley of Costa Rica was the **Central American Mission** (now CAM International), founded in Dallas, Texas, by Dr. C. I. Scofield and three friends “to pursue evangelism in Central America.” The first CAM missionary couple was the Rev. and Mrs. William McConnell, who arrived in Port Limón in February of 1891 and relocated to San José, with “a vision to evangelize the nation’s 280,000 souls.” This work progressed very slowly and with great difficulty due to strong opposition from Catholic priests and the general public in the Central Valley.

By 1950, at least 15 Protestant mission agencies had begun work in Costa Rica, including those mentioned previously. Five missionary societies concentrated on West Indians (creoles) along the Caribbean coast, and the other societies devoted their efforts to reaching the Spanish-speaking population, largely in the Central Valley. The **Methodist Episcopal Church** (now part of the United Methodist Church in the USA) arrived in 1917, followed by independent Pentecostal missionaries in 1918 (this work is now under the **Pentecostal Holiness Church International**), the **Latin American Evangelization Campaign** (founded by Harry and Susan Strachan) in 1921, the **Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)** in 1939, the **Church of God International (Cleveland, Tennessee)** also in 1939, the **Southern Baptist Convention** in 1943, the **Assemblies of God** in 1944, the **Pentecostal Church of God** (from Puerto Rico) in 1945, and the **American Baptist Association** in 1946.

1896 - The Anglican-Episcopal Church / *Iglesia Anglicana-Episcopal*

The Anglican Church (headquarters in London, England; aka The Church of England) was one of the first Protestant denominations to begin work in Central America and Panama (originally part of Colombia): the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist was established in Belize City in 1815, and the Cathedral of Christ-by-the-Sea was established in the Port of Colón, Colombia (now Panama), in 1864. However, Anglican chaplains had accompanied British ships to Central American ports-of-call since the 1740s, where several trading posts were established between 1750 and 1800. But it was not until the 1890s that Anglican missionary work began in Costa Rica, although an Anglican chapel had been constructed at Greytown, Nicaragua, in the 1850s, at the mouth of the San Juan River that forms the natural border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

In 1896, Bishop Ormsby of the Anglican Diocese of British Honduras, visited Costa Rica and established Anglican worship in the country for the first time, according to Nelson (1963:78). Ormsby visited Port Limón and San José, where he was invited to send an Anglican priest to serve as pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd – an interdenominational congregation founded in San José in 1848 to serve the growing Protestant community, largely composed of foreign residents – and to send missionaries to Port Limón, where he found many West Indians (creoles) of the Anglican Faith.

After Ormsby's return to Belize City, he arranged for the Rev. H. Alberto Ansell from Jamaica to relocate to Port Limón; Ansell arrived in Costa Rica in May of 1896 and established the Anglican Church in Limón, where Anglicanism prospered, according to Nelson (1963:79). On 28 April 1898, the foundation stone was laid for St. Marks Church in Limón, and the new building was dedicated on 13 November of that year. From Limón, Anglican work expanded among the settlements of West Indians along the Caribbean coast and along the railroad lines that had been built during the 1870s-1880s. The railroad was constructed under the supervision of two North American engineers, Henry Meiggs and Minor Keith, and was completed in December of 1890. After its completion, Keith and others formed the infamous *United Fruit Company* (referred to by Costa Ricans as "Mamita Uni") that developed the banana industry along the Caribbean coast, which required the importation of thousands of experienced banana workers from the English-speaking West Indies (former British colonies), many of whom were Anglicans, Baptists and Methodists.

Of the 15,118 Negroes in Costa Rica in 1950 (according to the census), about 91 percent of them were living along the Caribbean coast of the Province of Limón, where they formed about 33 percent of the population. This coastal area was a steaming jungle when the railroad was built and the Afro-Caribbean peoples arrived to clear the land, plant and care for the young banana stocks, and eventually harvest the crops and ship the fruit via the railroad to Port Limón for export to the USA and Europe. Before the arrival of modern sanitation, the region was rampant with malaria, yellow fever and backwater fever, which were deadly diseases for most Europeans. However, many West Indian Negroes had developed immunities to these diseases and could survive in this damp, hot climate where bananas flourished.

Most of the Negroes living in Costa Rica in 1950 were descended from these West Indian immigrants who settled along the Caribbean coast, and many of their families were Anglicans, Baptists or Methodists when they arrived on these shores. The *Jamaican Baptist Union* began work in Limón in 1887 under the leadership of the Rev. Joshua Heath Sobey, a missionary with the *Jamaican Baptist Missionary Society*; the First Baptist Church was organized on December 2, 1888 with Sobey as its pastor. The *Wesleyan Methodists* from Panama sent the Rev. A. W.

Geddes to Port Limón in 1894 to begin work among the West Indians; the first formal Methodist worship service was held at Cairo, a few miles north of Siquirres on August 20, 1894. After several years of slow beginnings, the Missionary Committee of the *Panama Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Church* (British origins) sent the Rev. Edward Augustus Pitt to Costa Rica in December of 1896, where he remained as missionary pastor for more than 30 years. Also, the *Salvation Army* entered Costa Rica in 1907 from Panama and began work among the West Indians; the first two officers were Captain Palaci (a Peruvian) and Lieutenant Stewart (a West Indian) who established themselves in Limón and began work along the Caribbean coast.

Anglican work in the Province of Limón suffered from numerous problems that were characteristic of that period of history: a migrant population, lack of education among the laity, lack of clergy and few financial resources. In 1947, Anglican work in Costa Rica was transferred from the Diocese of British Honduras to the jurisdiction of the *American Episcopal Missionary District of the Panama Canal Zone* in an effort to obtain more resources for the development of the work in Costa Rica. Although the Church of the Good Shepherd in San José had used an Anglican form of worship since 1896, the church government remained congregational (in keeping with its charter as an interdenominational church), with the church members holding title to the property. But, in 1947, the membership voted to formally affiliate with the Anglican Communion, called the "**Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America**" (PECUSA), and to transfer ownership of its property to the Missionary District of Panama. In 1956, a new Diocese was created, composed of the five Central American countries (excluding British Honduras), under the jurisdiction of the PECUSA, with the Rt. Rev. David E. Richards as the first Bishop.

Following this transition, the Anglican-Episcopal Church of Costa Rica became more evangelistic and began to reach out to the Spanish-speaking population, mainly in the San José metropolitan area. Traditionally, Anglican work in Costa Rica had been among the English-speaking West Indians on the Caribbean coast and among the English-speaking North American and European residents in San José at the Church of the Good Shepherd. In 1959, a Spanish-speaking church was organized in Barrio Cuba, San José, and in 1960 another congregation was established in the eastern suburb of Guadalupe.

As a consequence of these new efforts, the Anglican-Episcopal membership in Costa Rica increased from 956 in 1947 to 1,950 in 1960 (Nelson, 1963:219). By 1978, there were 17 churches and missions with about 2,150 members and 4,200 adherents (Holland, 1981:50). Between 1960 and 1980, the total number of churches and the total membership remained about the same: the denomination was obviously in a holding pattern. Since 1980, the overall church membership has declined, probably due to the demise of the older West Indian constituency and a failure to attract the younger generation. In 1986, church officials reported 14 churches and four missions (18 congregations) with only about 900 members. In March of 2000, there were 17 congregations with about 650 members within the three districts: Limón (7), Siquirres (6) and San José (4). According to the 2013-2014 national study of the Protestant movement in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES, this denomination reported three parishes and 17 congregations, with about 800 members.

In 1968, the Diocese of Central America was divided into separate jurisdictions for each country, thereby forming the Diocese of Costa Rica. Its first Bishop was the Rt. Rev. José Antonio Ramos (Puerto Rican). In 1973, this denomination became incorporated in Costa Rica as "Asociación Misionera de la Iglesia Episcopal Costarricense" (Missionary Association of the Costa Rican Episcopal Church). Between 1978 and 2001, the Bishop of Costa Rica was the Rt. Rev. Cornelius Joshua Wilson (a Costa Rican of West Indian descent), who died of cancer in

2002. The Rt. Rev. Héctor Monterroso González (a Guatemalan) was named Bishop of Costa Rica on 7 June 2003.

1891 - Central America Mission / *Misión Centroamericana*

The first Protestant missionary work among the Spanish-speaking population of Costa Rica was begun by the Central American Mission (CAM), a nondenominational Protestant “faith mission” from Dallas, Texas. CAM was founded in 1890 by Cyrus I. Scofield, a businessman and biblical scholar who was the author of the *Scofield Reference Bible* (SRB) in 1909, using the text of the old King James Version – an English translation of the Christian Bible that was commissioned in 1603 by the Church of England, and completed and published in 1611. Scofield was an adherent of “dispensationalist theology,” which was popularized in the SRB, and believed that the conversion of all humanity was a precondition of Christ's second coming. He founded the CAM with the belief that the conversion of the people of Central America to Protestantism would hasten the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. The CAM organization, while nondenominational, adhered to Dispensationalism and functioned as if it were a denomination in Central America.

Note: *John Nelson Darby* (1800-1882) was an Anglo-Irish Bible teacher, one of the influential figures among the original Plymouth Brethren and the founder of the Exclusive Brethren. He is considered to be the father of modern Dispensationalism.

The CAM's first missionaries were Mr. and Mrs. William Connell, who arrived in Costa Rica in 1891. Their initial ministry in San José was in English, but Spanish-speaking work was soon launched at the urging of Francisco Penzotti of the *American Bible Society*. This was a serious step to take because of the popular idea that Protestantism was alright for Anglo Americans and West Indians (Afro-Caribbean people from the British West Indies), but not for Hispanic Americans. The McConnells were aided by the arrival of three new missionaries in 1893 and five more in 1895.

From the outset, the emphasis of the CAM was on widespread evangelism rather than on church planting. Mission workers preached and distributed Bibles throughout the Central Valley and along the Atlantic coast. Meetings were held in private homes, and it wasn't until 1902 that the first chapel was built. During the early years, the CAM work weathered severe attacks from without by the Roman Catholic clergy and by popular fanaticism. From within, under the leadership of Francis Boyle (1912-1920), the work was divided and frustrated over the issue of Hyper-Dispensationalism.

Note: Hyper-Dispensationalism is the belief that the Christian Church began with the ministry of the Apostle Paul after the early part of the book of *The Acts of the Apostles*; all hyper-dispensationalists view the four Gospels and many of the New Testament Epistles as applying to the pre-Pauline Jewish-Christian church or to the future Davidic Kingdom, and not directly applicable to the predominantly Gentile Church of today.

These factors help to explain why CAM church growth was slow. From 190 baptized believers in 1900, the work grew to 721 members in 1919, with eight organized congregations in five provinces. However, by 1921, few CAM missionaries remained in Costa Rica, and the work, in general, had deteriorated. Only five congregations remained, and all but two national workers had abandoned the missions.

Another twenty years passed with very little church growth; only 300 members were reported in 1937. It was not until the 1940s and 1950s that a new group of missionaries, together with national pastors and workers, brought about an extension and consolidation of CAM work in Costa Rica. The churches and missions founded by CAM were organized as the **Association of Central American Evangelical Churches** (*Asociación de Iglesias Evangélicas Centro-americanas*, AIEC), becoming autonomous in 1948 and almost entirely self-supporting by 1956.

Not until the 1940s, under the leadership of missionary William Taylor, were national workers ordained as pastors and sufficient emphasis given to formal training of Christian workers. CAM church membership increased from 260 in 1935, to 650 in 1955, and by 1960 had reached 1,064.

By the latter date, 27 organized churches had been established, each with a Costa Rican pastor, in addition to 39 "congregations" (equivalent to "missions" in the vocabulary of other denominations), with about 4,200 reported adherents. Due to strict membership requirements, there were only about 1,000 communicant members out of the larger number of adherents.

Whereas the period 1940-1960 was one of slow but sustained growth, between 1960 and 1980 the number of churches and members remained about the same. In 1978, the CAM-AIEC reported 30 churches and 1,117 communicant members, or about the same number as in 1967 (1,123) or in 1960 (1,064). According to CAM missionary James Paul:

Since 1960, the work has been characterized by the principle of "holding the fort". Internal problems have retarded growth and an exodus of membership to new and more aggressive groups has taken place. From without, the Association has been affected by strange doctrines, by forms of both national and international ecumenicalism, by the tongues movement, by liberation theology, and by the normal process of change within Costa Rican society. A defensive stance has tended to dampen the joy, the freedom, and the aggressive extension of the work. (*CAM BULLETIN*, November-December 1977, page 11)

CAM missionary Sigifredo Bieske reported that, on the Pacific coast, CAM lost 10 out of a total of 15 congregations to the Pentecostals during the 1970s and 1980s (Bieske, 1990:13). Bieske characterized the period 1960-1980 in CAM history as "conservative, conformist and lacking dynamism."

However, between 1980 and 1990, CAM-AIEC experienced something of a revitalization, after coming to the realization of some of their shortcomings in a pastoral retreat in 1978. After the late 1970s, some of the older, conservative pastors retired or passed away, while the number of CAM missionaries increased, mainly young couples from the USA (some were reassigned from Nicaragua after the Sandinistas won the civil war against the Somoza dictatorship in 1979), as well as the arrival of new national pastors from other countries, mainly Guatemala and Nicaragua. Also, there was a change in the evangelistic strategy of CAM-AIEC, from planting churches in small towns in rural areas to concentrating on church planting in the growing urban areas of Costa Rica.

Consequently, the work of CAM-AIEC began to show signs of renewal and growth for the first time in several decades. During 1979 alone, CAM-AIEC started 10 new congregations in the San José metropolitan area, which at that time had a population of about 850,000 people. By 1986, the total AIEC membership had grown to about 2,900, or more than double what it was in 1978 (1,122); the total Sunday school attendance in 1986 was about 4,400 among the 50 churches and 14 missions ("missions" are called "congregations" by the AIEC). By 1989, there were 72 churches and missions with a total membership of about 3,420.

However, during the decade of the 1990s, the number of churches and members remained about the same. In March 2000, the AIEC reported a total of 69 churches and missions with about 3,500 members and 5,900 adherents. According to the 2013-2014 national study of the Protestant movement in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES, the AIEC only reported 57 churches and missions with about 3,000 members, which is a decline from what was reported in 2000.

1897 - Seventh-Day Adventist Church / *Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día*

Seventh-Day Adventism began in Costa Rica during the 1890s among the English-speaking West Indian immigrants and their descendants on the Caribbean coast. Adventist missionaries, based in the Bay Islands of Honduras, visited many ports of the Caribbean aboard their missionary schooner "The Herald" during the 1890s, arriving in Port Limón in 1897. Apparently, Elder F. J. Hutchins was the first Adventist to preach and teach in Port Limón, and he was followed by I. G. Knight. By 1903, two Adventist chapels had been established in Costa Rica at Limón and Pacuarito under the supervision of H. Louie Mignott and C. N. Moulton. By 1906, the first Adventist evangelistic efforts had been held in San José by T. M. Brown.

After the headquarters of the *West Indian Union Conference* was transferred from Kingston, Jamaica, to Colón, Panama, in 1908, Costa Rica and other Central American countries began to receive greater attention by Adventist missionaries. In 1921, the Adventists established a primary school in Port Limón. However, early efforts to reach the Spanish-speaking population were sporadic and not very successful. It was not until 1927 that the *Adventist Mission of Costa Rica-Nicaragua* was formally established, with four organized churches and 148 members in Costa Rica. By 1935, there were seven churches with 322 members, predominantly among the English-speaking West Indians on the Caribbean coast.

Although the Seventh-Day Adventist Church grew slowly in Costa Rica prior to 1950, since that time it has become one of the largest Protestant denominations in the nation. By 1955, there were 24 congregations (churches and "groups" or missions) with about 1,450 members. In 1978, 41 congregations and about 5,700 members were reported, and in 1986 there were 46 organized churches and 66 missions (total congregations = 112) with 9,444 members. Prior to 1960, the majority of the Adventist church members were English-speaking West Indians (creoles), but since then a growing number have been Spanish-speaking mestizos. By 1980, the Adventists comprised about 12 percent of the total Protestant population of Costa Rica and was the largest Protestant denomination in the country (Holland, 1981:50).

Although the Seventh-day Adventists are classified as "Protestants" by PROLADES, they are not necessarily known to be "Evangelicals," due to their own exclusiveness as a religious group and to certain doctrinal differences (particularly, honoring the Sabbath and emphasis on certain Old Testament regulations and Bible Prophecy) that have caused many Evangelicals to consider them to be distant cousins at best (see Nelson, 1983:295). The Adventists have always placed strong emphasis on both the mind and body: teaching morality (abstinence = against the use of alcoholic beverages and tobacco) and Bible prophecy (especially regarding the Second Advent = the return of Jesus Christ to establish his earthly kingdom), and emphasizing good physical health (natural health foods and vegetarianism). This historical separation between Adventists and Evangelicals (including Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals) in Costa Rica, and generally throughout Latin America, has been a mutual rejection of one another. Prior to the 1950s, this mutual antagonism was very strong, but since that time there has been greater tolerance and growing mutual understanding between the various Protestant traditions.

One of the significant contributions that the Adventists have made to education in Costa Rica was the founding of the "Colegio Adventista" (primary and secondary levels) in 1927. Although this school was originally founded in Las Cascadas, Panama, in 1925, it was relocated to San José in 1927, then to a site near Tres Ríos in 1932, and finally to its present location at La Ceiba, near the City of Alajuela, in 1950. By 1972, the name of the school was changed to "Centro Adventista de Estudios Superiores" (Adventist Center of Higher Education), and it offered courses that were the equivalent of what the Evangelicals were providing at the Bible institute level. However, since this type and level of instruction was not accredited by the government of Costa Rica, the Adventists began to upgrade their program so that it was able to satisfy government requirements to become a private university in 1986. With approval from the government's Council of Higher Education (CONESUP), the Adventists changed the name of this institution to the *Adventist University of Central America* (UNADECA).

This was the first "Protestant" educational institution in Costa Rica to achieve official "university" status, and it paved the way for two Evangelical programs of theological education also to become private universities in the 1990s: the Nazarene University of the Americas (formerly, the Nazarene Seminary of the Americas) and the Latin American Biblical University (formerly, the Latin American Biblical Seminary).

At the end of 1995, the Adventists reported a total membership of 20,274, and the 1999 annual report (31 December 1999) showed the following: 85 churches and 47 missions (132 congregations) with 31,350 members, 90 percent of which were Spanish-speaking Costa Ricans, 10 percent were English-speaking West Indians, about five percent were Spanish-speaking Nicaraguan immigrants, and about five percent were Bribri-speaking Amerindians. In 2000, this religious group was the second-largest Protestant denomination in Costa Rica. According to the 2013-2014 national study of the Protestant movement in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES, the Seventh-day Adventist Church reported 209 churches and missions with 66,516 members; it retained its position as the second-largest Protestant denomination in the country.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates six primary schools and three secondary schools ("colegios") throughout the country. At the UNADECA campus at La Ceiba, located near the city of Alajuela, this denomination operates the *Adventist World Radio* (short-wave), which covers the Americas, as well as a local radio station (Radio Lira) that covers about 80 percent of Costa Rican territory. In addition, at least 29 Adventist pastors and lay workers from Costa Rica were serving in other countries, including 11 in the USA and 13 in other Central American countries.

1917 - Methodist Episcopal Church / *Iglesia Metodista de Costa Rica*

The Methodist Episcopal Board of Foreign Missions began work in Costa Rica in 1917, with the arrival of George Amos Miller from Panama and Eduardo Zapata from Mexico. Although Miller returned to Panama, Zapata remained in Costa Rica and began missionary work. That year, the first Methodist congregation was founded in the home of Modesto Le Roy in San José, which later became the "Church of the Redeemer" in 1919. Zapata labored in Costa Rica until mid-1918, when he replaced by the Rev. Sidney Edwards of Puerto Rico. During his second visit to Costa Rica, in 1919, Miller (with funds from the Methodist Mission Board) purchased a piece of property on Avenida Central in San José that formerly housed the Club Catalán, which was converted into the first Methodist church building in the Central Valley. Later, it was on this property that the new Church of the Redeemer was built and dedicated in 1925, under the pastorate of the Rev. Carlos Alpízar.

Under the bishopric of W. P. Thirkfield, from 1920-1924, new missionaries arrived and new worship centers were opened. During the 1920s, new churches were founded in the San José metropolitan area (Barrio México and Guadalupe) and in other communities of the Central Valley (such as Cartago and Alajuela). During the 1930s, work was begun in the southwestern coastal plain (Puntarenas province) where the *United Fruit Company* was developing new banana plantations (Golfito, Sierpe and Puerto Cortés). However, by 1937, only 262 "members in good standing" were reported in Costa Rica by Methodist Church officials. According to Costa Rica Church historian Dr. Wilton Nelson:

The weakness of the Methodists seems to have been the opposite of that of the Central American Mission. The latter did widespread evangelism without proper church organization. The former had highly developed organization but lacked evangelistic zeal. About 1934, a change took place and an interest in evangelism began to manifest itself among the Methodists and resulted in expansion into new areas. (Nelson, 1963:165)

In 1937, the Methodists appointed the first two Costa Ricans as pastors. Nelson states that "the development of national workers and leaders was much slower than in the Central American Mission" (1963:167). In 1944, for the first time, a national was named as superintendent of the Costa Rican District of the "Central American Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church," which included the districts of Costa Rica and Panama. The Methodists were also slow in developing self-supporting churches, since it was not until 1954 that the first church in the district achieved this goal.

During the 1950s, new churches were established in Concepción de Alajuelita and Hatillo by pastor Juan Sosa and missionary Marion Woods, and in San Juan de Tibás, San Sebastián and San Pedro, all of which are in the San José metropolitan area. In addition, Methodist work continued to grow in the "southern banana zone" of Puntarenas province, where new churches were planted in Palmar Sur, Villa Briceño, Pueblo Nuevo de Coto, Pueblo Civil de Golfito, Buenos Aires, Piedras Blancas, Maiz, Camíbar, Kilómetro 31, Ollacero, Villa Neilly, Coto 47 and Río Claro. In 1962, a Methodist church was also established in San Isidro de El General (San José province), in the southern region.

Although most of the members of these new churches were employees of banana and African Palm oil plantations, many of the workers were migratory and did not remain for long in the hot, coastal plains. There was a seasonal migration of farm workers between the banana-growing areas in the lowlands and the coffee-growing areas in the highlands. Many of those who were converted in Methodist congregations in the southern banana zone eventually migrated to other parts of the country, where there were no Methodist churches, and became members of other Protestant denominations.

Methodists have always stressed the social implications of the Gospel, and Methodism in Costa Rica is no exception to the rule. In the first Annual Conference, social service and temperance committees were established. Boy Scout troops and Camp Fire Girl groups were developed in 1923. Since 1921, the *Methodist School* (bilingual in English-Spanish) in San Pedro has provided quality primary and secondary education for middle and upper-class students, who have later become part of the new generation of leaders within Costa Rican society. Many parents who would not darken the door of an Evangelical church sent their children to this school, thereby removing prejudice and creating a good public image for the growing evangelical community. In 1953, an agricultural project was initiated in San Carlos, known as the *Methodist Rural Center*.

The Central America Conference of the Methodist Church established, in Alajuela, a "School for the Preparation of Methodist Workers," beginning in 1957, with twelve students from Costa Rica and Panama. This school was operated until the late 1960s, and the facilities are still used as a retreat and training center for the Methodists and other groups. More recently, the denomination has reestablished a school for training pastors and lay workers: the *Evangelical Methodist Seminary* (Bible institute level) was founded at the Alajuela facility in 1990.

Although historically church growth among the Methodists has been rather slow, the work has been notably well organized. From the first Conference report in 1920, when 49 communicant members were reported, the Methodists grew to 262 in 1937, 633 in 1955, and by 1960 numbered 865. Only 88 members were added by 1967 (953), and only 1,135 members were reported in 1978. In 1967, 19 churches were reported to exist. Between 1967 and 1978, the Methodists had an annual growth rate of only 1.8 percent, which is less than the natural population increase of 3.5 percent.

There is evidence of more substantial growth during the 1980s-1990s. By 1983, there were 1,266 members, and by 1986 the membership had increased to 1,378 among 20 churches and seven missions (23 congregations). However, by 1989, the Methodist Church reported 25 churches and 23 missions (48 congregations), with about 1,568 members. By March 2000, there were 50 congregations and missions with about 5,000 adherents (no official membership data was reported). According to the 2013-2014 national study of the Protestant movement in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES, the Methodist Church reported 110 churches and missions with about 20,000 adherents.

A number of tensions among the Methodists in Costa Rica, as well as among other denominations, have led to conflicts between those who have favored "Liberation Theology" and those who have opposed it, between those caught up in the Charismatic Renewal movement and those who opposed the *Pentecostalization* of their churches, between traditional Liberals and Conservatives, etc. During the 1980s, several pastors who supported Liberation Theology left the Methodist Church due to conflicts with their more conservative brethren. In 1989, a Methodist pastor in Heredia left the **Methodist Conference of Costa Rica** (affiliated with the *United Methodist Church* in the USA) and became affiliated with the *Free Methodist Church of North America*; during the 1990s, four other churches were founded by, or became affiliated with, the **Free Methodist Church** in Costa Rica.

The Methodist Conference of Costa Rica has actively participated in the Costa Rican Evangelical Alliance (AECR), which in 2000 included about 100 members (denominations, independent churches and service agencies). For many years, Methodist Bishop Fernando Palomo served as President of the AECR Board of Directors and had a very active role in promoting cooperation and unity among Evangelicals.

1918 - Pentecostal Holiness Association / Pentecostal Holiness Church (1950)

The first Pentecostal missionaries to arrive in Costa Rica were Mr. and Mrs. James Hare, affiliated with the **Pentecostal Holiness Association** (PHA), according to Nelson (1983:270), although they only remained for a few months during 1918. However, in 1926, the Hares returned and established their first church in Cartago.

According to Luisa Jeter de Walker (1990:173-174), missionaries Paul and Evelina Derr served in Costa Rica under the auspices of the "Pentecostal Holiness Church" between 1926 and 1928 before being reassigned to work in Africa. In the *Pentecostal Evangel* of 6 August 1927,

there is mention of “an evangelical awakening” in Costa Rica during the evangelistic campaign of Ángel Archilla Cabrera, a Costa Rican evangelist. Paul Derr wrote the following:

José María Barrantes, whose address is Cartago, Costa Rica, is the first in this country to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The first two nights that he prayed for baptism, he received beautiful visions from the beloved Lord, and the third night he was filled like the disciples of old. Mr. Barrantes has the fire of God and feels called to preach to his people as soon as God opens the way.

Two additional Pentecostal missionaries arrived in Costa Rica during the 1930s. Miss Carrie Zeisloft came to Costa Rica in 1930 and served as pastor of the Cartago congregation for eight years; it is not known how long the Hares remained in Costa Rica, but in the mid-1930s they apparently were working with a few small churches in northern Guatemala (Pruitte, no date, page 4). Encouraged by the Hares, veteran missionary Amos Bradley arrived in Costa Rica in 1936, affiliated with the PHA, after having served as an independent missionary in Guatemala and El Salvador since 1908.

Apparently, Bradley and Zeisloft decided to work independently of each other, she in Cartago and he in San José. According to Wilton Nelson, Bradley formed “a few unstable congregations in the San José area during the 1940s” (Nelson 1983:270-271). According to Pruitte, these small congregations were located in the provinces of San José (Cinco Esquinas de Tibás, Barrio Cuba, Plaza Víques, Desamparados and Santa Ana) and Heredia, and Bradley was assisted by a “native worker,” don Víctor Ramos (Pruitte, no date, page 4). Because of her illness, Mrs. Bradley remained in the USA during all of Amos’ ministry in Costa Rica.

In 1950, Bradley rejoined the **Pentecostal Holiness Church** (PHC) in the USA (he had been affiliated with the PHC from 1912 to 1919) and requested that the PHC Mission Board, a different group than the Pentecostal Holiness Association, take over his mission work in Costa Rica, probably due to a lack of support from the PHA. After considering this request, the PHC responded affirmatively and sent the Rev. John Parker and his family to Costa Rica in 1951. At that time, Bradley was the supervisor of two organized churches (with two parsonages) and seven “preaching points.”

Parker, who was appointed the field superintendent after Bradley died in 1955, had some success during those first, difficult years; the work grew from a total of 44 church members in 1952 to 180 in 1960, and reached 1,104 in 1974. Mrs. Charlene West (her pastor husband was deceased) and her family arrived in Costa Rica in 1974 and replaced Parker as superintendent. By 1978, there were only 26 churches with about 1,100 members (Holland, 1981:50) and a Bible Institute had been established in Santa Ana, located in the Central Valley to the west of the capital city.

In March 2000, the PHC reported a total of 76 churches in Costa Rica with about 3,800 members (an average of about 50 members per congregation), which is an indication of solid church growth between 1978 and 2000. However, little information has been written about the historical development of these churches. According to the 2013-2014 national study of the Protestant movement in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES, the **Pentecostal Holiness Church Costa Rican Conference** (*Asociación Iglesia Santidad Pentecostal Conferencia de Costa Rica*) reported 85 churches and missions with about 5,000 members (an average of 59 members per congregation).

1921 - Latin America Mission / *Misión Latinoamericana*

The interdenominational *Latin America Evangelization Campaign*, later known as the Latin America Mission (LAM), entered Costa Rica in 1921, under the leadership of Harry and Susan Strachan of Scottish Presbyterian heritage. The mission began as a promoter of evangelistic campaigns throughout Latin America, and soon came to have a major role in pulling the evangelical movement in Costa Rica out of its impasse and stagnation. This was accomplished by means of local evangelistic campaigns and the cooperative institutional efforts promoted by the Strachans .

Harry and Susan Strachan, who had served in Argentina under the *Regions Beyond Missionary Union*, established the headquarters of their new mission in San José for the express purpose of engaging in: (1) Systematic evangelistic campaigns in the larger cities and towns of Latin America, to be held in tents, theatres, halls, or in the open air, to attract people who would normally not come to a building associated with religious services; (2) Itinerant evangelization to be carried out simultaneously, covering the district surrounding the center where the campaign is held; (3) Training of native workers (Nelson, 1962:175). Some of the best evangelists of Latin America were recruited as preachers for the campaigns that were carried out between 1921 and 1934 in Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Morocco. According to Nelson, "These campaigns may well have constituted one of the factors that pulled the Evangelical Movement in all Latin America out of its decades of doldrums and started it on its modern period of phenomenal growth" (1962:176) .

Such campaigns were held in Costa Rica with Juan Varetto in 1922 and with Angel Archilla Cabrera in 1927. During the first campaign, there was no organized opposition, and people from all social classes packed out the largest theatre in San José. But the second campaign in 1927 provoked a great religious controversy, with public defamation of Protestants by Catholic priests through articles in local newspapers and printed handbills. However, this seemed to encourage people to attend the meetings held in a San José lumberyard, where 1,400 overflowed the meeting place. The Archilla campaign contributed greatly to the advancement of the evangelical movement in Costa Rica, because sympathy for the evangelical cause had been created, and hundreds had been converted. New converts were so numerous that the existing churches could not care for them, which motivated the Strachans to build a large tabernacle-like structure in 1929, seating about 800 people. This was the origin of the Bible Temple in San José that served as an "evangelistic center" for the extension of the work in the capital and to outlying areas.

Before coming to Costa Rica, the Strachans had traveled throughout Latin America in 1920 to survey the status of evangelical work. One of their conclusions was that Bible institutes and seminaries were few in Latin America, and that an urgent need existed to train national workers. During the campaigns, this need was met by holding short-term Bible institutes in the mornings, concurrently with the evangelistic meetings in the evenings. They also established a Women's Bible Training School in the Strachan home in San José, beginning in 1923 with eight students.

In 1924, when a two-story structure was built for the Training School, Harry Strachan brought down eight young men from Nicaragua and converted the school into a "Bible Institute." By 1925, the Institute was functioning with 19 students and a faculty composed of missionaries of the Central American Mission, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Latin America Evangelistic Campaign. This interdenominational Institute met a long-felt need and was well received in evangelical circles, resulting in many Missions deciding to send students to the school. In 1930, there were forty students, representing eleven countries and eight denominations or missions. The name was changed to the "Latin America Biblical Seminary" in 1941, when its

academic standards were raised to meet the growing needs of the evangelical movement.

Other ministries were created by the Latin America Evangelization Crusade to further Protestant Mission work in Costa Rica and Latin America. In 1926, a Spanish literature ministry was initiated that grew to become the *Editorial Caribe/LAMP* (Latin America Mission Publications) in 1948, that became one of the most important publishers and distributors of evangelical literature in Latin America. By 1961, LAMP bookstores had been formed in Port Limón, Panama City and New York City, in addition to the original bookstore founded in San José in 1953. Editorial Caribe continued to expand and increase its effectiveness; however, its offices were moved to Miami in 1970 to better serve the growing literature market throughout Latin America.

The Bible Clinic (now, *Hospital Clínica Bíblica*) was constructed in 1929 to care for believers who needed hospitalization, since prejudice was so strong against evangelicals that they were sometimes refused entrance to government hospitals or, once interned, were neglected. Although Costa Rica was becoming more liberal, fanaticism still persisted in many of the state and Catholic institutions. In addition, loving care of the sick and helpless in an evangelical hospital resulted, both directly and indirectly, in winning many to the Lord and improving the public image of the evangelical movement in Costa Rica. The Bible Clinic grew out of a small nursing school that was established by the Mission in 1928, under the direction of missionary and national nurses. Many leading Costa Rican doctors have practiced medicine at the Bible Clinic, including a growing number of Protestant doctors who are Costa Ricans. A new hospital building was added to the older facilities in 1975, which doubled the capacity to over 60 beds. Since 1968, the hospital has been entirely under national management.

Susan Strachan had a great concern for sick and homeless children, and in 1931, when a two-hundred-acre dairy and coffee farm was purchased by the Mission, her dreams were fulfilled by the establishment of an evangelical orphanage, called the *Bible Home*, in San José de la Montaña. Hundreds of orphaned and abandoned Costa Rican children have been cared for by the Bible Home, some of whom have become outstanding evangelical leaders. In 1947, a camping ministry was added to the work of the LAM, utilizing part of the Mission farm. *Camp Roblealto* thus became one of the earliest such camping ministries in all of Latin America.

The decade of the 1940s brought many changes to the *Latin America Evangelization Crusade*. In 1941, the name was changed to "The Latin America Mission" (LAM) to reflect the expanding interests and ministries of the Mission. With the death of Harry Strachan in 1945, his son, Kenneth, became co-director of the LAM along with his mother, Susan. When Mrs. Strachan passed away in 1950, Kenneth became the General Director.

The 1940s also brought the organization of the **Association of Costa Rican Bible Churches** (AIBC – *Asociación de Iglesias Bíblicas Costarricenses*), which grew out of the LAM's evangelistic work. Although it was not the Strachan's intention to plant churches, the expansion occurred naturally resulting from evangelistic work by students and faculty of the Bible Institute and from evangelistic campaigns sponsored by the Mission. During the 1920s and 1930s, local congregations were formed in the Central Valley and in the northwestern coastal province of Guanacaste. The Bible Temple in San José remained the center of these efforts, with the distinction of being the largest evangelical church in the country until the 1980s.

In 1945, the AIBC was formed with 14 churches and 406 baptized members, however, the number of adherents was considerably larger. The LAM, during its early years of evangelistic enthusiasm, did not adequately follow-up and consolidate the gains made in evangelism by organizing new believers into local congregations. This lack of proper ecclesiastical organization was a common defect of independent missions, such as the CAM and the LAM, and stemmed

from an inadequate concept of the importance of the local church.

The first LAM missionary to see this weakness was Kenneth Strachan, who initiated the preliminary steps that led to the formation of the AIBC in the mid-1940s. However, many of the founding congregations of the AIBC had only been organized locally the year before, when the first Latin American pastors were ordained. By 1959, much progress had been made toward self-support among the AIBC.

In 1960, the AIBC had 13 churches, 18 missions and 37 preaching points, with a total membership of 1,055. During the 1950s, a large number of rapidly growing missions, mostly daughter-congregations of the Bible Temple, had been planted in the San José metropolitan area, many of which later became flourishing churches.

By 1967, the membership of the AIBC had grown to 1,574, in 1974 to 3,470 and by 1978 had reached 3,984 with 44 churches, 18 missions and at least 34 preaching points. The annual membership growth between 1967 and 1978 was 9.7 percent (AAGR = Average Annual Growth Rate). Most of these congregations were located in the Central Valley and in the provinces of Guanacaste and Alajuela (especially in the San Carlos plains).

Beginning in the early 1970s, the AIBC began to experience the impact of the growing Charismatic Renewal movement in North and South America, which resulted in the *Pentecostalization* of the many of the AIBC congregations throughout Costa Rica. The Bible Temple was the first AIBC church to hear testimonies in the pulpit from Charismatic leaders, both Protestants and Catholics, from the USA and Argentina regarding the "New Pentecostal Revival" that was spreading around the world. During the 1970s, the "Renewal Movement," as it was called in Costa Rica, had a large impact on many non-Pentecostal denominations, like the AIBC, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Convention and other groups. While many local congregations began to exhibit Neo-Pentecostal tendencies, others rejected these influences and became strongly anti-Charismatic. For years many AIBC congregations struggled over this issue: some experienced conflicts and divisions and lost members to other churches, while others were unified and prospered. By and large, the AIBC became identified with the Neo-Pentecostal movement by the late 1970s.

However, during the 1970s and 1980s, other conflicts emerged that caused serious damage to people and organizations and led to the first real schism within the ranks of the AIBC. Liberation Theology (LT) became a controversial issue in the mid-1970s among evangelicals in general and, in particular, among the faculty and students of the Latin American Biblical Seminary (LABS) in San José, a school founded by the LAM in the 1920s that trained pastors and Christian leaders from many denominations and not just from the AIBC. The pro-LT and anti-LT factions waged verbal warfare against each other, with the result that many individuals were slandered and many evangelical organizations were divided over this issue, including missionaries of the LAM and of other mission agencies.

By the late-1970s, a number of professors had resigned from the LABS who were opposed to, or not comfortable with, the teaching of LT, which left the majority of the remaining professors united and supportive of LT. At the same time, many denominations in Costa Rica that were opposed to LT, as well as national churches and mission agencies in other countries, stopped sending their leaders to the LABS.

This controversy also affected the AIBC as several of the LABS professors were also pastors in AIBC churches, and the issue of LT was hotly debated within the leadership of the AIBC for several years. Finally, in 1985, a group of five pastors and their churches withdrew from the AIBC and founded a new association of churches: the **Costa Rican Fraternity of Evangelical Churches** (FIEC, *Fraternidad de Iglesias Evangélicas Costarricenses*).

The FIEC became affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in the USA, as well as a member of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI, in Spanish) and the Association of Reformed and Presbyterian Churches in Latin America (AIPRAL, in Spanish). At the end of 1988, FIEC reported nine churches and one mission, with a total of about 400 members. In March 2000, there were 24 churches with about 1,700 members affiliated with FIEC. In 2014, the FIEC (renamed the **Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Costa Rica** / *Iglesia Evangélica Presbiteriana de Costa Rica*) failed to report its statistics.

Meanwhile, the AIBC continued to expand geographically and grow in membership. In 1983, the AIBC reported 52 churches and 18 missions in Costa Rica, with about 5,700 baptized members; and, in 1989, the total membership was about 6,000 in 70 congregations. In 1989, there were 109 congregations (75 churches and 34 missions) with about 9,350 members. In March 2000, the AIBC reported 134 congregations (churches and missions) with 8,772 members (an average of 66 members per church).

According to the 2013-2014 national study of the Protestant movement in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES, the AIBC reported 145 churches and missions with 25,561 members (an average of 176 members per church). These reports indicate that the AIBC membership had increased significantly between 2000 and 2013 (an increase of 16,789 members) while adding only 11 new congregations.

Part of this increase was due to the growth of the Bible Temple in downtown San José, which had become a charismatic mega-church with an average attendance of about 2,400 in three Sunday worship services, in an auditorium that only had seating for 800 in each service. By January 2016, the leaders of the Bible Temple had acquired a new, larger facility (a former warehouse) in Cinco Esquinas de Tibás, a northern suburb of San José, and sold the old Bible Temple property that had been purchased by the Latin America Mission 88-years previously (1928) and had served as the “mother” congregation of the AIBC. The new auditorium seats about 3,000 people and the congregation now has a team of eight pastors, under the dynamic leadership of the Rev. Reynaldo Salazar (formerly a pastor and district superintendent with the Church of God – Cleveland, TN).

1926 - Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) / *Iglesia de Dios-Anderson, IN*

One of the early denominations that has not prospered in Costa Rican soil is the **Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)** due to a lack of financial and human resources. Not much is known about its early history, but in 1978 its leaders reported four churches, two missions and seven “campos blancos” (preaching points), with a total of 162 members. During the 1970s, the work was strengthened by the arrival of missionary Keith Plank as well as by Harry and Jene Nachtigall who had previously served as missionaries in Africa. The fruit of their labors is seen in their 1986 report, which listed seven organized churches with a total 183 members. The Nachtigalls provided leadership for the development of a central church in Barrio Tiribí, Paso Ancho (a southern suburb of San José), which offered the services of a community center and recreational facilities for the youth. However, by 1990, there were only eight organized churches with a total 198 members (an average of 25 members per church). More progress was made during the 1990s and 2000s. By the year 2000, the membership had increased to 702 among nine churches, one mission and four preaching points. By 2013, there were 15 churches and three preaching points with a total of 1,500 members, under the leadership of President Irma Drummond, who was pastor of the Church of God in Siquirres, Limón province.

The Church of God, with offices in Anderson, Indiana, USA, began in 1881 as a movement that emphasizes unity and holiness. Early leaders like Daniel S. Warner and Mary Cole sought to abandon denominational hierarchies and formal creeds, relying solely on the Holy Spirit as their overseer, and on the Bible as their doctrinal statement. These individuals saw themselves at the forefront of a movement to restore unity and holiness to the Church of God.

1937 - Church of God (Cleveland, TN) / *Iglesia de Dios Evangelio Completo*

"The Church of God" (a Pentecostal denomination with international headquarters in Cleveland, Tennessee, USA) began its mission work in Limón in 1935 after it took under its protection a small congregation of 14 members, who were English-speaking Creoles (Afro-American immigrants and their descendants from the British West Indies). The congregation was founded by a former Salvation Army worker, Rosabelle Dandie, who received the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" in 1927. The first Pentecostal temple in Costa Rica was built in Limón in 1933, thanks to the help of a plantation owner who also donated another property for the poor members of this congregation to raise their crops. Pastor Dandie remained in the leadership of this congregation until at least 1948 when missionary Graham L. Stillwell and his wife preached there for several weeks (Charles W. Conn, *Where the Saints Have Trod: A History of Church of God Missions*, 1959: 151-152).

In 1950, Noel de Sousa, a young, bilingual Panamanian missionary, arrived to further develop the work of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN). The first Spanish-speaking church was organized in San José in 1951, and by 1955 four churches with 281 members were reported. However, Wilton Nelson states that "during its first years this group was notorious for its proselytizing activities and an extreme form of Pentecostalism" (1962:224). Noel de Sousa was reportedly arrested some 40 times because of his preaching in public places. This "scandalous behavior" did not enjoy the respect of other evangelical groups, and even fellow Pentecostals protested. This situation led to the formation of a number of splinter groups.

However, with the arrival from Guatemala of the Rev. Jaime Aldama in 1959, the work of the Church of God took on a more serious character. Under Aldama's leadership, the Church of God became more identified with the evangelical movement in Costa Rica, especially after their participation in the 1960-61 Evangelism-in-Depth campaign, sponsored by the Latin America Mission. By 1967, the work had expanded to include 14 congregations and 835 members, with over 2,000 reportedly attending Sunday school. In 1974, the national membership totaled 1,235 and by 1978 it had increased to 2,100 distributed among 48 organized churches and 17 missions (an average of 32 members per congregation). Between 1967 and 1978, the total national membership grew by 9.7 percent per year. The main San José church is located in Barrio Cristo Rey, where the Church of God has its offices and operates a Bible Institute.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Church of God (known in Costa Rica as the Full Gospel Church of God – *Iglesia de Dios Evangelio Completo, IDEC*) continued to expand geographically, as well as experiencing an increase in the total number of congregations and membership. By 1983, there were 236 churches and missions with about 9,145 members (an average 39 members per church); by 1986, there were 324 churches and missions with about 12,700 members. However, in 1989, denominational officials reported only 301 churches and missions (a decline of 23) but with an increase of 800 members, for a total membership of 13,500.

In March 2000, this denomination reported 19,000 members and 380 churches in Costa Rica (an average of 50 members per church), which made it the third-largest Protestant denomination

in Costa Rica. According to the 2013-2014 national study of the Protestant movement in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES, the IDEC reported 364 churches and missions (a decline of 16) with 37,330 members (an increase of 18,830, with an average of 104 members per church). If these statistics are accurate, this denomination experienced significant growth in its membership but with a slight decline in the number of churches and missions. On 13 September 2012, the Rev. José Flores Escobar became the national supervisor of the IDEC in Costa Rica, now with three territories: central, pacific and atlantic.

1942 - Assemblies of God (1942) / *Asociación Cristiana de las Asambleas de Dios*

The largest Protestant denomination in Costa Rica today, the Assemblies of God (AoG), was established by the Rev. and Mrs. Lawrence Perrault in 1942. By 1944, several missions had been established in San José, Alajuela and Puntarenas. The Assemblies of God workers also experienced some difficulties during these early years, mainly due to the novelty of Pentecostalism in Costa Rica but also due in part to the attitudes and policies of their missionaries. Some of the first national workers were pastors who had served with other Missions, but who were recruited by the Assemblies of God after professing the Pentecostal experience. However, this initial period of non-cordial relationships was soon overcome when Perrault left and Arthur Bauer took his place. The latter demonstrated a friendly and cooperative spirit, which has been true of most of the missionaries who have arrived since Bauer. When the Costa Rican Evangelical Alliance was formed in 1950, the Assemblies of God was a charter member.

In 1945, the AoG expanded their work to the town of San Isidro de El General, an important market center located on the Pan-American Highway to the south of San José. This led to the development of the work in the large southwestern sector of Costa Rica, an agriculturally-rich area that was attracting many colonists, including a group of Italians who settled in a mountain valley near San Vito. This region was practically untouched by other Protestant groups, except for the Methodists. Here, the AoG found a large field for evangelism and church planting. By 1956, eleven churches had been formed in this region, mainly cared for by new workers who had been trained in the new AoG Bible Institute in the northeastern Moravia district of San José.

During the period 1946 to 1952, very little progress was made in opening new work by the Assemblies of God in Costa Rica. This was mainly due to a lack of national workers, which kept missionaries tied down to pastoral responsibilities. However, by 1950, a national pastor was appointed to the main church in San José, and two years later the same occurred in Alajuela, which freed missionaries to develop work in new fields. The establishment, in 1953, of the AoG Bible Institute in Moravia, under the direction of David Kensinger, led to the development of trained national pastors and provided new workers for church expansion in the southwest region.

Between 1953 and 1980, the AoG grew to become the largest Pentecostal denomination in Costa Rica, and the second-largest Protestant denomination after the Seventh-Day Adventists. From 189 baptized believers in 1953, the work grew to 556 members in 1960, and by 1967 a total membership of 846 was reported. Between 1967 and 1978, the national membership grew by 19.2 percent per year, which was the highest rate of growth among the larger denominations. AoG membership more than doubled between 1974 and 1978, from 2,128 to 4,492, with 120 congregations in existence by 1978.

Much of this recent growth has been due to concentrated evangelistic efforts since 1970 in the San José metro area and throughout the Central Valley, which have met with considerable success. Several large new churches, such as those in Desamparados and Moravia, have been planted after a year of conducting an extended evangelistic campaign with wide publicity from

radio, TV, and newspaper advertisements. Thousands were drawn to the meetings by a strong emphasis on divine healing, and hundreds stayed on to become founding members of the new churches. Special training sessions were held for new converts before the evening evangelistic services, and new leaders were prepared to teach Sunday school classes and to shepherd the new congregations. In 1980, one of San José's largest churches, the La Gran Campaña de Desamparados, reported more than 500 baptized members, and with 800 to 1,000 in regular attendance. Many new churches and missions have been started by means of these extended evangelistic campaigns throughout Costa Rica, combined with the zeal of young, new pastors who were trained in the AoG Bible Institute in Moravia.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the growth of the Assemblies of God in Costa Rica was even more spectacular. By 1983, the total membership was reported to be 11,691 (in about 300 congregations); by 1986, it had increased to about 18,000 (in about 325 congregations). However, in 1989, denominational officials reported only 228 churches and 17,268 members. Nevertheless, there is evidence of a surge of growth during the 1990s. In March 2000, the Assemblies of God reported 294 congregations with about 46,900 members in Costa Rica, which made this religious group the largest Protestant denomination in the nation.

If the statistics are correct, then this denomination grew significantly by planting many new congregations (geographical expansion), as well as by attracting more people to the existing churches. Part of this church growth can be attributed to an increase in membership among some of the suburban congregations in the San José metro area. In 2000, the largest AoG congregation in the nation was reported to be *Iglesia Oasis de Esperanza* (with about 3,500 members) in Moravia, a suburb of San José; the pastor and his congregation could be seen on a weekly local TV program. In addition, the Assemblies of God have been successful in founding many private Christian schools under the sponsorship of a local church in the Central Valley.

By 2014, the AoG reported a total membership of about 80,000 in 514 churches and missions nationally (an average of 156 members per congregation), which was the largest Protestant denomination in Costa Rica. Also, the AoG has been successful in growing mega-churches in the San José metro area: *Iglesia Oasis de Esperanza* in Moravia, under the leadership of pastor Raúl Vargas, had an average Sunday attendance of 5,250 in October 2011; and the *Centro Evangelístico de Zapote*, under the leadership of pastor Hugo Solís, had an average Sunday attendance of 4,000 in October 2011. (Source: May and Holland 2011)

1944 - Southern Baptist-Related Churches

One of the largest of the ten Baptist groups in Costa Rica is the work historically related to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in the USA. Their first church in Costa Rica was a group that broke away from the Central American Mission in 1943, under the leadership of Aurelio Gutiérrez, who was appointed to the Home Mission Board in 1944. During this early period, the doctrine of "Landmarkism" was especially strong, which brought ill repute upon the Baptists because they taught that "Baptists, especially Southern Baptists, constitute the only true and legitimate succession of the Apostolic Church" (Nelson 1962:229). Many of the early Baptists in Costa Rica had been "converted" from other evangelical groups. However, dissent soon arose within the new Baptist movement, which led to the formation of a splinter group, known as the **National Baptist Church**, in 1945.

Note: **Landmarkism** is a type of Baptist ecclesiology developed in the Southern USA in the mid-19th century that advocates a strong version of the "perpetuity theory of Baptist origins" that claims

an unbroken continuity and unique legitimacy to the Baptist movement since the apostolic period. It includes belief in the exclusive validity of Baptist churches and invalidity of non-Baptist liturgical forms and practices. It has led to intense debates and splits in the Baptist community.

From 1944 to 1948, Gutiérrez was the only resident SBC missionary, but the Rev. Van Earl Hughes was sent to Costa Rica in late 1947. With his arrival, the former policy of *Landmarkism* began to change, and relationships improved with other evangelical groups. Although the **Baptist Convention of Costa Rica** (CBCR, *Convención Bautista de Costa Rica*) did not become affiliated with the Costa Rican Evangelical Alliance when it was formed in 1950, the CBCR did cooperate wholeheartedly in the Evangelism-in-Depth campaign in Costa Rica during 1960-61.

The expansion of the Baptist work began in 1944 when missions were begun in Cinco Esquinas, Moravia, Puriscal and Nicoya, and the following year in Limón, Naranjo and Alajuela. The first Annual Convention of the CBCR was held in 1946 with representatives from six churches and missions. By 1949, when the CBCR was transferred to the **Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention** (FMBSBC), there were three organized churches and six missions, with about 220 members.

The period 1950-60 was marked by the organization of six new churches, the construction of new church buildings, the initiation of a theological seminary, and the paternalistic administrative and economic policy by the FMBSBC. Funds for the purchase of property and the construction of new temples, as well as pastoral salaries, all came from the FMBSBC, with very little economic participation from the local churches. After the founding of the Baptist Theological Seminary in 1951, new fields were opened by the graduates with the economic support of the Mission. However, the work suffered a setback in 1955 when Gutiérrez led a breakaway movement that became affiliated with the **World Baptist Fellowship**. By 1960, however, new churches and missions had been added to the work that had grown to 613 official members and a Sunday school attendance of 1,278. By 1962, a total of 867 members were reported by all the churches and missions in Costa Rica related to the CBCR.

Beginning in 1957, there was a turnover in missionary personnel, with nine new couples arriving by 1979. Among them were seminary professors, literature workers, general missionaries, urban church developers and pioneer workers. Three new fields were opened by evangelistic missionaries (church planters) in Turrialba, San Ramón and San Isidro. Baptist bookstores were established in the cities of San José (1958) and San Ramón (1960). Since 1966, an excellent campground has been developed by the Southern Baptist Mission in San Rafael de Ojo de Agua, which was used by many different groups.

Beginning in 1960, the Southern Baptist Mission began a ten-year program aimed at self-support of national workers and programs, which created a crisis in missionary-national relationships. During 1963, several pastors resigned in protest, but the churches generally accepted the responsibility of self-support. The CBCR, since 1966, had administered the funds sent through the SBFMB for church work in Costa Rica and for its various institutions (Baptist Theological Institute, Baptist Camp and bookstores) and programs (social, youth and evangelistic work). By 1973, most of the churches were self-supporting, although many of the pastors were working part-time outside the church. However, lay participation increased, and the churches continued to grow both in number and membership.

Between 1967 and 1978, the CBCR had a 6.7 percent average annual growth rate (AAGR), increasing from 1,107 members in 1967 to 1,626 in 1974, and 2,260 members were reported in 1978. By 1978, there were 27 organized churches and 13 missions (40 congregations).

Other groups of Baptists in Costa Rica in 1980 were: Baptist Association of America (Walter Goulding: 13 churches and 540 members); Baptist Missionary Association of America (Robert Heflin: 295 members); Baptist International Mission (William Murdock: 227 members); World Baptist Association (William Tabor: 212 members), and several other independent groups related to the Baptist Bible Fellowship in the USA.

In 1980 (Note: this is the date given by Bieske, page 44; but it appears that the rupture occurred in the Annual Convention of 1979; see Nelson, page 290), the CBCR had a falling out with the FMBSBC in the USA, and the former became independent of the latter. The main problem seems to have been a breakdown in relationships between the missionaries (related to the Foreign Mission Board) and the national pastors (related to the national Baptist Convention) over the issue of the autonomy of the local congregations and the use of funds from abroad. Consequently, each organization went its separate way.

After the split, 12 churches remained with the CBCR, while others became independent of both groups, and a few remained in fellowship with the FMBSBC. For years, both associations of churches sought to incorporate independent Baptist churches into their own ranks. The SBC-related churches and missions continued to receive the support of the FMBSBC. After about three years of financial struggles, the CBCR became affiliated with the **American Baptist Churches in the USA**, which enabled the Baptist Convention to cover part of its budget with funds from abroad and to begin its own Bible institute program with courses at night. In 1986, the CBCR reported 17 churches and 11 missions (28 congregations), with about 850 members; and, in 1989, there were 24 churches and 6 missions (30 congregations), with about 2,500 members. Obviously, there was significant growth in membership (194 percent) but not in the total number of congregations.

Note: According to a 1988 study by Clive Buttermere (a missionary with the Southern Baptist Foreign Missionary Board), there were a total of 181 churches and missions in Costa Rica that were part of 10 autonomous church associations or were independent (13 congregations) that he classified as "Baptist" (Buttermere, 1999).

In 1989, when the CBCR reported 30 congregations, the FMBSBC-related fellowship of churches, called the **National Union of Baptist Churches** (UNIB – *Unión Nacional de Iglesias Bautistas*), reported 17 churches and eight missions (25 congregations) with about 620 members. It could be that the separation between the two sister organizations allowed each one to concentrate more on its own priorities and development unhindered, and that this released the built-up tension and allowed greater freedom and creativity to emerge, thereby producing greater growth in total membership and in the establishment of new congregations than might have been achieved if the split had not occurred. Both organizations appear to have been "revitalized" after the split took place, and to have grown both in quality and quantity.

In March 2000, the CBCR reported 31 congregations and 1,400 members, whereas the UNIB reported 22 congregations and 1,517 members, which made a total of 53 congregations and 2,917 members among the two organizations. By comparison, at this same time, other Baptist groups in Costa Rica reported the following: **Missionary Baptists** (two groups of churches), 21 congregations and 1,500 members; **Baptist Bible Churches** (six different groups of churches), 20 congregations and 3,442 members; and others (largely, independents), 29 congregations and 2,610 members.

The division between the National Union of Baptist Churches (UNIB) and the Baptist Convention of Costa Rica (CBCR), which lasted 23 years, was overcome on 13 April 2003 when together they celebrated a united meeting for reconciliation. The unification was proposed by a Commission for Unity of Baptist Work in Costa Rica, which was formed in July 2002 by decision of the two boards of directors and integrated by pastors Alejo Quesada and Johnny Saborío of CBCR and Enrique Piedra M. and Johnny Alfaro of UNIB. The Commission agreed that “the unity of the church is an inescapable demand, that the two organizations were united for 23 years, that more than differences there is a great convergence in terms of goals and programs between the two, and that the conflict that divided them in 1980 has been overcome” (1980-2003). However, some churches that were members of UNIB (14) did not want to be part of the UNIB-CBCR union, and some member churches of the CBCR (9) did not participate in the union, which was renamed “**Federation of Baptist Associations of Costa Rica**” (FABCR - *Federación de Asociaciones Bautistas de Costa Rica*).

According to the national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES (2013-2014), FABCR reported 33 churches and missions with about 5,000 members nationwide. In global terms, Baptist work in Costa Rica totaled about 223 congregations (churches and missions) with about 20,825 members (2013 data). The largest of the other Baptist church associations in Costa Rica in 2013 were: **International Baptist Bible Fellowship Advance Association** / *Asociación Avance del Compañerismo Bíblico Bautista Internacional* (John Barnes, missionary coordinator), 29 churches and missions with about 5,000 members; the **American Baptist Association in Costa Rica** / *Asociación Bautista Americana en Costa Rica* (missionaries Walter Goulding and Gene Ray Ward), 29 churches and missions with about 3,000 members; the **Association of Missionary Baptist Churches** / *Asociación de Iglesias Bautistas Misioneras* (founded by missionary Robert Heflin), 23 congregations with about 2,000 members; **Baptist International Missions, Inc. (BIMI)** / *Iglesias Bautistas Emanuel* (founded by missionary William Murdock), with about 20 congregations and 1,750 members; and the **World Baptist Fellowship-related Fundamental Baptist Churches** / *Iglesias Bautistas Fundamentales* (founded by missionary William Tabor), 17 congregations with about 1,500 members. In addition, there is a group of 14 independent Baptist churches with 840 members that formerly were part of UNIB; and a group of nine independent Baptist churches with 540 members that formerly were part of CBCR.

Below is an overview of the origin of some of the Baptist denominations and mission agencies that have church work in Costa Rica.

The **World Baptist Fellowship** (WBF), a separatist fundamentalist Baptist organization, was founded in 1933 by J. Frank Norris (1877–1952) of Texas, who became a combatant in the *fundamentalist / modernist controversy* during the first half of the 20th century. Both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Texas expelled Norris because of his controversial behavior. Norris, C. P. Staley and others formed the **Premillennial Missionary Baptist Fellowship** in 1933 at Fort Worth, Texas. In 1938, the name was changed to **World Fundamental Baptist Missionary Fellowship** and then to **World Baptist Fellowship** (WBF) after the schism that created the Baptist Bible Fellowship International in 1950. The WBF is headquartered in Arlington, Texas, on the campus of Arlington Baptist University, which is the organization's educational branch.

The **Baptist Bible Fellowship International** (BBFI) is a conservative Baptist organization formed in 1950 by members who broke away from the *World Baptist Fellowship* as the result of a leadership dispute with J. Frank Norris. It is headquartered in Springfield, Missouri.

The **American Baptist Association** (ABA), formed by a merger of two related groups in 1924, is an association of autonomous Baptist churches, mainly located in the Southern USA. The principal founder was Benjamin M. Bogard, a pastor of Antioch Missionary Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas. ABA headquarters, including its bookstore and publishing house, Bogard Press, is based in Texarkana, Texas.

Pioneers in the Landmark Baptist movement included Benjamin M. Bogard (March 9, 1868 – May 29, 1951) and Doss Nathan Jackson (July 14, 1895 – November 29, 1968). These two men were very influential in their respective state associations of Arkansas and Texas. The Baptist Missionary Association of Texas was begun in 1900 as a way for Landmark Baptist churches to conduct mission work on a state level away from what was seen as the corruption of the “convention board system” of the powerful Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). This was followed by a departure of a group of Baptist churches in Arkansas from the SBC and the founding of the Arkansas Baptist State Association in 1902. In 1905, a nationwide association of Landmark Missionary Baptists was formed, called the General Association of Baptist Churches. In 1924, the Baptist Missionary Association of Texas joined this association, and the name was changed to the *American Baptist Association*.

The Baptist Missionary Association of America (BMAA) is a fellowship of autonomous Landmark Baptist churches concentrated in the Southern USA that left the American Baptist Association over church representation matters and established its headquarters in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1950 as the North American Baptist Association; it changed its name to the Baptist Missionary Association of America in 1969. Currently, the denomination’s headquarters are in Conway, Arkansas. BMAA missionary Duane Robert Heflin (1930-2013) arrived in Costa Rica in 1961 and retired in 2001; he died in December 2013 at 83 years of age in San Pedro, Montes de Oca. Also, missionaries William Gibson (1942-2015) and his wife Jeanette served in Costa Rica for many years during the 1980s. Pastor Jairo Bonilla (Costa Rican) was appointed as a National Missionary by the **Costa Rican Baptist Missionary Association / Asociación Bautista Misionera Costarricense** in 2005.

For an overview of Landmark Baptist history and principles, see:

<https://www.mbu.edu/seminary/the-landmark-controversy/>

Baptist International Missions, Inc. (BIMI). In 1917, Anton and Viola Andersen boarded the ship *The City of Calcutta* to plant their lives in Africa for the sake of the Gospel. Through more than forty years of ministry, thousands came to Christ. In 1955, the Andersen's son Fred, a student at Tennessee Temple, impressed upon Dr. Lee Roberson the need for helpers in the Belgian Congo. In response Dr. Roberson, along with nine other pastors, organized the Southern wing of the *Congo Gospel Mission*. When the Congo closed in 1960 because of revolution, Dr. Roberson made the motion that the Mission be enlarged to embrace the world. That led to the formation of *Baptist International Missions* on 28 June 1960. Since 1960, BIMI has extended its ministries into 100 fields around the world. With over 1,000 missionaries, BIMI continues to assist Fundamental Baptist local churches with their efforts to fulfill the Great Commission. Its

headquarters were established first in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and are now located in Harrison, Tennessee.

BIMI missionaries have served in Costa Rica since 1967, beginning with Bill and Cindy Murdock, with a focus on church planting, training national leadership, and sending national missionaries to other countries. More than 20 churches have been established in several cities throughout the country. Mission work in Costa Rica is being conducted by the following couples: Jeremy & Michelle Blanz, Rick & Shannon Dove Jr., and Brent & Jennifer Hoffman.

DURING THE 1950s

Between 1950 and 1985, at least 28 additional Protestant mission agencies began work in Costa Rica, and numerous other church bodies came into existence as the result of the nationalization of missionary efforts, as a reaction to missionary control of the work, or as a result of independent efforts.

1950 - A small group of 30 **Quakers** from Fairhope, Alabama, arrived in the small town of Santa Elena, located in the mountain region of Puntarenas province, where they bought land and founded an agricultural colony called Monteverde. They were not evangelistic but held silent worship services weekly and established Sunday School classes for their children as well as an elementary school.

1953 - International Church of the Foursquare Gospel / *Iglesia del Evangelio Cuadrangular Internacional*

This Pentecostal denominational initiated work in Costa Rica in 1953 as an extension of its strong work in the Republic of Panama, where the Foursquare Church was one of the largest evangelical denominations in the nation. On 24 April 1953, two female missionaries, Nelwin Palmer and Ruth English, arrived in Costa Rica from Los Angeles, California, and settled in Escazú, a western suburb of San José, where they began their work with children and adults. However, their first efforts did not meet with success. In this same place, in 1954, the Rev. Claudio Updike conducted his first evangelistic campaign with assistance from the Rev. Erasmo Escudero of Panama, but this place was not very open to Protestants and there were few positive results. Given this situation, Updike and Escudero relocated to the Pacific port city of Puntarenas, where a massive campaign was held on 4 November 1954, where “God blessed with great miracles and supernatural healings.”

On 6 January 1955, the Rev. Erasmo Escudero took over as pastor of the newly-formed church in Puntarenas and he became the first Spanish-speaking Foursquare pastor in the country. A year later, a permanent church building was built in Barrio del Carmen, Puntarenas. As part of all the movement that was taking place at that time, the need to train new workers became apparent, which led to the establishment of the Foursquare Bible Institute at the mother church in Barrio del Carmen. The Bible Institute celebrated its first graduation in 1957 and the second one in 1960.

During this period, the brothers began to visit towns in both Puntarenas and Guanacaste provinces, such as La Angostura, Chacarita, La Vigía, Pitahaya, Chomes and Aranjuez, in addition to Barranca, Esparza, Palermo and Jicaral. The ministry grew as workers visited house to house and witnessed the conversion of many people. A church was planted in La Vigía, Nicoya, by Ramón Brenes and his wife that became a promotional center for the preaching of the Gospel

throughout the Province of Puntarenas.

In the Central Valley of the country, after Updike conducted an evangelistic campaign in San José, it became necessary to establish a base of operations in the capital. With this objective in mind, Maurice Tolle and his family settled in San José and began to preach in Barrio La Cruz, just 100 meters east of where the Central Church is located today. Brother Tolle was the one who, with vision, started the construction of the temple, which was completed by Elmer McCammon who imparted new missionary objectives and evangelistic vision to members of this congregation. In addition to starting the work in Barrio La Cruz, he also began the training of workers with classes from the Bible Institute in church principles; this work was continued by missionaries McCammon and Pritchett. Beginning in 1962, William and Betty Pritchett carried out missionary work with great results, because, in addition to teaching at the Biblical Institute, they explored new regions to spread the Gospel. They participated in daily programs for evangelical radio station TIFC, Faro del Caribe, in San José (founded by the Latin America Mission). They visited other regions of the country where they provided training to rural pastors through brief institutes, campaigns and conferences.

Because of the influx of Panamanian Foursquare members into the banana and African palm-oil-growing region of southwestern Costa Rica, a considerable number of Foursquare churches were founded in that area of Puntarenas province. In 1978, 19 out of a total of 31 Foursquare churches in Costa Rica were located in this area. However, this region has experienced great mobility in its workforce, which has caused some local churches to lose members while others gained new members due to migration.

Of the larger Protestant denominations in Costa Rica, the Foursquare Church had the second highest rate of growth for the period 1960-1978, somewhat lower than that of the Assemblies of God. From 56 members in 1956, the Foursquare work increased to 250 members in 1960. The total membership tripled between 1960 and 1967, with 758 members recorded in 1967. Between 1967 and 1978, an annual growth rate of 14.4 percent was maintained, with 1,626 members in 1964 and 2,905 in 1978. In 1986, denominational officials reported 2,500 members among 73 churches and 32 "campos blancos" (preaching points). The Foursquare Bible Institute was established at the central church in San José for the training of national pastors and lay workers.

The growth of the Foursquare Church continued during the 1990s, more so in membership than in starting new churches. In 1989, the Foursquare Church reported 74 churches and 34 "campos blancos," with about 3,750 members. By March 2000, there were 77 churches and 23 "campos blancos" with about 4,776 members. There were two congregations among Native American Indians, Cabécar and Guaymí, in the southern zone. This was the fifth-largest Protestant denomination in Costa Rica in 2000.

In about the year 2000, the first Costa Rican national supervisor, the Rev. Rubén Shedden Ching, was appointed at the request of the Costa Rican pastoral leadership. The timing coincided with a decision by the Foursquare International Mission Board to cut funding and mission personnel to Costa Rica due to their own lack of financial resources. During the 2000s, the Foursquare International Mission Board provided very little financial support for work in Costa Rica, which meant that local pastors had to rely on their own local resources to continue their respective ministries. This reduction in financial support from Foursquare Church headquarters also meant that no funds were available for the purchase of property and the construction and / or renovation of church buildings. Furthermore, the Costa Rican pastoral leadership was not prepared to take on the tasks of supervision at the national level that had previously been provided by foreign missionaries. Therefore, it took several years for some of the national leaders to obtain the education and skills necessary to provide adequate supervision for work at the

national level.

In 2014, the national supervisor of the *Asociación Iglesia del Evangelio Cuadrangular de Costa Rica* (in addition to being the chairman of the Board of Directors) previously pastored a church in Ciudad Neily, which is the region's largest population center in southwestern Puntarenas province. Victor Hugo Aguilar was appointed Superintendent in 2010 and became pastor of the Central Foursquare Church in the Barrio La Cruz neighborhood of San José, which is now considered the headquarters of the denomination. Although this congregation only had about 250 active members, the leadership decided to remodel the old facilities to give them a more modern appearance. This is an indication of the greater social and financial strength of the membership of this denomination.

According to the national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES during 2013 and 2014, the Foursquare Church reported 84 congregations (churches and missions) and 15 “campos blancos,” with a total of 95 congregations with about 6,000 members nationally (an average of 71 members per congregation). Below is a chart of the geographical distribution of Foursquare Church work in Costa Rica for 2001 and 2013.

PROVINCES	DIRECTORY 2001	DIRECTORY 2013
SAN JOSE	9	8
ALAJUELA	2	1
CARTAGO	5	8
HEREDIA	1	1
GUANACASTE	4	11
PUNTARENAS	56	51
LIMON	12	15
TOTALS	89	95

Note: The PROLADES Directory of 2001 included 71 churches and 18 “preaching points” (*campos blancos*) of the IECCR, for a total of 89, with 4,776 members. The PROLADES Directory of 2013 listed 84 churches and missions and 15 “preaching points,” for a total of 95 congregations, with a total of about 6,000 members nationally. Some of the “preaching points” listed in the 2001 Directory had become missions or churches by 2013, according to denominational officials. Although new congregations were added in the provinces of Cartago, Guanacaste and Limón between 2001 and 2013, the strength of Foursquare Gospel Church work was in Puntarenas province, specifically the southwest region near the Panamanian border.

1956 - The **Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany** established a working relationship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to begin work in San José, with worship services in German for the German immigrants and their descendants, some of whom had established businesses and coffee farms in the Central Valley.

1958 - The **Moravian Church** (founded in 1735 in Germany by Pietists) began church work in Costa Rica as an extension of their work in neighboring Nicaragua that began in 1849 by German Moravian missionaries on the Caribbean coast among the Miskito Indian population. Later, some Miskito and Creole Moravians migrated to the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica and later to the nation’s capital, where small congregations were established in English and Miskito.

1958 - Missionaries of the **International Evangelical Church Soldiers of the Cross / Iglesia Evangélica Internacional Soldados de la Cruz** arrived in Costa Rica and began work in the cities of Limón and San José, where several small congregations were established. This Sabbatarian

Pentecostal denomination was founded in Cuba in the 1930s and expanded its work to other Caribbean island nations and to the USA, especially after the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s.

1958 - Baptist Bible Churches / Iglesias Bíblicas Bautistas

There are several church associations in Costa Rica that are related to the **Baptist Bible Fellowship** (BBF), founded in 1950 in the USA by members who broke away from the World Baptist Fellowship. The BBF is headquartered in Springfield, Missouri. "The Baptist Bible Fellowship International is officially a fellowship of pastors, and by extension, a network of preachers, churches, missionaries, and educational institutions worldwide, affiliated for the purpose of church planting and sharing the truth of the Word of God." Source: <https://www.bbfi.org/about-the-bbfi>

The largest of these BBF-affiliated church associations in Costa Rica was established in San José about 1958 by missionaries Jefferson and Maudie Meek. According to Nelson, after some initial success, this group began to lose ground because of its "Fighting Fundamentalism" stance. By 1974, however, the work had increased to 287 members, and several new missionary couples arrived in Costa Rica, including the Meek's daughter and her husband, Karry and John Barnes. Filled with youthful enthusiasm, the new missionaries embarked on an aggressive evangelistic ministry in several new, middle-class neighborhoods in San José, where they successfully established new churches. Their approach has been to set up a tent ministry in a vacant lot that they purchased, conducting evangelistic meetings in the evenings and training new leaders in the mornings, which was similar to Strachan's approach during the 1920s. Later, after the congregation grows to an adequate size, a permanent temple is built with the aid of stateside churches.

By 1978, BBF-affiliated missionaries and their national pastors had established four churches and three missions, with a total membership of 2,950. This gives them an average congregational size of 421 members, which was probably the highest average size of any Protestant denomination in Costa Rica at that time. Even more noteworthy is the fact that the BBF-affiliated churches annual growth rate between 1974 and 1978 was a remarkable 79 percent; however, they started from a very small membership base. Nevertheless, in this period, the Baptist Bible churches outdistanced the growth of all other Baptist groups in Costa Rica, and their church in San Sabastian alone reported almost 1,000 members, with an even greater number in attendance in 1978.

John and Karry Barnes began their mission work in Costa Rica in 1972. During their first four years in Costa Rica they were able to establish a church in the San Sebastián neighborhood of San José. This church has served as the birthplace for 26 additional churches. In 1978, the Barnes founded the Baptist Bible Institute, which has helped train pastors and workers for these churches. Since then, they have been able to open branches of the Bible Institute in the southern part of Costa Rica. The Barnes were able to purchase a youth camp from the Baptist Convention of Costa Rica (CBCR) during the 1980s that has been an instrument for evangelism and Christian development. The camp is located in San Antonio de Belén, Alajuela, under the administration of Juan Luis Hidalgo.

According to the national church growth study by PROLADES in March 2000, the various BBF-affiliated church associations in Costa Rica (various organized groups led by different missionaries) had 20 churches and missions with a total of 3,442 members nationwide, which represents an average of 172 members per congregation.

The largest of the BBF-affiliated church associations in Costa Rica in 2013 was the **International Baptist Bible Fellowship Advance Association / Asociación Avance del Com-**

pañerismo Bíblico Bautista Internacional (AVANCE), with offices at the Baptist Bible Institute in San Sebastián, under the leadership of Pastor Alex Guzmán Coto. This association reported 24 churches and five missions in Costa Rica in 2013, with a total membership of about 5,000 people (an average of 167 members per congregation).

Additional BBF-affiliated missionaries in Costa Rica include the following, some of whom have founded church associations that are independent of AVANCE: Anna Marie West arrived in May 1974; Ramon and Annette Pérez were appointed as missionaries to Costa Rica in May 1979 (Annette is the daughter of Jeff and Maudie Meek and the sister of Karry Barnes); Randy and Sherry Rhoton arrived in Costa Rican in August 1986 (one of their four sons, Ray, is a BBF missionary who works with the Kuna Indians in Panama); Randy and Sandy Roberts arrived in Costa Rica in May 1988; Jonathan and Sarah Robertson arrived as independent missionaries in May 2008 and were approved as BBF career missionaries in Costa Rica in September 2012; and Chad and Jennifer Braymer arrived in Costa Rica in September 2015 .

Source: <http://bbfimissions.com/bbfi-missionaries/>

Between 1960 and 1969, the following groups were founded in Costa Rica.

1960	Conservative Mennonite Convention / Convención Menonita Conservadora	USA
1961	Seventh-day Adventist Church Reform Movement / Iglesia Adventista Séptimo Día, Movimiento de Reforma	Germany
1962	Conservative Mennonite Fellowship / Compañerismo Menonita Conservador	USA
1962	Missionary William Tabor, affiliated with World Baptist Fellowship / Compañerismo Bautista Mundial), these churches are now called: Asociación de Iglesias Bautistas Fundamentalistas.	USA
1963	Apostolic Assembly of Faith in Jesus Christ / Asamblea Apostólica de la Fe en Cristo Jesús (founded in 1916, Los Ángeles, California, among Hispanics)	USA
1964	Association of Lutheran Churches in Costa Rica & Panama / Asociación de Iglesias Luteranas de Costa Rica & Panamá (Kenneth Mahler)	USA
1964	Pentecostal Christian Church, Worldwide Missionary Movement / Iglesia Cristiana Pentecostal del Movimiento Misionero Mundial (1950s, Puerto Rico)	Puerto Rico
1965	Beachy Amish Mennonite Conference (agricultural colonies) / Menonitas Beachy Amish	USA
1965	Church of the Nazarene (Kansas City, Kansas) / Iglesia del Nazareno	USA
1967	Conservative Baptist Home Mission Board / Misión Bautista Conservadora; assisted English-speaking Baptist churches in Limón province that were founded by the Jamaican & Central American Missionary Society.	USA
1967	Plymouth Brethren Assemblies (Salas Evangélicas – Asambleas Cristianas); an autonomus fellowship of congregations, not a denomination..	USA
1967	Churches of Christ / Iglesias de Cristo (autonomous local churches of the non-instrumental (<i>a capella</i>) Restoration movement tradition, not a denomination)	USA
1968	Baptist Bible Fellowship / Compañerismo Bíblico Bautista.	USA
1968	Baptist International Missions / Asociación de Iglesias Bautistas Emanuel	USA
1968	Trinitarian Light of the World Work / Iglesia Obra Luz del Mundo Trinitario (in Puntarenas)	Venezuela

1960 - Conservative Mennonite Conference / Conference of Evangelical Mennonite Churches in Costa Rica (1974)

The Conservative Mennonite Conference (CMC, called *The Amish Mennonite Conservative Committee* before 1954) was founded in 1910 in the USA when Conservative Amish pastors and congregations separated from the Old Amish Order. At first, the new conference concentrated on the establishment of Sunday schools, but later extended its efforts to service abroad and on missions, with a missionary meeting and publication of the "Missionary Bulletin." In June 1960, the CMC and the Salunga Missionary Board commissioned Orie O. Miller and Raymond Schlabach of the CMC to make an exploratory visit to Central America. They reported that Costa Rica was the country where it would be best to concentrate missionary efforts. In 1961, the first missionaries to arrive in Costa Rica were the Schlabachs and the Lehmans: Raymond and Susana Schlabach began working on the translation of the Bible among the Bribri Amerindian people in the Talamanca region, while Elmer and Eileen Lehman concentrated their efforts on establishing churches among the country's Spanish-speaking population.

Although the Schlabachs worked primarily on Bible translation, they also evangelized in the community. The first Bribris to be baptized, Raimundo and his wife Luisa, were baptized by Elmer Lehman in the Talamanca river in 1969, which began the Mennonite church in Talamanca. Although portions of the New Testament were translated into Bribri, it turned out to be very slow work. In 1978, the CMC Missionary Board made the decision to suspend this project; after almost two decades of work they were still unable to translate the entire New Testament. Most of the Bribri people had begun to speak Spanish and it was estimated that it would take at least another ten years to finish the translation.

In March 1962, the Lehmans began personal evangelism work among the Spanish-speaking population in Heredia, a strongly Catholic city in the Central Valley, located north of San José. Another means of evangelism was through the radio program "Luz y Verdad." A notable case is that of Mrs. Jovita de Corrales who converted to Christ when listening to the program and later her husband made his own profession of faith. He turned out to be one of the most successful evangelists in the Heredia Mennonite church and became the first national pastor.

A third method of evangelism was a preaching crusade. This form of evangelism was widely used throughout Latin America in the 1960s under the leadership of Kenneth Strachan through the "In-Depth Evangelism" (EID) movement, sponsored by the Latin America Mission. The Lehmans participated in Pablo Finkenbinder's (affiliated with the Assemblies of God) evangelistic campaign in San José in 1967 that resulted in new members entering the Mennonite church in Heredia. In this same year, the church in Heredia only had 37 baptized members and 125 people regularly attending services.

The radicalization of the Cuban revolution resulted in the exodus of many Cuban missionaries and pastors. Among them were Methodist teachers Justo González and his wife Luisa García. They took refuge in Costa Rica where, in 1962, they established a literacy program known as ALFALIT. This program coincided well with the activities of Mennonite missionaries because it was intended to be "an effective instrument for understanding the Kingdom of God." Literacy work reached many rural areas of poverty in Costa Rica and later spread to Managua, Nicaragua.

Initially, the Mennonite Voluntary Services effort to encourage community development among the poor was carried out with the momentum generated in the 1960s and the Alliance for Progress programs promoted by the U.S. government. The Mennonite Voluntary Services conducted work in agricultural and construction projects that were concentrated in the Atlantic coast

region of the country, as well as inland in Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí and Upala near the Nicaraguan border.

Henry and Esther Helmuth arrived in Costa Rica in 1965 as missionaries with the **Rosedale Mennonite Mission** (based in Irwin, Ohio, USA) to provide leadership to the church emerging in Puerto Viejo, Sarapiquí, a place where missionary work and Mennonite Volunteer Services activities mixed very well. When the Helmuths returned to Costa Rica in 1970 after studying at Eastern Mennonite College for two years, it was obvious that they had been influenced by the Charismatic Renewal movement that had begun in the USA and spread very rapidly in Latin America. They began work in Barrio Pilar, Guadalupe, in a highly populated district of San José, as pastors of the “Casa de Oración” Temple. Under their leadership the Charismatic Renewal movement had a strong impact on Mennonite churches. When the **Conference of Evangelical Mennonite Churches in Costa Rica** was formally organized in 1974 there were only five local congregations – in Sarapiquí, Upala, Guadalupe, Heredia and Pithaya – where many national leaders were formed.

A group of 20 **Beachy Amish Mennonite** families arrived in 1968 from Ohio, Virginia, Georgia and Maryland and settled on 750 hectares (1,853 acres) of land near Laguna del Arenal in the northern part of Alajuela province. These Mennonite settlers dressed in the conservative style; the women wore veils that signified their submission to men who in turn were submissive to God. They did not allow the use of radios or televisions, although they did use modern planting equipment and had a Ford truck to transport their products to market. Costa Ricans were welcome to be part of the Mennonite community if they were willing to accept the same faith and lifestyle that included the prohibition on cursing, smoking, dancing, and drinking alcohol, and were taught that they must love their enemies. Those who did not follow the community regulations were excommunicated.

The small town of Laguna del Arenal was disorganized first by the eruption of the Arenal Volcano in 1969 and later by the expropriation of much of the land by the Costa Rican government for the construction of the Arenal hydroelectric dam. Some families relocated to Upala, Grecia, San Carlos, Guatuso and Los Chiles (mostly in northern Alajuela province) and others to Coto Brus (southern Puntarenas province), Sarapiquí (northern Heredia province) and Pérez Zeledón (southern San José province). In 2010, the Beechy Amish Mennonites reported 10 churches with about 260 members and some independent Mennonites had three churches with about 80 members.

The Costa Rican Evangelical Mennonite Conference is governed by an annual assembly composed of pastors and delegates from each congregation. The executive committee is elected each year during the assembly to carry out the conference program throughout the year. In 1987, in addition to the executive committee, there were eight auxiliary committees.

The Mennonite Bible Institute was established in 1977 as a resident Bible institute. In 1982, its program was revised to provide theological education by extension (TEE), with teachers visiting six regional centers around the country to give short seminars to local church leaders. The Costa Rican conference is also affiliated with SEMILLA (*Seminario Ministerial de Liderazgo Anabautista* / Anabaptist Ministerial Leaders Seminary), a cooperative effort of the Latin American Mennonite-related churches to train Anabaptist leaders.

According to the national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica in 1978, conducted by PROLADES, the **Conference of Evangelical Mennonite Churches** had seven churches, two missions and two “campos blancos” (preaching points), with a total of 303 baptized adult members. In March 1987, the Costa Rican conference reported 18 churches with 1,212 baptized members, six ordained ministers, one ordained evangelist, nine licensed ministers, and four lay

pastors. In 2009, the renamed *Asociación Convención de Iglesias Menonitas de Costa Rica* (CIMCR) reported 1,470 members in 20 congregations.

According to the 2013 PROLADES national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica, the CIMCR reported 26 organized churches and two “preaching points,” with 1,520 adult baptized members nationwide (an average of 59 members per congregation). CIMCR’s president was Mrs. Sandra Campos Cruz with offices in the central church of Heredia, and pastor Freddy Alfaro was the National Supervisor of Pastors. CIMCR develops its ministries under the administration of the Pastoral Council and through various committees: Justice and Peace Committee, Christian Education Committee, Emergency Committee, Youth Committee, and Women's Fraternity. Also, a Bible Institute was operated in the central church of Heredia.

Sources: GAMEO-Costa Rica / https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Costa_Rica/

https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Convenci%C3%B3n_Evang%C3%A9lica_Menonita_de_Costa_Rica

Dr. Jaime Prieto Valladares, *Mission and Migration: A Global Mennonite History – Latin America*, “Costa Rica” pp. 275-280 (Intercourse, PA: Good Books & Pandora Press, 2010)

1963 - Apostolic Assembly of Faith in Jesus Christ / *Asamblea Apostólica de la Fe en Cristo Jesús*

This Hispanic denomination (initially, with predominantly Mexican immigrant constituents) had its origin in the beginnings of the Pentecostal Revival that took place in Los Angeles, California, USA, in 1906, but it was not formally organized until 1925 in San Bernardino, California. The current name was adopted once it was legally incorporated in 1930 in the State of California. Due to the lack of a denominational structure before 1930, the first Hispanic leaders of the Oneness Pentecostal (“Jesus Only”) churches obtained their ministerial credentials from the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW). The *Asamblea Apostólica de la Fe en Cristo Jesús* (AAFCJ) adopted an episcopal ecclesial structure.

In the early 1960s, new AAFCJ churches were established in Washington, Oregon, Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Florida, as well as missionary efforts in Costa Rica, Honduras and Italy during 1964 and 1965. By 1966, there were 152 AAFCJ congregations with about 8,000 members in 12 states of the USA, including the new ones in Utah, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

In 2004, the AAFCJ annual report listed 52,000 baptized adult members, nearly 80,000 adherents (adults, youth and children), 700 churches organized in 44 states distributed among 27 districts in the USA. In addition, there were 19 mission fields in Canada, Mexico, Central America (Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panama), South America (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela), the Caribbean (Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico), and Europe (Italy and Spain). These mission fields reported 19 missionaries, 31,000 baptized adult members, and nearly 50,000 adherents (adults, youth and children) and 600 organized churches.

The AAFCJ’s sister denomination in Mexico is called the Apostolic Church of Faith in Jesus Christ / *Iglesia Apostólica de la Fe en Cristo Jesús* (IAFCJ) and was founded in 1914 in Villa Aldama, Chihuahua, under the leadership of Mrs. Romana Carbajal de Valenzuela, who became a Pentecostal in Los Angeles, California, and returned to her hometown to evangelize her family, friends and neighbors. In 1918, the new organization began to move out of Villa Aldama and expanded to Gómez Palacio, Durango; Calexico, California; and Mexicali, Baja California. In 1925, the IAFCJ arrived in Sinaloa and the following year in Tijuana, Baja California. By 1949, the IAFCJ had expanded throughout northern and central Mexico, and began sending missionaries to other countries. Under the leadership of Maclovio Gaxiola López, IAFCJ mis-

sionaries established new churches in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Canada, the USA, Belize, Colombia, Spain, and Venezuela. However, the mission field of Costa Rica was served by its sister denomination in the USA, the AAFCJ.

Costa Rica. Since its founding in 1963 under the leadership of missionary Daniel Ruiz Picado, the AAFCJ has grown from 13 congregations (churches and missions) with 558 members in 1978, to 11 congregations with 475 members in 1983, to 34 congregations with 3,550 members in 2001, and to 56 congregations with 4,000 members in 2013 (an average of 71 members per congregation). The most significant growth took place between 1983 and 2001, when the AAFCJ added 23 congregations and more than 3,000 members. Between 2001 and 2013, another 23 congregations were added along with 450 new members. San José province (19) and Limón province (15) had the largest number of congregations nationally in 2013.

The current president of the AAFCJ in Costa Rica is Bishop Tulio Cerda, with offices at the central church in Barrio Quesada Durán in the district of Zapote of the capital city of San José.

1963 - Costa Rican Lutheran Church / *Iglesia Luterana Costarricense (ILCO)*

Lutherans in Costa Rica 1963-1970. In Costa Rica, the Lutheran Church was founded as a result of the radio program "Christ for all nations" on the "Lutheran Hour" broadcast, sponsored by the **Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod** with headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri. This program became so popular that Costa Rica became the Central American country where there were more listeners, and where a greater number of people maintained regular correspondence with the branch office in Antigua, Guatemala. Considering this situation, Pastor Kenneth Mahler was entrusted with the missions in Costa Rica and Panama (Lutheran Church, Synod of Missouri). Consequently, the necessary measures were taken to adapt the new pastors to the requirements of Lutheran theology and liturgical tradition.

A training department was established and teachers who were knowledgeable about the subjects and capable of teaching were brought to Panama. In fact, one of the greatest achievements for the church, in the medium and long term, as part of the nascent Theological Community of Mexico, was the fact of establishing a house of studies, which later became a seminary. From there, academic training was made available in everything related to theology and pastoral that would honor the centuries-old Lutheran tradition for students from all over the northern region of the continent.

Between 1959 and 1962, vicar (seminarian) Kenneth Mahler conducted services in Spanish in Panama outside the Panama Canal Zone (PCZ) for the first time. Mahler arrived in Panama in August 1962 as the first general Spanish-speaking missionary and was based in Balboa, PCZ. Together with Ezekiel González, he focused on the area around Tambo in the Coclé area, where he developed social improvement projects along with evangelization.

The Costa Rican Lutheran Church, under the leadership of the Rev. Kenneth Mahler, promoted and carried out various ecumenical activities. One of these ecumenical signs was performed on 29 October 1967 when the rector of the Catholic seminary attended the laying of the foundation stone of the new Lutheran temple in the Curridabat district of San José.

In the late 1970s, missionary Kenneth Mahler (1927-2014) separated from the *Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, the U.S. Lutheran sector that had been sending missionaries to the Central America region. Mahler founded the **Lutheran Association for Social Action and Evangelization** with Samuel Hiller. As a logical result of all this restructuring, the Lutherans

resumed contact with various popular and pastoral experiences, as well as with the Lutherans of the Central American countries, particularly with the Lutheran Church of El Salvador.

In 1980, the **Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Costa Rica** was led by missionary Bishop Kenneth Mahler, who later became affiliated with the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (ELCA). During the 1980s, the *Lutheran Dioceses of Panama and Costa Rica* was led by Bishop Mahler.

NOTE: The American Lutheran Church (merger 1960), the Lutheran Church in America (merger 1962) and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (1976 schism from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod) merged on 1 January 1988 to become the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** (ELCA).

The Costa Rican Lutheran Church (*Iglesia Luterana Costarricense*, ILCO), affiliated with the ELCA, was founded in 1988 to promote the integral mission in this country, “where a Gospel is preached that is called to build signs of the Kingdom, through diakonia (social action) in marginalized communities both urban and rural.” The first worship was held on 22 August 1988 when a group of Costa Rican Lutherans who participated in the first mission and other foreigners living in Costa Rica working for ecumenical organizations founded the Costa Rican Lutheran Church, guided by the Integral Mission, understood as a ministry of Word, sacrament and diakonia, at the service of the excluded sectors of society.

In November 1988, the **Communion of Lutheran Churches of Central America** (*Comunión de Iglesias Luteranas de Centroamerica*, CILCA) was constituted, where the Costa Rican Lutheran Church participated as a foundering member. CILCA is composed of the Faith and Hope Lutheran Church of Nicaragua (*Iglesia Luterana de Fe y Esperanza*, ILFE), the Costa Rican Lutheran Church (*Iglesia Luterana Costarricense*, ILCO), the Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras (*Iglesia Cristiana Luterana Hondureña*, ICLH), and the Salvadoran Lutheran Church (*Iglesia Luterana Salvadoreña*, ILS).

In 1989, the ordination as priests of two members of this church – who came from the Lutheran tradition, had theological training and had assumed the duties of lay pastors during this period – was approved: Melvin Jiménez and Ana Langerak were ordained as priests. With the installation of the first Board of Directors, the legal statutes of the organization were approved. In 1990, the president of CILCA, Bishop Medardo Gómez of the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod, ordained three pastors – two women and one man, church leaders who came from the Lutheran tradition – who will be volunteer pastors for the first five years.

On the occasion of the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the **Costa Rican Lutheran Church** (in 2008), the first bishop was ordained (Melvin Jiménez) and four pastors were ordained or installed. By 2010, the Costa Rican Lutheran Church had developed and was present in approximately 30 communities with 10 congregations, five missions and 15 points of service (with about 1,500 members); with a diaconal work for economic, social and cultural human rights with peasants, indigenous people, workers, people with HIV- AIDS and migrants; with the wide participation of women, youth and children, and with a strong prophetic voice recognized in Costa Rican society.

Adapted from: <http://www.ilco.cr/quienes-somos/nuestra-historia.html>

In 1983, the *Evangelical Lutheran Church of Costa Rica and Central America* was led by Bishop Ernest Moser Yohanes, which consisted of one church with 150 German-speaking members in Costa Rica who previously were pastored by Veit Bruegmann, affiliated with the *Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany and Switzerland*.

THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF COSTA RICA /

Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de Costa Rica

(Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Costa Rica, German-speaking)

Pastored by the Rev. Matthias Von Westerholt

The church is located in Pavas in the installations of Humbolt Academy, San José

1964 - Pentecostal Church of God, Worldwide Missionary Movement / *Iglesia Cristiana Pentecostal del Movimiento Misionero Mundial*

Founded in 1963 in Puerto Rico by the Rev. Luis M. Ortiz (1918-1996), who had been a missionary with the Assemblies of God in Cuba from 1944 to 1959, this denomination arrived in Costa Rica in 1964 through Ortiz' personal evangelistic ministry. The *Iglesia Cristiana Pentecostal del Movimiento Misionero Mundial* (known as MMM) has an episcopal form of church government, with the National Superintendent functioning as a bishop; all church properties are held in the name of the denomination.

The MMM has achieved a great deal of success in Costa Rica. By 1986, under the leadership of National Supervisor Luis A. Monge Salazar, 26 churches, 10 missions and 18 preaching points had been established with a total of 1,788 members and a church community of about 2,500. In early 2000, there were 110 churches, 30 missions and 80 preaching points, with an estimated membership of 5,000, which made this religious group the 9th largest Protestant denomination in Costa Rica. The National Supervisor in 2000 was the Rev. Carlos F. Guerra Suárez. About 90 percent of the members were native Costa Ricans and 10 percent were a mixture of Nicaraguans, Colombians and Salvadorans.

In 2003, there were 160 established congregations (churches and missions) with about 7,500 baptised members. The average congregational size was 47 members. According to the 2013-2014 national study of the Protestant movement in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES, the MMM reported 180 churches and missions with about 10,000 members nationally (an average of 55 members per congregation).

1964 - Church of the Nazarene / *Iglesia del Nazareno de Costa Rica*

The Church of the Nazarene in Costa Rica was started not by North American missionaries, but by Nicaraguan Nazarene pastors. In 1962, Pastor Ignacio Hernández was awarded a scholarship for post-graduate studies at the Latin American Biblical Seminary (SBL) in San José. He began the first Sunday school in San José in February 1963 with financial support from the Nazarene Missionary Council in Nicaragua.

After Pastor Hernández finished his studies at the SBL, he had to return to Nicaragua to become pastor of the First Church of the Nazarene in Managua. But the District Superintendent asked him, before leaving for Nicaragua, if he would formerly organize the Church of the Nazarene in San José, in the Barrio México neighborhood. The organization of the First Church of the Nazarene in San José took place on 2 March 1964, with the presence of the District Superintendent in Nicaragua, at that time the Rev. Dean Galloway.

The First Church of the Nazarene in Costa Rica was organized with 10 members in full communion and 13 probationary members who were later received as full members. The Rev. Diego Manuel Ortíz became the new pastor. With this beginning of the work in Costa Rica, the District in Nicaragua was renamed the *Nicaragua-Costa Rica District*, with offices in Nicaragua.

At the beginning of the 1970s, a new training and educational center for the preparation of future Nazarene leaders was developed in Alto de Guadalupe, canton of Goicoechea, called the Central American Nazarene Seminary, which was later renamed the *Nazarene Seminary of the Americas* (SENDAS, *Seminario Nazareno de las Américas*), since students came not only from Central America but also from the Caribbean and South America. It was in this location where the new District in Costa Rica held its first District Assembly, from 13-15 April 1972, with the presence of pastors, missionaries and delegates. The new District Superintendent was the Rev. Marshall G. Griffith who was responsible for two organized churches and two missions, 44 members in full communion, and 34 associate or probationary members.

At the eighth District Assembly, held on 2 February 1979, General Superintendent Dr. George Coulter thanked the Rev. Allan Wilson and his wife for their good work in the growth and development of the Pioneer District of Costa Rica. At the same time, the work in Costa Rica became a National Mission District, led by a new National District Superintendent, the Rev. Ezequiel Juantá. At the end of 1979, there were 434 members in full communion, and 146 probationary members in 12 churches and five missions.

Beginning in 1979, the Nazarene District of Costa Rica was under national leadership with the responsibility of developing the Church of the Nazarene in Costa Rica, with the financial support of the Mission, which included subsidies for the purchase of land and construction of churches and pastoral houses.

In the 15th District Assembly, held on 18 January 1986, the District of Costa Rica was divided into two parts: the Central District and the Northern District. Before the division, the single District had 1,079 members in full communion, 447 associate members, 23 organized churches and six missions.

In 2004, the Church of the Nazarene in Costa Rica had two regular districts with 31 organized churches and three missions that were distributed geographically from the center of the country to the northern border with Nicaragua. There was still no Nazarene representation in the southern part of the country. There are 2,206 members in full communion and 311 associate members, for a total of 2,517 members.

During the 1980s to 1990s, the coordination between the District, Seminary, and Mission led to a period of quantitative church growth that resulted from the ministerial service projects that students of the Nazarene Seminary of the Americas had to carry out: evangelization, discipleship, church planting and pastoring existing churches. Financial assistance was provided to the District by the Mission, which was invested in land and administrative support. The Mission also sent special Alabaster offerings and Work and Testimony Groups from Nazarene churches in the USA. The majority of the land that was purchased in the 1980s occurred at a time when the economy was stable, and the properties were very comfortably priced and had favorable conditions for purchase.

One of the advantages of having established the first Evangelical university in the country, the **Nazarene University of the Americas** (UNAZA, *Universidad Evangélica de las Américas*), in the existing facilities of the Nazarene Seminary was that many pastors, leaders, and national laity of different denominations came to study there, since it was well recognized for its sound doctrine and for the quality of its teachers.

One of the serious problems of the Church of the Nazarene in Costa Rica has been the lack of national leadership, since most of the Nazarene seminary and university students were of different nationalities who came to study in Costa Rica and stayed because of the lack of national pastors. Also, one of the failures has been that the Nazarene pastors with more experience have

not formed their own leaders, their “Timoteos,” to be their successors or pastors of new churches or missions.

Adapted from: “Historia de la Iglesia del Nazareno en la Región Centroamericana,” *Módulo Historia de la Iglesia del Nazareno* (2004), compiled and edited by Dorothy Patton de Bullón.

Statistical Summary of the Church of the Nazarene by PROLADES: in 1972, there were two churches with a total of 34 members; in 1979, 11 churches, five missions and two “campos blancos” were reported, with a total of 460 members nationwide; 1983, 20 churches and 11 missions were reported with a total of 842 members nationwide; 1986, 23 churches, five missions and eight “campos blancos” were reported, with a total of 1,079 members nationwide; 1989, 20 churches were reported with a total of 1,188 members; 1994, 1,539 members were reported; 2001, 31 churches and two missions were reported with an estimated 2,006 members nationwide; 2004, 31 churches and three missions with a total of 2,206 members; and 2013, 26 churches and eight missions (34 congregations) were reported, with an estimated 1,500 members nationwide (an average of 44 members per congregation). Between 2000 and 2013, there was a decline in the number of congregations and members reported. In 2014, the national supervisor was the Rev. Mario Vargas Castro, with headquarters on the SENDAS campus in Ipís de Guadalupe.

Sources: PROLADES, National Study of the Evangelical Work in Costa Rica: 1978, 1983, 1986, 1989, 2001 and 2013-2014.

1967 - Plymouth Brethren Assemblies / *Asambleas de Hermanos Libres (Salas Evangélicas)*

The first Plymouth Brethren laymen (there are no ordained clergymen) in Costa Rica are believed to have arrived in 1967 from other Central American countries. Since then, the Brethren Assemblies (“brethren who meet in the name of Jesus Christ”) have established meeting places in San Juan de Dios, Desamparados, San José; Ciudad Colón de San José; Quitirrisí de Guayabo de Mora, San José; and Guápiles de Limón.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/asambleas.encostarica>

A Brief History of its origins in England and Ireland. The first “Gospel Assemblies” were formed in England and Ireland in the 19th century (around 1820 and 1830), “where several Christians, moved by the Holy Spirit, realized that the doctrine of the existing congregations was not according to the doctrine of the Early Church, so they began to gather in small groups of people to read and study the Bible.” One of the main initiators was **John Nelson Darby** (18 November 1800 – 29 April 1882), a former Anglican minister.

The initial objective was not to create another Church or denomination, but to renew the existing ones to restore the doctrine of the Early Church. Soon, many more Christians were added to these groups, and the movement grew in England, Ireland, France, Germany and the other English-speaking countries. Like the early church, these groups grew in number, so they had to congregate in larger places (homes or rented places) and later build their own premises. Main Characteristics (according to the Early Church): 1. Autonomy of each congregation; 2. No hierarchies or superiors outside the local assembly; 3. They were governed by a group of elders within each local assembly; 4. Their meeting was with total simplicity and under the principle of separation from iniquity, which was their main basis of unity; and 5. They celebrated the Lord's supper every Sunday.

In 1848, there was a division as some argued that each congregation should have its autonomy and others said no, but the rest of the doctrine was maintained the same. In 1836, the first hymn book was published, called "Christian Hymnal." This movement continued to grow more and more, thanks to the missionary vocation of the brethren of that time, which took it to more countries in the world.

Unfortunately, two main differences arose among the various branches of the movement. Between 1856 and 1858, a separation occurred because some local assemblies accepted all those who professed the same faith in Christ, while the "exclusive brethren" did not. Therefore, two groups emerged: *Free or Open Brethren* and *Closed or Exclusivist Brethren*. The term "Free Brethren" began to be used approximately in the year 1856.

This "Free Brethren" movement continued to grow throughout the Americas and arrived in Argentina approximately in 1892 and currently has more than 1,000 assemblies; in the Dominican Republic in 1919 where there are currently approximately 150 assemblies; in Peru in 1893, currently there are around 225 assemblies; in 1836, they arrived in Spain, where currently there are around 200 assemblies; and to Guatemala in 1923, where currently there are more than 250 assemblies (Note: the date of these statistics is unknown). Adapted from:

http://www.asambleascristianasevangelicas.org/materiales/xdocumentos/Discurso_de_la_Historia_de_las_Salas_Evang%C3%A9licas.pdf

1967 - Churches of Christ / Iglesias de Cristo (a capella)

The Stone-Campbell movement (aka Restoration Movement) originated during the early 1800s, mainly in Kentucky and Pennsylvania, and grew rapidly during the period from 1832 to 1906, when the Stone-Campbell movement was first recognized as such in the 1906 U.S. Religious Census. The Stone-Campbell churches are found mainly in three groups (or "streams"): independent **Churches of Christ (a capella)**, independent **Christian Churches/Churches of Christ (instrumental)**, and the **Christian Church-Disciples of Christ** (an ecumenical denomination officially formed in 1968 that traces its origin to 1832).

The first assembly of independent "churches of Christ" (*a capella*) in Costa Rica took place after N.C. Fine and John Kling, USAID workers, began offering free Bible courses by correspondence. Among the first converts was Efraín Valverde, who later played a prominent role in the radio and television ministries and authored several books. Ray and Liz Bynum and the Norman Fox family were the first full-time workers in Costa Rica. The Bynums served in Costa Rica from 1967 to 2003. After establishing 39 congregations through locally trained evangelists, Bynum focused on starting a cell church model before his departure. All of the local congregations are led by national pastors.

Source: *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. Douglas A. Foster, et al, editors. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004: pp. 463-465.

According to the 2013-2014 national study of the Protestant movement in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES, the independent "churches of Christ" (non-instrumental = *a capella*) reported about 40 churches and missions with about 2,400 members nationally (an average of 60 members per congregation).

* * * * *

The Charismatic Renewal Movement (CRM) began in Costa Rica during the period 1969-1973 inspired by the visit of several Evangelical Charismatic leaders from the Argentine Charismatic Renewal movement in Buenos Aires: Juan Carlos Ortiz (Assemblies of God) and the Alberto Mottesi (Baptist). After hearing about the Argentine Renewal movement that began among the Plymouth Brethren in Buenos Aires in 1968, a small group of Evangelical leaders (led by Jonás González and Rubén Loes of the LAM) in Costa Rica agreed to invite Ortiz to visit San José and share what was happening in Argentina at a “Seminar on Evangelization.” This seminar, held in September of 1969, was well-attended by an ample cross-section of Evangelical leaders who were electrified by his message.

This historic event was co-sponsored by the Costa Rican Evangelical Alliance, the LAM’s Department of Evangelism-in-Depth, the Latin American Biblical Seminary (affiliated with the LAM), the Assemblies of God Bible Institute, the Foursquare Bible Institute and the Pentecostal Holiness Bible Institute. Also participating in the seminar were pastors from the Costa Rican Bible Church Association (AIBC, affiliated with the LAM), the Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Association of Central American Churches (affiliated with CAM), the Baptist Convention (affiliated with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board), the Foursquare Gospel Church, the Evangelical Methodist Church, and several smaller denominations. The participants included leaders from non-Pentecostal as well as Pentecostal churches and institutions, and some of them accepted the CRM as God-given while others rejected it as heresy, such as the Baptists and the CAM-related pastors.

Many of the early CRM activities were associated with the Bible Temple (*Templo Bíblico*) in downtown San José (affiliated with the AIBC), which was one of the largest congregations in the country in 1970. After Ortiz shared his testimony regarding the Argentine Renewal Movement at the Bible Temple, this historic non-Pentecostal church (founded by the LAEC / LAM in 1927) became a catalyst for the CRM in Costa Rica. The CRM spread during the next few years to most of the AIBC churches in the Central Valley and Guanacaste province, to some churches affiliated with the Baptist Convention, the Evangelical Methodist Church, the Association of Central American Churches, as well as to many Pentecostal denominations.

An additional catalyst for the spread of the CRM in Costa Rica was Evangelical radio station TIFC, known as “*Faro del Caribe*,” owned and operated by the LAM, which broadcast the recorded messages that Ortiz delivered at the “Seminar on Evangelization” in 1969. This was followed by recorded messages delivered in San José by other charismatic leaders: Gerardo de Ávila (a Cuban Pentecostal pastor from New York City) in 1970, Alberto Mottesi (a Baptist pastor from Buenos Aires) in 1971 as well as a second visit by Ortiz that year and two more visits in 1972, and Father Francis MacNutt (a Dominican priest from the USA) in 1971 as well as Víctor Landero (an Evangelical pastor from Colombia with the LAM-affiliated Association of Bible Churches of the Caribbean) in 1972.

After several members on the Board of Elders of the Bible Temple attended a private gathering of Catholics and Protestants in 1971 to hear the testimonies of Father MacNutt, Catholic laywoman Barbara Shlemon (RN), and Methodist pastors Tommy Tyson and Joe Petree concerning the nature, origin and early development of the **Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR)** movement in the USA (which began in 1967 at Dusquesne and Notre Dame universities), Father MacNutt was invited to speak at the Bible Temple on a Sunday morning. This was the first time in memory that a Catholic priest had spoken from the pulpit of an Evangelical church in Costa Rica; and MacNutt gave a powerful message at the Bible Temple regarding the person,

power and gifts of the Holy Spirit (including “speaking in tongues,” prophecy and healing) that had a great spiritual impact on the audience. This event further stimulated the growth and expansion of the CRM among AIBC churches through the country.

Other catalysts for the spread of the ecumenical CRM in Costa Rica were the establishment of chapters of the **Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship** (FGBMF, founded in 1951 by businessman Demos Shakarian in Los Angeles, CA) and **Women’s Aglow Fellowship** (founded in 1967 in Seattle, Washington) in the San José metro area during the early 1970s, which were well-attended by Evangelical and Catholic laymen and laywomen. In addition to regular weekly luncheon meetings, both of these organizations also sponsored small Bible study groups in private homes for men and women as well as for couples. These small group meetings, directed by lay leaders, became an important part of the development of CRM movement in Costa Rica, not only in the Central Valley but also in other parts of the country.

Additional influences that positively impacted the early development of the CRM in Costa Rica were the participation of numerous Costa Rican Evangelical leaders in the “First Latin American Congress on Charismatic Renewal” held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in December of 1972; the visit of Father Francis Corbett (a Charismatic priest from Central Illinois) to Costa Rica in January-February and July of 1973; as well as the ministry of Pentecostal Evangelist T. L. Osborn who led a “Divine Healing Campaign” in San José during February of 1973.

However, following the Osborn Campaign, a negative backlash soon development among many non-Pentecostal Evangelical pastors, denominational leaders and missionaries, who were strongly opposed to the Pentecostal and Charismatic (also called neo-Pentecostal) teachings concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, prophecy, faith healing and casting out of evil spirits. The Fundamentalists, who are strong advocates of dispensationalism, were particularly antagonistic toward Pentecostals and Charismatics (especially the Catholic variety) and toward non-Pentecostals who were sympathetic to the CRM. During the 1970s and 1980s, within some non-Pentecostal denominations, pastors and laypeople who became Charismatics were publicly rebuked and shunned, which resulted in an exodus of thousands of Evangelicals from those denominations to Pentecostal and Charismatic groups.

* * * * *

Between 1970 and 1979, the following groups were founded in Costa Rica.

1970	Trans World Missions / Asoc. Misión Transmundial (Centros Cristianos)	USA
1970	Elim Fellowship (fundada en Lima, Nuevo York, en 1932, 1947) / Iglesias Elim de Guanacaste	USA
1970	Pentecostal Church of God, International Mission / Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, Misión Internacional	Puerto Rico
1970	The Christian Mission (Barbados / Panamá) / La Misión Cristiana (Dr. Jorge Taylor)	Barbados
1970	Church of God of Prophecy / Iglesia de Dios de la Profecía	USA
1971	Congregational Holiness Church / Iglesia Congregacional Pentecostés	USA
1971	Pentecostal Church of God of New York / Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal de Nueva York	USA
1972	Christian Church of Christ (Robert Sheldon) / Iglesia Cristiana de Cristo	USA
1972	Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International / Iglesia de Dios Ministerial de Jesucristo Internacional	Colombia
1973	Association of Christian Churches / Asociación de Iglesias Cristianas	Costa Rica
1974	Pentecostal Missionary Baptist Church / Iglesia Bautista Misionera Pentecostal	USA
1975	Door of Faith Missionary Community / Comunidad Misionera Puerta de Fe	Costa Rica

1975	Damascus Council of Churches / Concilio de las Iglesias Cristianas Damasco (Nueva York, NY)	USA
1975	Crusade of Faith Evangelistic Center / Centro Evangélico Crusada de Fe	Costa Rica
1975	Christian & Missionary Alliance / Alianza Cristiana y Misionera	USA
1975	Evangelical Free Church of North America / Iglesia Evangélica Libre de Costa Rica	USA
1975	Oasis of Hope Church / Asociación Cristiana Oasis de Esperanza (affiliated with Assemblies of God)	Costa Rica
1975	The Covenant Evangelical Community / Comunidad Evangélica del Pacto (Guyón Massey)	Costa Rica
1976	United Pentecostal Church, International / Iglesia Pentecostal Unida Internacional	USA
1976	The Rose of Sharon Christian Mission / Misión Cristiana La Rosa de Sarón	Costa Rica
1978	National Evangelical Churches Council / Concilio de Iglesias Evangélicas Nacionales	Costa Rica
1978	Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church / Iglesias Bautistas Pentecostales de Unción y Santidad	USA
1979	Banquet House Ministries / Ministerios Casa del Banquete (now, Iglesia Centro Victoria)	Costa Rica

1970 - Pentecostal Church of God, International Mission / *Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, Misión Internacional*

This Puerto Rican denomination arrived in Costa Rica in 1970 in the person of missionary Virgilio Figueroa, who established his headquarters in the San José area. In 1978, Figueroa reported 14 churches and 1,200 members nationally. In 2000, this denomination reported 118 congregations with a total of about 4,000 members, which made the Pentecostal Church of God the 12th largest Protestant denomination in Costa Rica. According to the 2013-2014 national study of Evangelical work in Costa Rica, conducted by PROLADES, this denomination reported 130 congregations (churches and missions) with about 7,000 members (an average of 54 members per congregation).

Doctrinally, this group has basically the same doctrinal statement of faith as the Assemblies of God, from which it emerged in Puerto Rico in 1921 as national church body affiliated with the Assemblies of God in the USA. The Pentecostal Church of God in Puerto Rico began its own missionary program in 1940, which resulted in the establishment of affiliated churches in many Latin American countries as well as an earlier (1929) sister denomination on the East Coast of the USA: The Latin American Council of the Pentecostal Church of God of New York.

1970 - Church of God of Prophecy / *Iglesia de Dios de la Profecía*

The Church of God of Prophecy (founded in Cleveland, Tennessee, in 1923 as a split from the Church of God-Cleveland, TN) arrived in Costa Rica in 1970 and grew slowly until the years 1990-2000. According to a series of the national studies of evangelical work in Costa Rica conducted by PROCADES-PROLADES, the following results were found: in 1978, seven churches with 154 members; in 1983, six churches with 129 members; and 1986, seven churches with 158 members.

In October 1987, Francisco López (a Guatemalan) was appointed to supervise the Church of God of Prophecy (COGP) in Costa Rica, until October 1992. By 1989, there were 12 churches and 16 missions (28 congregations) with 557 members nationwide. In March 2000, this denomination reported 64 congregations in Costa Rica with a total membership of about 2,500 people (an average of only 39 members per congregation). In summary, the COGP increased from seven

churches with 158 members in 1986 to 64 congregations and 2,500 members in 2000, which is evidence of good leadership and solid church growth during this 14-year period.

In 2014, the COGP reported 65 churches and 32 missions (97 congregations), 150 “campos blancos,” and a total of about 6,000 members nationally, composed of the following: Costa Ricans 35 percent, Nicaraguans 30 percent, Cabécar 15 percent, Dominicans 15 percent, and Salvadorans five percent, approximately, according to national supervisor Alejandro Ramos.

1970 - Trans World Missions (TWM) / *Asociación Misiones Trans-Mundiales de Costa Rica* (AMT)

The Mission was founded in 1949 under the leadership of Nyles and Bernice Huffman, with the support of Dr. Claire Britton, pastor of Bethany Church in Alhambra, California, affiliated with the Assemblies of God. Consequently, the Mission’s first name was "Betania" when it was founded in that California city. Nyles was an experienced pilot who trained young pilots. He had flown in Mexico over areas unreachable by overland roads. He was a fervent Christian and while flying he wondered how to carry the Gospel message to the people of these regions.

With a small plane, he flew over remote villages and began throwing out copies of scripture portions with an address included at the end of each booklet. After doing this several times, he presented his pastor with a more aggressive plan. With the support of his church, the work continued, now with a Jeep, supplies for the plane, and thousands of copies of the Gospel of St. John, which included at the end an address to request a series of Bible studies. The work was done in the most remote areas of Mexico with a Taylorcraft single-engine airplane.

In 1953, Mission’s name was changed from "Bethany" to "Airmail From God" (AFG). It received a great deal of popularity and funding in Southern California through local Christian radio station KGER. Mexican Christian workers were recruited to travel throughout the mountains and villages of rural Mexico to follow-up on messages received from people who responded after receiving the Gospels of St. John that were distributed by the Mission’s small airplanes. Despite opposition from Catholic authorities, new converts were made and new churches and missions were established in some villages. However, negative criticism of the efforts of "Airmail From God" was made by some Protestant leaders in the USA because of the claims made by this organization that “whole villages in Mexico had been evangelized and reached with the Gospel” as the result of dropping Gospel portions and tracts from low-flying aircraft.

AFG president John Olson visited Nicaragua during the early 1960s and asked President Somoza for permission to distribute a million Gospels of St. John in Nicaragua. There, he met a young man named Manuel Tijerino who wanted to work on airplanes; Tijerino traveled to Mexico where he was trained as a pilot-mechanic and also as an evangelist. During the later 1960s, the work of AFG was begun in Brazil and Nicaragua, which motivated it’s leaders to change the name to "Trans World Missions" (TWM) in 1968.

On a trip to Costa Rica, Manuel Tijerino married Olga "una tica" and requested that he remain in that country as an evangelist with TWM. He began his work with young people in the city of Heredia in a small place near the Central Park. Then he bought nine hectares of land in Birrí, Heredia, where a camp was built and the “vacation with God” program began. In 1976, a dynamic leader, Luis Mejia, joined the Tijerino team and assumed a predominant role within the Mission. New churches were founded in Grecia and San Ramón around this time.

In 1979, the building where the church in Heredia met burned down, which forced the Mission

to buy another property in San José. Meetings began in rented cinemas until the Río Cinema in Guadalupe was purchased, located on the west side of the town's main plaza. People began attending this church, named Christian Center, from Heredia and from other parts of the country, where new Christian Centers soon would be founded in different locations, such as Cartago, Turrialba, etc.

In August 1983, Manuel Tijerino was disqualified as director of TWM work in Costa Rica, after 25 years of ministry, and Luis Mejía was appointed as the new director while serving as a missionary in Guatemala. Under Mejía's leadership during the 1980s, several other Christian Centers were established in other cities of Costa Rica and several TWM missionaries from Costa Rica were sent to various countries in Latin America.

In July 1994, TWM president John Olson died suddenly, and in early January 1995 Luis Mejía was appointed President of Trans World Missions at the international level. At that time, more than 50 churches had been founded in Mexico and Central America (Nicaragua and Costa Rica). Under Mejía's direction, missionary work was begun by starting Christian Centers in Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, Honduras, Colombia and Venezuela. Adapted from:

<http://transworldmissions.blogspot.com/2010/10/resena-historica-de-la-mision.html>

According to the national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES in 2013-2014, TWM reported 34 churches, five missions and 10 "preaching points" with a total of 3,500 members nationwide. The president of TWM in Costa Rica is Víctor H. Quirós Acuña, with headquarters at the Christian Center in Guadalupe, Goicoechea, an eastern suburb of San José.

In 2001, there was a division among TWM-affiliated churches in Costa Rica, when Pastor Osvaldo A. Carrillo in the city of Heredia became independent of TWM and founded the *Asociación Centro Cristiano Transmundial* (ACCTM), with headquarters in Heredia. According to PROLADES, ACCTM only reported five churches with a total of 1,500 members nationwide in 2013. However, in 2018, the Internet pages of this association reported that 12 daughter churches had been founded by the mother church in Heredia:

<http://www.ccheredia.com/index.php/quienes-somos/iglesias-hijas>

Together, these two organizations reported a total of 44 congregations with about 5,000 members in 2013 (an average of 114 members per congregation).

1970-1973 - Association of Christian Churches / *Asociación de Iglesias Cristianas*

This denomination was established between 1970-1973 by pastors Jorge Borbón Guerrero in Grecia, Eugenio Quiroz in Heredia and Víctor Loaza Chinchilla in Cartago to preserve the fruit of the campaign celebrated with evangelist Otto J. de la Torre who preached a message that "Jesus Christ saves, heals, liberates, works miracles, baptizes with his Holy Spirit, and He will return to the earth a second time." Evangelist Otto J. de la Torre founded the *Evangelistic Ministry Jesus Christ is Lord* in 1977. For over 35 years, he preached the gospel of power of the Lord Jesus Christ in campaigns, on the radio, on television, in books, brochures, and in person. "We have seen millions of people accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and millions were healed and delivered by the power of God," according to the evangelist.

In 1986, the *Asociación de Iglesias Cristianas* (AIC) reported 35 churches, one mission and two "campos blancos," with a total of 3,315 members nationally. Headquarters were in Barrio Pirro de Heredia under the leadership of its president, Pastor Jorge Borbón (Directorio de

PROLADES, 1986). In 2001, the AIC reported 25 churches and four “campos blancos” with 2,500 members (Directorio de PROLADES, 2001). In 2013, there were 20 churches with 2,150 members (Directorio de PROLADES, 2014), led by its president, Víctor M. Loaiza Chinchilla, in Paraíso de Cartago.

In 1986, the AIC experienced a division because of administrative differences among the leadership, which resulted in the founding of *Asociación Costa Rica para Cristo “Casa de Oración”* under the leadership of Eugenio Quiroz, pastor of “Casa de Oración para Todos los Pueblos,” in Heredia. In 2001, this organization reported 27 churches with 2,700 members (Directorio de PROLADES, 2001). In 2013, it reported only nine churches with a total of 790 members (Directorio de PROLADES, 2014). The reasons for the decline in the number of churches and members between 2001 and 2013 is unknown.

1971 - Congregational Holiness Church / *Asociación de Iglesias Congregacionales Pentecostales*

This organization was founded in the canton of Desamparados, located south of the City of San José, in February 1971 by missionaries William Randall Chester (1942-2011) and his wife Sharon. The Chesters were missionaries with the **Congregational Holiness Church (CHC)**, a Pentecostal-Holiness body, located in Griffin, Georgia. The CHC was founded in 1921 in High Shoals, Georgia, with 12 affiliated churches, and in 2000 it reported 5,200 affiliated churches in 12 states in the USA and 19 other countries. Its type of government is congregational and its theology is derived from the 19th century Wesleyan Holiness Revival and the 20th century Pentecostal movement in the USA.

The following is a brief summary of the historical development of this denomination in Costa Rica. In 1978, missionary William Randall Chester (headquarters in Desamparados) reported eight churches, five missions, and four “campos blancos” (preaching points), with a total of 300 members. In 1983, supervisor Mario Obando (based in San Rafael, Oreamuno, Cartago) reported 11 churches with 836 members. In 1986, supervisor Rogelio Navarro Rivera (based in San Rafael, Oreamuno, Cartago) reported 16 churches and one mission with 699 members. In 1991, supervisor Mario Obando (based in Turrialba, Cartago) reported 28 churches with 1,639 members. In 2001, according to the PROLADES national study, this denomination reported 22 churches with 1,250 members.

According to the latest national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES in 2013-2014, this denomination reported 16 churches with about 1,080 members, all located in the provinces of Limón and Cartago. The national president was Humberto Solano Arguedas, with headquarters in Barrio La Colina in the city of Limón.

1976 - Church of God in Christ Association / *Asociación Iglesia de Dios en Cristo (formerly known as *Iglesias Cordero de Dios*)*

In 1976, Pastor Eliécer Sánchez rented a house in a government housing project in Barrio López Mateos de San Sebastián to start a new church with a small group of charismatic people who were expelled from the Catholic Church. By 1986, several affiliated churches and missions had been established in neighborhoods of the San José metropolitan area using the name “Lamb of God Churches” (*Iglesias Cordero de Dios*). In 2000, this denomination reported 16 congregations (churches and missions) with about 1,920 members.

In 2001, a division occurred within the denomination due to a conflict with Pastor Eliécer, who was placed under discipline by the Council of Elders, and most of the affiliated congregations separated and formed a new association: the **Christian Community of Adoration and Joy (CCAJ)**, under the leadership of Pastor William Obando Zamora in San Sebastián (see next section).

Nevertheless, in 2013, the **Lamb of God Churches** (renamed “Church of God in Christ Association” / *Asociación Iglesia de Dios en Cristo*) reported 11 organized churches with about 1,500 members nationwide. In 2017, Pastor Eliécer Sánchez reported 13 affiliated churches, with about 1,800 members.

2001 - Christian Community of Adoration and Joy / *Comunidad Cristiana de Adoración y Júbilo*

In 2001, there was a division in *Iglesias Cordero de Dios* because of a conflict involving Pastor Eliécer Sánchez, who was placed under discipline by the Council of Elders; most of the affiliated churches separated and formed a new association, the **Christian Community of Adoration and Joy** under the leadership of Pastor William Obando Zamora in Barrio López Mateos, San Sebastián, a southern suburb of San José. In 2013, this denomination reported seven churches and one mission with about 1,000 members nationally.

1975 - Oasis of Hope Church / *Iglesia Oasis de Esperanza*

In February 1975, Assemblies of God missionaries Richard & Elva Jeffery and Gerald & Carol Robeson began a crusade in the cantón of Moravia, San José, that was called “La Gran Campaña de Sanidad Divina” (The Grand Campaign of Divine Healing). The crusade took place “in a vacant lot, with one area covered by a tin roof, where we could take refuge from that constant drizzle, with people standing. But God's support was great because miracles were seen every night. Deaf, blind, paralytic, people with various diseases were healed,” stated Raúl Vargas who was chosen to be the first pastor of this new congregation.

After holding the services in a place for 200 people, the construction of a temple with a capacity for 750 attendees began, which was completed in 1980. But the constant growth of the congregation meant that every Sunday people were located in the hallways and classrooms of the temple, and sometimes they could not enter the main auditorium.

On 31 December 1988, after two years of miracles and hard work, the church held a worship service in a new structure that was still without walls, but that marked the beginning of a new stage of its development: 1500 people worshiped God that day. After eight years, an auditorium with a capacity for 2,000 people was built, with about 8,000 people attended the four Sunday services.

In 1996, *Oasis de Esperanza* experienced “a refreshing stage that it had not experienced in previous years.” With the visit of Pastor Fernando Sosa, “the fresh breath of the Holy Spirit shook up every service, with a wave of adoration and revelation through the Word of God.”

In the year 2000, the church began a new cycle when it changed its way of working to the Model of Jesus. The congregation entered a time of transition, attendees were informed and prepared, and then a core body of leaders was trained through the process of meetings, worker academy, creating outreach groups, implementing discipleship, and networking.

Due to the great growth experienced as a result of working with the Model of Jesus, the congregation reached almost 10,000 attendees, which seriously overcrowded its installations with multiple worship services and limited parking capacity. This is why the project to build a new temple was born that would seat 10,000 people in one worship service. The "Casa Oasis" was proposed to the members of Oasis Church in 2003.

As a result of this expansion, the congregation experienced a national and international projection. Governing Pastor Vargas became "Apostle Vargas" by provided ministerial coverage to more than 10 national ministries, and Oasis witnessed the birth and growth of more than 10 daughter churches around the country. Internationally, Apostle Vargas and his pastoral team have had the opportunity to share and teach the Model of Jesus to groups in North, Central and South America.

Beginning in November 2008, the church changed its name from "Oasis of Hope" to just "Oasis Church" because it has a vision that not only offers hope, but also has the goal of encompassing not only the concept of hope but of life, refuge, home, salvation and restoration.

"Since 1975, the church has witnessed miracles, healings, and the change of life that God has given to thousands of people. All this great impact and growth has been possible thanks to the power of God," stated Vargas. Adapted from: <http://www.iglesiaoasis.net/nosotros/historia/>

CASA OASIS

Oasis Church began a new stage of its development as "Casa Oasis" (Oasis House) in the San Miguel district of Santo Domingo in Heredia province, on a 13-hectare property, with its inauguration in February 2013 with seating for 10,000 people. The concern to build new facilities was born in 2003 when its leaders saw the great growth that *Iglesia Oasis* had in recent years and also because the original location in Moravia did not have adequate parking available to meet the necessary requirements of its growing congregation.

The vision for building a 10,000-seat auditorium and its planning and construction process involved tests of faith both for Apostle Raúl and his team, as well as witnessing with members of the congregation a series of miracles that God performed in obtaining the plans (donated by a friendly church in Houston, Texas), the purchase of materials and the construction of the main auditorium. That required 840 tons of steel for its metal structure.

The change of location not only solved the difficulties of limited seating and parking but it also challenged the congregation to spread God's message to people in our new locality.

Adapted from: <http://www.iglesiaoasis.net/casa-oasis/>

Pastor Raúl Vargas has been affiliated with the Assemblies of God since his conversion in 1972 and during his entire pastoral ministry. However, because of his expanded national and international leadership as "Apostle Raúl," the ministry of "Iglesia Oasis" and now "Casa Oasis" and its affiliated churches and ministries function as a separate organizational structure within the *Asociación Cristiana de las Asambleas de Dios en Costa Rica*, and its statistics are not included in the annual report issued by that denomination. *Casa Oasis* is the largest of more than a dozen evangelical mega-churches in Costa Rica, most of which are located in the San José metro area. In 2014, the ministry of *Casa Oasis* included 20 churches and missions in Costa Rica, with about 14,000 members.

1975 - Door of Faith Missionary Community / *Comunidad Misionera Puerta de Fe*

The founders of the **Door of Faith Missionary Community** were pastors Marco Antonio Castro, Bolívar Jiménez and Edgar Miranda in Barrio El Carmen de Paso Ancho, a southern suburb of San José. According to the national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES in 1986, this association of churches reported five organized churches, one mission and seven “preaching points,” with a total of 775 members nationwide. In 2000-2001, this denomination reported 16 churches and two “preaching points” with about 1,120 members nationwide. In 2014, this denomination reported only eight affiliated churches nationwide and PROLADES reported there were eight other churches that previously “belonged to the Puerta de Fe Missionary Community” (Paso Ancho). There was no division but for legal reasons these last eight churches obtained their own legal status with the government under different names, and they are still in fellowship with the “mother church” in Paso Ancho.

1975 - Christian & Missionary Alliance / *Iglesia Alianza Cristiana y Misionera*

In 1881, the pastor of the 13th Street Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, New York, USA, Albert Benjamin Simpson, resigned his position to dedicate himself "to the rejected and churchless masses." To accomplish this, he organized a Missionary Training Institute and the New York Gospel Tabernacle. He also published a magazine to spread his message, "The Word, The Work, and The World" (today known as "Alliance Life"). By 1884, Simpson and his followers were able to finance the sending of five missionaries to the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo).

The year 1887 would see the founding of two Holiness-oriented missionary societies that would later become the **Christian & Missionary Alliance (C&MA)**, which mobilized evangelical-Protestant believers towards the foundation of churches outside the countries already evangelized (from the Protestant point of view). Simpson believed that a life "totally surrendered to Christ" (an evangelical way of referring to Christian Consecration) was one in which evangelizing work was of paramount importance. Similarly, he believed that a person "controlled by the Holy Spirit" could not but actively involve himself in the evangelizing mission of the Church, both overseas and in the country itself.

After the arrival of the C&MA in Costa Rica in 1975, Pastor Marco Antonio Castro reported the existence of three organized churches with a total of 390 members in 1978, according to the PROLADES national study. In 1986, Pastor Lorenzo Castro Lobo reported that there were five churches and one mission, with a total of 410 baptized members in Costa Rica. In 1990, there were six organized churches and one mission with 505 members nationwide. According to the national study by PROLADES in 2000-2001, there were only four churches with 550 members in Costa Rica; in 2013, only four churches with 220 members were reported.

1976 - United Pentecostal Church International / *Iglesia Pentecostal Unida Internacional*

The **United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI)** was formed in 1945 by a merger of the former *Pentecostal Church, Inc.* (known as the Pentecostal Ministerial Alliance until 1932), and the *Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ* (founded in 1931 in Columbus, Ohio).

The founder of this Oneness Pentecostal denomination in Costa Rica was missionary Ralph

Holland, who established the “mother church” in the city of Desamparados in 1976. Twenty-four years later, in March 2000, according to the PROLADES national study, this denomination had 33 churches and missions with a total of 2,350 members nationally (an average of 39 members per congregation). In 2007, missionary David H. Schwartz reported 75 churches and “campos blancos” (preaching points) with 34 licensed preachers and a "community" of about 4,800 believers.

According to the latest national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES in 2013-2014, this denomination reported 52 churches with about 3,500 members (an average of 67 members per congregation). Something happened in this denomination between 2007 and 2013, which resulted in fewer congregations (churches and missions) and members in 2013 than were reported in 2007. The national supervisor of this denomination was Julio Pacheco Orozco.

One possible explanation for the recent decline in the United Pentecostal Church (UPC) in Costa Rica was competition from another Oneness Pentecostal denomination from Colombia.

1994 - United Pentecostal Church of Colombia (*Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia - IPUC*) was established in Costa Rica in 1994 after its first missionary arrived, Marcos Pavón Duarte, who was sent by the IPUC Department of Foreign Missions. Churches founded by this denomination outside of Colombia use the name "Latin American United Pentecostal Church" / *Iglesia Pentecostal Unida Latinoamericana* (IPUL).

In 2013, Pastor Jairo Restrepo Díaz (superintendent since 2009) reported that his denomination had 28 organized churches with about 2,200 members nationwide (an average of 79 members per church). Restrepo stated that about 60 percent of the members are Costa Rican, 20 percent are Colombian and 20 percent are Nicaraguan. The work is organized in two districts: #1 Guanacaste, Puntarenas and Alajuela provinces; and #2 San José, Heredia, Cartago and Limón provinces.

1976 - The Rose of Sharon Christian Mission / *Misión Cristiana “La Rosa de Sarón”*

According to a study by CAM missionary Sigifredo W. Bieske, “The Rose of Sharon Christian Mission” was founded in San José in 1976, following an extended evangelistic campaign led by evangelist Gumerindo Melgar, a controversial Pentecostal leader from Guatemala. Before leaving Costa Rica, Melgar entrusted young José Luis Madrigal Chacón, a Costa Rican pastor who had no formal theological training, with the responsibility of providing pastoral care for the small congregation that had been formed as a result of the crusade.

From this small beginning, Madrigal and his organization began to make quite a name for themselves (positive with some, negative with others) in Costa Rica, not only because of Madrigal’s charisma and style of worship but also due to the rapid growth of the movement. First, Madrigal rented the second floor of a commercial building, located near Plaza González Víquez on the south side of San José, where they began to hold meetings in late 1976. Within two years, the congregation had increased to more than 300 members and had outgrown the facilities. Consequently, part of the congregation moved to a larger meeting place near the Central Market in the "red-light" district of San José, where they rented another "upper room" in a building that formerly housed the Canada Dry Company. From these two locations, Madrigal and his followers began to hold evangelistic meetings around the country that resulted in the formation of a series of daughter congregations. By 1983, The Rose of Sharon Christian Mission reported 26 affiliated congregations with about 3,000 adherents (no membership records were kept).

However, in 1984, a conflict developed between Madrigal and Yamiel Antonio Herrera Arce, the pastor of the Plaza Víquez congregation, which resulted in the movement's first division. After Herrera was forced to leave Madrigal's organization, he started a new church in the "red-light" district of San José that became known as Maranatha. In 1986, although the central church in San José had only about 100 members, the Maranatha movement (affiliated with Maranatha Church in Chicago, IL, USA) reported 1,130 total adherents in five small congregations throughout the country. In 2000, there were eight churches and six missions (14 congregations) in Costa Rica affiliated with the **Maranatha World Ministry of Faith and Power**. Currently, the leader of this movement is David Coto Azofeita, who is pastor of the "mother" church in Paso Ancho (Revival Cathedral / "Catedral de Avivamiento"), which reports 11 daughter churches in Costa Rica (April 2020).

Both of these movements are characterized as very authoritarian, with the founder being the dominant leader and prophet who requires absolute obedience and loyalty from his followers. Both Madrigal and Hererra are given to sharing "special revelation" by means of dreams, visions, tongues and prophecy, which enhances their authority and popularity among their followers. The worship services, which often last for two or three hours or more, are characterized by very active and loud participation by members of the congregation in a variety of activities: singing, praying, dancing in the spirit, speaking in tongues, words of prophecy, etc. There is also a strong emphasis on divine healing and the casting out of demons led by church leaders. Consequently, both The Rose of Sharon Christian Mission and Maranatha are classified by PROLADES as part of the Divine Healing and Liberation Family of Churches within the Pentecostal Movement.

In early 1983, Madrigal began promoting the idea of building a large central church with a seating capacity of about 6,000. At that time, the "mother church" of the movement, located in San José's Central Market district, only had about 800 people in attendance. Madrigal began to raise money to buy a large piece of property (about 4,000 square meters), located across the street from the Kamakiri Restaurant on Calle Central in Barrio Tournón (District of San Francisco de Goicoechea) on the north side of San José, for about \$100,000. His vision was to build a three-story building on this site consisting of a first floor for church offices and a dining hall for social activities, a large second-floor auditorium (seating 6,000), and a basement to be used as a parking garage. By late 1983, the property had been purchased and construction began on the basement area, but soon the funds ran out and the project came to a halt. However, after the congregation began to meet in the unfinished basement, the attendance continued to grow (about 1,200) and the funds continued to flow, which allowed construction efforts to resume. At the end of 1989, a temporary roof had been built for the first floor, and the congregation had grown to about 2,000 in attendance.

By 1986, The Rose of Sharon Christian Mission was an established "denomination," reporting 25 churches and missions with about 3,915 members. In 1990, Madrigal reported 6,000 adherents in 30 congregations. However, a series of problems arose during the 1990s in the administration of this denomination (especially in the "mother church" under Pastor José Luis Madrigal Chacón due to conflicts between leaders) that resulted in the closure of some "daughter churches" and the return to the "mother church" of their members, while other "daughter churches" became independent of "La Rosa de Sarón" in San José.

In 1995, five of the dissident groups joined forces to form the **Association of Wesleyan Churches** (Holiness tradition), with international ties to the International Wesleyan Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. In August 2001, there were 30 churches and about 3,000 baptized members related to this denomination. Two of the main leaders of this group were president Robert Barrantes (Concepción de Tres Ríos, La Unión, Cartago), and vice-president Luis Azofefa

(Grecia, Alajuela).

Meanwhile, the central church of *La Misión Cristiana "La Rosa de Sarón"* in Barrio Tournón reported an average Sunday worship attendance of about 10,000 in March 2000., which made it the largest single congregation in the nation. In addition, there were four other congregations related to “La Rosa de Sarón,” including one in Ciudad Colón and one in Santiago de Puriscal. In 2000, this was the fourth-largest Protestant denomination in Costa Rica.

However, the 2013-2014 national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica, conducted by PROLADES, revealed that *Misión Cristiana "La Rosa de Sarón"* reported only three affiliated congregations with about 6,000 members nationwide. Sunday attendance at the “mother church” in Barrio Tournón had greatly declined by mid-2010, with only about 3,000 people present in the main worship service at 10:30 am. Also, other Sunday services were held at 8:00 am and 4:00 pm with fewer people in attendance than at the 10:30 am service. When asked about the reasons for this decline, several former members stated that the authoritarian style of leadership of Madrigal had motivated some of the top leadership to leave and form their own churches.

1978 - National Council of Evangelical Churches / *Asociación Concilio de Iglesias Evangélicas Nacionales de Costa Rica*

This is an autochthonous Costa Rican Pentecostal denomination with no known links to any religious group in other countries. It was founded on 19 June 1978 at the *Iglesia Evangélica Nacional* in the municipality of Guadalupe, Barrio San Gerardo, Cantón de Goicoechea (an eastern suburb of San José) by eight members of the Board of Directors of the new **Association of National Council of Evangelical Churches of Costa Rica / *Asociación Concilio de Iglesias Evangélicas Nacionales de Costa Rica*** (ACIENCR), which held office from 1978 to 1980. This denomination has a Presbyterian form of church government, with the ruling elders making all of the most important decisions for the Association without consulting the members. The President of the ACIENCR at its founding in 1978 was the Rev. Edgar Chacón Alvarado (hijo), who held that office until 1986 when he was replaced by Ramón Rojas Chavarría (1986-1988).

In 1994, denominational officials reported 46 organized churches with 58 licensed preachers, which were divided into eight presbyteries: San José I (Guadalupe, Zapote, Cinco Esquinas and Centro Cristiano Canaán), San José II (Centro Cristiano Fe y Esperanza, San Juan de Tibas and San Felipe), San José III (Santa Ana, Puriscal, La Fila and Guayabo de Mora), San José IV (Villas de Ayarco, Monte Sinaí and Dos Cercas), Alajuela (La Argentina, Palmares, San Ramón and Tacaes), Zona Sur (Ciudad Cortéz, Abrojos Ciudad Neily and Miramar), Parrita (Pueblo Nuevo, La Julieta, Palo Seco, Cerritos, Cerros, La Loma and Damas), Puerto Jiménez (El Edén de Osa, Rincón de Osa, Palma de Osa, Palo Seco de Osa, Sándola, Puerto Jiménez Centro, Río Tigre, Cañaza and San Miguel), Guanacaste (Santa Ana, Paso Tempisque, Belén, Corralitlos, Santo Domingo, Ortega and San Blas), Puntarenas (Cidral) and Zona Atlántica (Pejivalle).

Geographically, the 46 organized churches were located as follows: San José Province (14), Alajuela Province (4), Zona Sur (Southern Puntarenas Province, 3), Central Pacific Region (Part of Puntarenas Province, 7), Puerto Jiménez area (Part of Puntarenas Province, 9), Northern Puntarenas Province (1), Guanacaste Province (7) and Zona Atlántico (Limón Province, 1). The total for Puntarenas Province was 20 churches.

In 1988, ACIENCR acquired by merger the churches and properties that formerly belonged to the **Elim Bible Association / *Asociación Bíblica Elim*** (ABE) in Guanacaste Province with seven organized churches located in the Cantón of Carrillo, which were listed above under Guanacaste Province in 1994. The ABE was created by the evangelistic, pastoral and teaching ministry of the

Rev. and Mrs. Kenneth Bennett, who had a casual association with Elim Assemblies in Lima, New York, a Pentecostal denomination in the Latter Rain tradition. This included the property of the Elim Bible Institute in Carrillo, organized and built by the Bennett's as part of their 20-years of ministry in Guanacaste. Faced with a need to retire from their mission work in Costa Rica and return to the USA, the Bennetts decided to turn over their mission work to the ACIENCR along with the legal title to all of their property, rather than selling the property and keeping the assets for their retirement.

There have been a number of serious conflicts among the principal leaders of ACIENCR, with some dissident pastors leaving to join other denominations with a loss of an estimated 8-10 organized churches. Consequently, there was not much actual church growth between 1986 and 2000. The official denominational statistics for March 2000 showed only 41 organized churches and 4,768 members. According to a national study of the Protestant movement in Costa Rica conducted by the PROLADES during 2013-2014, ACIENCR reported 45 congregations with about 5,000 members (an average of 111 members per congregation). This was an increase of only four congregations and about 230 members during the 13-year period 2000-2013.

Nevertheless, ACIENCR did experience considerable church growth between the date of its founding in 1978 (with seven or eight organized churches) and 1986 when this denomination reported 41 organized churches, two missions and 17 preaching points, with a total of 3,351 baptized members and a church community of about 4,600. Most of this growth occurred in the provinces of San José and Puntarenas as a result of evangelistic activities by numerous pastors and of a "spiritual revival" that occurred in the Central Pacific Region of Puntarenas province during the early 1980s.

1987 - Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church / *Asociación de Iglesias Bautistas Pentecostales de Unción y Santidad de Costa Rica*

The Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church, Inc. (PFWBC) was founded in 1959 with its headquarters in Dunn, North Carolina, USA. It has associated churches primarily in the southeastern USA, especially in the states of South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and Florida. Also, it has missionary work in eight countries: Mexico (1963), Puerto Rico (1963), the North and South Philippines (1969), Nicaragua (1971), Venezuela (1974), Costa Rica (1978), Nigeria (1989) and Guatemala (1990). Additionally, it has missionary work among Hispanics in the USA, with nine affiliated churches in North Carolina and Florida.

The PFWBC, historically and theologically, combines Baptist and Pentecostal traditions. It originated from a small group of Baptist churches in North Carolina that became independent from Free Will Baptist Churches (Arminian theology) to join the Holiness (Wesleyan) movement and eventually adopting certain Pentecostal doctrines after the Azusa Street Revival (1906-1913) in Los Angeles, California. Its doctrine is a combination of Baptist beliefs (specifically Free Will Baptist) and Pentecostal Holiness beliefs (Wesleyan and Arminian).

The PFWBC began missionary work in Central America in 1971 by naming Keith Black (born in Puerto Limón, Costa Rica, in 1935) as a missionary in Nicaragua, where he established several small local churches. But, due to the difficult and dangerous conditions during the Sandinista revolution in the 1970s, Black decided to leave Nicaragua in 1977 and seek refuge in Costa Rica, his native country. Consequently, the PFWBC foreign mission made the decision to appoint missionary Black to work in Costa Rica, where he had previously ministered with the Full Gospel Church of God and the Foursquare Gospel Church.

The first church founded by the PFWBC in Costa Rica was located in Hatillo 6, a southern suburb of San José, after a 15-month evangelistic campaign during the years 1977 and 1978 led by missionary Black with the support of the PFWBC missionary Gary Manning and Pastors Fernando Calvo Cintrón and Odimaco García. This church became the “mother church” of the PFWBC in Costa Rica and the largest congregation in this denomination, with some 300 members in 2013.

This denomination was officially founded in Costa Rica in 1978 under the legal name of “Association of Pentecostal Baptist Churches of Anointing and Holiness of Costa Rica,” according to missionary Black. During the period 1978-1982, Black supported the organization of the interdenominational Fraternity of Pastors of San José, which met for many years on Monday mornings in a room at radio station TIFC “Faro del Caribe,” located in San Francisco de Dos Ríos. Later, the meetings were held in the Templo Bíblico (affiliated with the AIBC) in downtown San José, and most recently in the conference room at the Costa Rican Bible Society adjacent to Plaza Víquez in San José.

During the years 1978 to 1982, Black and his associate pastors led a series of evangelistic campaigns in many parts of the country that resulted in the formation of new local churches. In 1983, this denomination reported that it had five organized churches with about 250 members nationwide. In 1982, Black left Costa Rica for the U.S. state of Louisiana to work as a translator in the production of Spanish language literature and radio programs, in addition to establishing and pastoring Hispanic churches. After Black’s departure, other pastors assumed leadership positions in the new denomination in Costa Rica, such as Odimaco García and Fernando Calvo Cintrón (currently the president). In 1990, 14 organized churches with about 1,000 members were reported nationwide, and by 2000 there were 35 churches with 2,566 members (an average of 73 members per church).

According to the 2013-2014 national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES, this denomination reported 36 congregations (churches and missions) with about 3,400 members nationwide (an average of 94 members per congregation). Denominational officials indicated that approximately 80 percent of its members are Costa Rican and 20 percent are Nicaraguan. Earlier in its history, according to missionary Black, the PFWBC had about 45 affiliated churches in Costa Rica, but some of them later became independent for various reasons.

The distribution of PFWBC congregations in Costa Rica, by province, is as follows: San José 3, Alajuela 7, Cartago 1, Heredia 10, Puntarenas 6, Guanacaste 1 and Limón 8 (total is 36). This information does not include the “campos blancos” (preaching points) that are currently being served by several of the pastors and their churches. In addition, a church was founded in Agua Dulce, Panama, which is a “daughter church” of the International Soul Clinic Ministry in Costa Rica (the name of the “mother church” at the denominational headquarters in Hatillo 6).

Sources: Clifton L. Holland, personal interview with Keith Black, on 7 February 2014, in the offices of PROLADES in San Pedro, Montes de Oca (from 2:30 to 4:30 pm); Melvin Murillo, personal interview with administrative pastor Héctor López Arias on 22 October 2013 in the offices of the national headquarters in Hatillo 6; Mr. Murillo was a member of the PROLADES team of interviewers for the 2013-2014 national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica.

* * * * *

In 1977, the Institute of In-depth Evangelization / *Instituto de Evangelización a Fondo* (INDEF) began a new ministry under the direction of LAM missionary Clifton L. Holland, known as the Central American Socio-Religious Studies Program (PROCADES = *Programa Centro-*

americano de Estudios Sociorreligiosos, later renamed PROLADES after its work was begun in other Latin American and Caribbean countries). During 1977-1978, the PROCADES team of researchers and support staff conducted a national study of the Protestant movement in Costa Rica, which produced a national database of denominations, local congregations (churches and missions), and para-church ministries. In June 1978, PROCADES published the **Directory of Churches, Organizations and Ministries of the Protestant Movement: Costa Rica / Directorio de Iglesias, Organizaciones y Ministerios del Movimiento Protestante: Costa Rica** (116 pages). Soon thereafter, PROCADES was invited to conduct similar studies in Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador and Panama (1978-1982) in cooperation with national leaders and their organizations.

* * * * *

In 1978, the national study of the Protestant movement conducted by PROCADES was able to identify the 12-largest Protestant denominations in Costa Rica, based on the number of baptized church members reported by the respective headquarters or based on estimates by PROCADES. These 12 denominations had 71 percent of the total number of congregations (churches and missions) reported to exist in 1978 and 72 percent of the total membership reported nationally.

**TABLE OF THE TWELVE LARGEST
PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS
IN COSTA RICA, 1978**

RANK	NAME OF DENOMINATION	DATE FOUNDED	NUMBER CONG.	NUMBER MEMBERS
1	Seventh-Day Adventist Church	1897	47	5,700
2	*Assemblies of God	1944	120	4,900
3	Association of Costa Rican Bible Churches (AIBC-LAM)	1921	62	3,984
4	Baptist Bible Churches	1958	7	2,950
5	*Foursquare Gospel Church	1953	31	2,900
6	Baptist Convention (Southern Baptist affiliated)	1944	39	2,260
7	*Church of God (Cleveland, TN)	1937	66	2,100
8	Protestant Episcopal Church	1896	17	2,049
9	Association of Central American Churches (CAM)	1891	60	1,500
10	Methodist Church of Costa Rica (UMC-related)	1917	24	1,395
11	*Pentecostal Church of God, International Mission	1970	14	1,200
12	*Pentecostal Holiness Church	1918	26	1,100
	TOTALS		513	32,038

Note: only five of the 12 denominations listed above were Pentecostal (marked with an *) with a total of 257 congregations (churches and missions) with a total of 12,220 members, which was 50 percent of the total number of congregations and 38 percent of the members reported in the table above. Conversely, the seven non-Pentecostal denominations listed above had 62 percent of the members and 50 percent of the congregations. In 1978, the non-Pentecostal denominations in Costa Rica still represented the majority of the church members among the 12-largest groups.

Between 1980 and 1989, the following groups were founded in Costa Rica.

1980	Christ Lives Christian Centers / Asoc. Centros Cristianos Cristo Vive	Costa Rica
1980	Spring of Life Christian Association / Asoc. Cristiana Manantial de Vida de Costa Rica	Costa Rica
1980	Shalom Christian Community / Comunidad Cristiana Shalom	Costa Rica
1980	Panamerican Christian Association / Asoc. Cristiana Panamericana (Rony Chávez, one church)	Costa Rica
1980	SIM Church (We are Sent to the Harvest) / Iglesia SIM (Somos Enviados a las Mies)	Costa Rica
1980	National Union of Baptist Churches / Unión Nacional de Iglesia Bautistas (a division of the Baptist Convention); supported by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.	Costa Rica
1980s	Calvary Chapel / Capilla Calvario (founded in Costa Rica by missionary Paul Weinard; with headquarters in Costa Mesa, California – Pastor Chuck Smith)	USA
1983	Christian Reformed Church (Grand Rapids, Michigan) / Iglesia Cristiana Reformada	USA
1983	Holiness & Anointed Pentecostal Baptist Churches / Iglesias Bautistas Pentecostales Unción y Santidad	Costa Rica
1983	Vineyard Churches / Federación de Iglesias Viña de Costa Rica	USA
1984	Maranatha World Ministry of Faith and Power (Chicago, Illinois) / Ministerio Mundial de Fe y Poder Marantha	USA
1984	Association of Reformed & Presbyterian Churches / Asociación de Iglesias Reformadas y Presbiterianas de Costa Rica (una división de la Iglesia Cristiana Reformada)	USA
1985	Fraternity of Costa Rican Evangelical Churches / Fraternidad de Iglesias Evangélicas Costarricenses (FIEC, a division in the AIBC); now called Iglesia Evangélica Presbiteriana de Costa Rica (affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.)	Costa Rica
1985	Evangelistic Center of Zapote / Centro Evangelístico de Zapote	Costa Rica
1986	Costa Rica for Christ / Asociación Costa Rica para Cristo	USA
1988	Costa Rican Lutheran Church / Iglesia Luterana Costarricense (ILCO), afiliada a la Comunión de Iglesia Luteranas de Centroamérica (CILCA)	América Central
1989	Genesis Presbyterian Church (Korean) / Iglesia Presbiteriana Génesis	Corea
1989	Pentecostal Church of God of America / Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal de América	USA
1989	Free Methodist Church / Iglesia Metodista Libre	USA

1980 - Spring of Life Christian Association / Asociación Cristiana Manantial de Vida

Pastor Jorge Luis Soto Gould was converted during an evangelistic campaign in April 1978 in a public square in Liberia, Guanacaste, led by Domingo Pilarte from the Dominican Republic. Soto is the founder and president of *Asociación Cristiana Manantial de Vida*, founded in 1980, with headquarters in the *Cathedral of the Holy Spirit* (built in 1997), located in Esparza, Puntarenas province.

The Spring of Life Christian Association is composed of numerous churches throughout the country and others in Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras, Colombia, Peru, Spain, Canada, and the USA, among others. He is also director of the *Olivos Verdes International Ministry* through which he teaches leadership seminars in Central America, South America, the Caribbean and even in Europe, especially to pastors. For some years, he has been part of International Intercrossers, which promotes prayer in various nations of the world, in favor of the unity of the Church and for its governments.

Adapted from: <http://www.manantialdevida.org/index.php/nosotros/jorge-luis-soto-gould>

According to the national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES in 2013-2014, this association of churches reported two organized churches and nine missions, with a membership of approximately 2,000 people.

1980 - City of God - Shalom Christian Community / *Comunidad Cristiana Shalom - Ciudad de Dios*

In the late 1970s, a powerful charismatic movement began in Costa Rica that gave rise to the Hatillo Christian Church, founded by Pastor Dr. Alex Alvarado (a dental surgeon) and a group of leaders. This group was made up mostly of charismatic Catholics who wanted to seek more of God. This group began to grow and became a church, called *Shalom Missionary Church*.

In the early 1980s, after great effort, the church managed to purchase a property in district of Hatillo, a southern suburb of San José, where the first building was constructed. Later, it became known as the *Shalom Christian Community*. After a “visitation of God” during the years 1996 to 1998, the hunger for God was such that the house meetings, which are called discipleship “cells”, produced an explosive growth. Starting in 2000, the church changed its name to the *Ciudad de Dios*. This church has been part of the *Brethren in Christ Church* denomination in the USA since 2008. Pastor Alex is coordinator for Central America of the Brethren in Christ Church: <http://bic-church.org/>

The City of God Church is an evangelical mega-church of about 5,000 members and has affiliated churches in Alajuelita, Santa Ana, Escazú, Heredia and a mission in Puntarenas. The sanctuary of the mother church in Hatillo has a capacity of 1,250 people seated in metal folding chairs, with a total attendance of between 2,000-2,500 people in the two services on any given Sunday.

1980 - Pas Community / *Comunidad Pas (Perdonados para Amar y Servir)*

In 1970, missionaries John and Leah Huffman (Latin America Mission) started a group for high school and university students to study the Word of God and serve their neighbors, called the “English-speaking Youth Group,” under the auspices of the Association of Christian Ministries to English Speakers - AMCA). That ministry reached hundreds of young people from its Center (“La Casona”) on Avenida 10, between Calles 21 and 23, in Barrio González Lehman de San José. This ministry grew and people of various ages began to attend its meetings at the beginning of the charismatic movement in the San José metropolitan area. In 1980, the need arose to found an evangelical church to serve all ages.

This led to the founding of PAS Community (Forgiven to Love and Serve) located in Zapote, south side of the peripheral route, between the Zapote roundabout and the San Francisco de Dos Ríos roundabout, in its own temple with the capacity to serve about 500 people.

In 2013, they moved to a new, larger temple in Paso Ancho (with seating for about 2,000 people), located 300 meters northeast of the La Guacamaya roundabout (traffic circle), under the leadership of Pastor Alejandro Castro and his pastoral team.

According to statistics compiled by PROLADES since 1986, this ministry has grown from one church with 160 members in 1986, to two churches with about 500 members in 2001, to two churches with about 2,000 members in 2014.

1980 - Panamerican Christian Association / *Asociación Cristiana Panamericana*

In 1980, Costa Rican pastor Rony Chávez founded the **Panamerican Christian Association** in the district of Tibás, San José, where eventually he developed a congregation of about 800 people (2014). During the 1990s, Chávez became known as “Apostle Dr. Rony Chávez” because of his association with Dr. C. Peter Wagner’s (1930-2016) and a member of his **International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders** (ICAL), which Wagner co-founded in 2000 with other like-minded Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders. The ICAL is self-described as “a family of connected apostolic leaders who are developing leaders and advancing the Kingdom of God worldwide.” In the 1990s, Wagner coined the term “New Apostolic Reformation” (NAR) to describe the network of churches and leaders that had become self-appointed “apostles” or who were appointed as such by others, including their own churches or by other “apostles.”

See: <https://www.icaleaders.com/about-ical/history-of-ica>

Wagner, a former tenured professor of Missiology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, during the 1970s thru the 1990s (when he was asked to leave!), wrote about “spiritual warfare” in a series of books, including *Confronting the Powers: How the New Testament Church Experienced the Power of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare* and *Engaging the Enemy*. In *Confronting the Powers*, Wagner breaks down “spiritual warfare” as having three levels: "Ground Level: Person-to-person, praying for each other's personal needs. Occult Level: deals with demonic forces released through activities related to Satanism, witchcraft, astrology and many other forms of structured occultism. Strategic-Level or Cosmic-Level: To bind and bring down spiritual principalities and powers that rule over governments." "Strategic-level intercession" uses "spiritual mapping" and "tearing down strongholds" to engage in spiritual warfare against "territorial spirits." (C. Peter Wagner. *Confronting the Powers: How the New Testament Church Experienced the Power of Strategic-level Spiritual Warfare*. Regal Books; 1996)

According to Wagner, these methods "were virtually unknown to the majority of Christians before the 1990s." The premise of *Engaging the Enemy* is that Satan and his demons are literally in the world, that Satan's territorial spirit-demons may be identified by name, and that Christians are to engage in “spiritual warfare” to defeat them.

Pastor Rony Chávez became part of this “spiritual warfare” movement and a friend of Wagner and his international associates in the ICAL network. In Costa Rica, Chávez has had a dubious reputation because of his “fanatical” adherence to this movement, and by teaching and preaching NAR beliefs and practices. It was widely reported among Evangelical leaders in Costa Rica that Rony Chávez and a few of his associates rented a small aircraft to fly over the nation’s capital of San José in order to spread droplets of “holy oil” over the city, and thereby to “liberate the city and its people of demonic oppression.” Although this practice and claim by Chávez was repudiated by some of the leading Pentecostal pastors and denominational officials, Chávez continues to be held in high regard by other Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders who self-identify with the NAR and believe in the importance of conducting “spiritual warfare” to liberate individuals, territories (cities, regions and nations) from Satan’s bondage to prepare the way for the Second Advent of Jesus Christ.

Chávez’ Facebook page currently lists him as President and Founder of World Mission Advance Ministry, Pastor General and Apostle of the World Center of Worship / *Presidente y Fundador del Ministerio Avance Misionero Mundial, Pastor General y Apóstol del Centro*

Mundial de Adoración, which is assumed to be his small church in Tibás:
https://www.facebook.com/pg/ApostolRonyChaves/about/?ref=page_internal

1982 – Maranatha Power and Faith World Ministry / Ministerio Mundial de Fe y Poder Maranatha

In 1982, a serious conflict developed between José Luis Madrigal Chacón, the governing pastor of the Christian Mission "La Rosa de Sarón" (MCRS), and Yamiel Antonio Herrera Arce, the pastor of the MCRS congregation in Plaza Víquez, who was expelled from the MCRS. Then, Pastor Herrera founded a new church in the "red-light zone" of San José under the name "Maranatha," which later became affiliated with Maranatha Church in Chicago, Illinois, USA, founded in 1974 by the Apostle Nahum Rosales: <http://maranathausa.com/es>

In 1986, the Christian Association "La Nueva Jerusalén" (Maranatha Church) in San José reported five congregations in the country with about 1,130 members under the leadership of pastor Yamiel Antonio Herrera. In 2001, eight churches with about 800 members were reported, under the leadership of Pastor Oscar Coto. In 2013, 12 churches with 2,500 members were reported, according to the PROLADES national study.

Official History. "The Maranatha San José Church in Costa Rica was founded and led by Pastors Oscar and Patricia Coto. It has been characterized by having a message loaded with faith and power, with a fresh revelation of the word of God. Currently, it is being pastored by their son, David Coto, who not only leads the Central Church but the entire Maranatha ministry in Costa Rica. Pastor David is a young man passionate about the presence of God, and with a burden for this generation. He has known how to take over the leadership from his parents and to be a prophetic voice to young people and adults in these times of social crisis."

Source: https://www.facebook.com/pg/MaranathaSanJose/about/?ref=page_internal

1084 - Reformed Presbyterian Churches / Iglesias Presbiterianas Reformadas de Costa Rica

The work of Reformed missions and churches in Costa Rica began in mid-1984. Missionaries of the *Christian Reformed Church of North America* (CRC) had started work in Honduras and Nicaragua, but there was still no Reformed church in Costa Rica. Some early Reformed-Presbyterian background denominations had already abandoned their roots, and were embracing Pentecostalism.

Among those arriving in these early years were Pastor William ("Bill") Green and his wife Aletha. Together with a recent convert, Roberto Venegas, they began work in Guadalupe de Goicoechea, a district east of San José. Two churches were formed, in the sector of Tepeyac and in Los Cuadros, Purral Arriba, both located in the cantón of Goicoechea. Roberto Venegas prepared himself theologically and assumed the pastorate of the congregation in Tepeyac. Marvin Briceño arrived from Nicaragua to reinforce the work in Los Cuadros, and the work there was established with solidity.

The **Christian Reformed Church (CRC)** missionaries and local leaders began work in several places, including San José, Alajuela and Puntarenas. But these mission efforts lacked continuity, and the CRC mission ended its work in Costa Rica in the late 1990s. Differences in theology and government produced a separation from the two other CRC-related churches, and the churches in Tepeyac and Los Cuadros continued to support the Reformed Confessional

foundation. They took the name "Reformed Presbyterian Churches of Costa Rica" (IPRCR - *Iglesias Presbiterianas Reformadas de Costa Rica*).

In 1993, the IPRCR church in Tepeyac established the Reformed Christian Education Center / "Centro Educativo Cristiano Reformado" (CECRE), an educational institution. Aletha Green served as principal for 13 years, during which CECRE managed to build a primary school and advance the construction of a new school building. The educational program grew to provide a high school program thru the 11th grade. Its vision has been to provide a clearly Christian, Biblical, Christocentric and Reformed school education. This includes imparting a Reformed worldview of life and society. Pastor Donald Herrera joined the team, helping to strengthen the Bible and worldview area of the curriculum. The establishment of a Reformed educational program has not been easy due to many factors, including the attitudes of some parents who do not understand the principles of Christian education, the need to train teachers in a Reformed worldview, and struggles with gaining approval from the Ministry of Education.

The Tepeyac IPRCR planted two daughter churches, one in El Carmen de Guadalupe (Grace Covenant), and one in Cartago (First Reformed Presbyterian Church of Cartago). In addition, the Tepeyac church established a mission in Pérez Zeledón. The IPRCR now consists of a presbytery of four congregations and a mission. Since its inception all these congregations have been self-supporting. The Christian Reformed mission helped with the construction of the Tepeyac temple, and many brethren have helped with the construction of the primary school and high school facilities.

The desire of all IPRCR leaders has been to serve the church in Costa Rica and the country. Together with the Reformed Baptist Church of Los Lagos (Heredia), the IPRCR leaders promoted the formation of an association of reformed pastors and leaders in Costa Rica. This association meets every two months for edification, and it plans a united worship serve for "Reformation Day," and also the annual Reformed "Grace and Truth" conference. These efforts have always been open to the public, and other leaders and brethren have joined these activities.

1985 - Federation of Costa Rican Evangelical Churches / *Federación de Iglesias Evangélicas Costarricenses* (FIEC); now renamed, *Iglesia Evangélica Presbiteriana Costarricense* (IEPC)

During the 1970s and 1980s, there arose a conflict between leaders of the Association of Costa Rican Bible Churches (AIBC) that led to the first schism among AIBC affiliates. Liberation Theology (TL) became a controversial topic among evangelicals in general and among the professors and students of the Latin American Biblical Seminary (SBL), in particular, during the mid-1970s. The SBL was founded in San José by the LAM ("Latin America Mission") in the 1920s and trained pastors and Christian leaders from many denominations, not only from the AIBC. The pro-TL and counter-TL factions waged a verbal war against each other that resulted in slander against many individuals and a split between many evangelical organizations, including LAM missionaries and other mission agencies.

By the late 1970s, a number of professors who were against or not comfortable with teaching TL had resigned from the SBL, which left the remaining SBL teach staff united in their support of TL. At the same time, many Costa Rican denominations, in addition to national churches and mission agencies in other countries that opposed the TL, stopped sending their pastors and leaders to the SBL.

This controversy affected the AIBC because several of the SBL teachers were also pastors in AIBC churches, and for several years there were discussions on the issue of TL among the AIBC leadership. Ultimately, in 1985, a group of five pastors and their churches withdrew from the

AIBC and founded a new association of churches: the Federation of Costa Rican Evangelical Churches (FIEC). Now the FIEC is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA) and is a member of the *Latin American Council of Churches* (CLAI) and the *Association of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America* (AIPRAL).

In late 1988, FIEC reported nine churches and one mission with a total of approximately 400 members. In March 2000, FIEC reported 24 churches with about 1,700 affiliated members, but in 2004 only 12 congregations and three home Bible studies were reported with about 1,000 members. In 2005, the FIEC changed its name to the *Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Costa Rica* (IEPC). The Executive Director was Darren Barrientos and the National Coordinator / Executive Secretary was Carlos Tamez Luna. In 2013, 19 churches and five missions (24 congregations) were reported with a total of 1,325 members nationwide.

1985 - Evangelistic Center of Zapote / Centro Evangelístico de Zapote

This ministry began by evangelizing people house-to-house in the neighborhood of Zapote, which is a middle-to-upper class suburb of the City of San José. The goal in that personal work was to invite people to the first worship service that was held on Sunday, 13 January 1985, at 5:00 in the afternoon. About 60 people visited the service that afternoon, but the following Tuesday, when the second service has held, only 12 people attended, including four family members of Pastor Hugo Solís.

In 1979, Hugo Solís began his ministry as an Associate Pastor of Raúl Vargas at “Oasis de Esperanza” in Moravia. Solís is an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God and a graduate of the Assemblies of God Bible Institute. When he turned 19, he was called upon to begin a new church in the city of Cartago, where services were started in a tent and where little by little the church that he pastored for six years was established. Upon leaving the city of Cartago, he left a strong and well-established church with 700 members in their own building.

Currently, Pastor Hugo is a recognized personality in Costa Rica and many other countries because of his popular TV programs, “Vida de Fe” (Life of Faith) and “Un día en Tu Casa” (A Day in Your House), transmitted by ENLACE, an evangelical communications company based in San José. “Furthermore, God uses him to preach about fulfillment, challenging the people to believe God and fight for their dreams. Pastor Hugo is an excellent preacher and teacher, charismatic, fun and direct ministering backed by the move of God through manifestations of the Holy Spirit and miracles,” states its website: Adapted from: <http://centroevangelistico.net/>

While living in Cartago, her hometown, Pastor Ruth de Solís received an invitation to attend a campaign of healing and miracles, where she met the man who is her husband today. Together they pastored the new congregation in Cartago until they were called to establish a new one in Zapote, known today as the Evangelistic Center of Zapote.

She has obtained several university degrees in pedagogy, family therapy and pastoral counseling, which have given her knowledge that has been an effective tool in her ministry and in the congregation where she has an active role. Pastor Ruth teaches workshops, preaches in Costa Rica and in different countries, and is used by God in the ministries of prophecy, intercession, deliverance, leadership training, and healing.

Together, Hugo and Ruth have pastored the Evangelistic Center of Zapote since 1985, which has resulted in a stable and growing congregation that now has more than 7,000 adherents who consider this church their home. It is here that they have had the privilege of ministering to thousands of people, formed many leaders, planted new churches, supported other ministries and have created well-known social welfare projects, such as the Hogar C.U.N.A.

In 2013, this organizations reported six affiliated congregations (churches and missions) with 4,895 members nationally, according to the PROLADES national study.

1989 - Free Methodist Church Association / *Asociación Iglesia Metodista Libre de Costa Rica*

During the 19th century, the Holiness movement began within the Methodist Episcopal Church in the USA and spread to other denominations and nations; Christians demanded a deeper level in their relationship with God and a great interest in the needs of suffering humanity. Within this context, the Rev. Benjamin T. Roberts, along with other ministers and laity at the *Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* in western New York, raised a protest against theological liberalism, unhealthy engagement in controversial social affairs, and the loss of spiritual fervor in their denomination.

Between 1858 and 1860, many of these leaders were expelled from the Methodist Episcopal Church on various charges and allegations. Actually, the main issue was their proclamation of the basic principles of Methodism, *especially the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification*. Those who had been expelled could not join another Methodist body, as there was none who agreed with them on the issues that had caused the expulsion.

Therefore, the Free Methodist Church (FMC) was organized by a convention of lay and ministerial members, who met in Pekin, Niagara County, New York State, on 23 August 1860. The first General Conference met in October 1862 in Saint Charles, Illinois. The Free Methodist Church, since its inception, continues to spread around the world through a body of missionaries, the development of additional General Conferences, and a coordinated world organization.

Free Methodist ministry in Latin America began in 1889 when Samuel Mills became the first missionary to preach the gospel in the Dominican Republic. Over the next 75 years, churches were established in Mexico (1917), Brazil (1936), Paraguay (1946), Haiti (1964), and Puerto Rico (1967); and more recently in Costa Rica (1989). During the past 25 years, the Free Methodist Church has begun work in 18 other countries. In each case the work began when a Latin American leader came into contact with the denomination or purposely went to minister from one Latin American country to another.

Six of the eight current churches in the Costa Rican FMC district are in the Central Valley, and the other two are located several hours north, toward the Nicaraguan border. Also, there are four church planting projects in various stages of development. Pastors include four ordained elders and three ministerial candidates. Four of the churches have recently started leadership training schools for lay people. The priorities for the district are: developing leaders, planting churches, strengthening FMC identity, and achieving economic sustainability.

The Costa Rica district leader, Víctor Quesada, is also pastor of the Montecillos FMC. Dr. Hiuberth Zapata, pastor of Iglesia Peniel FMC in Costa Rica, also serves as the district leader in neighboring Nicaragua. Over the years, connections from Costa Rica resulted in starting FMC work in four other countries in the region, as well as a new ministry targeting the beach communities of Central America.

According to the PROLADES national studies of evangelical work in Costa Rica, the FMC reported five churches with a total of 300 members in 2001; in 2013, there were nine churches and two missions with a total of 489 members nationwide (an average of 44 members per congregation).

1989 - Kingdom-Takers Church Mana International / Mana = *Misión Apostólica Nido de Águilas*

Dr. Guido Luis Núñez and his wife Ligia are the founders of Kingdom-Takers Church and the MANA International Ministry in San José, Costa Rica. For several years, the Kingdom-Takers Auditorium was located in the La Uruca district of San José, in a large warehouse building. This space had an auditorium very well equipped to present all kinds of shows and with a capacity for 5,000 people. A Youth Service was held on Saturday evening and services for all ages were held on Sundays at 10:00 am and 5:00 pm. These worship services and special events attracted a large following: in 2014, there were 15 affiliated churches and seven missions with a total membership of about 3,000 people. Not all of the people who attended the special events held at the Kingdom-Takers Auditorium were members of the central church but may have been members or associated with the affiliated churches in the Central Valley.

Guido Luis was born in Costa Rica and his wife Ligia in Honduras. Both are professionals. Guido Luis studied chemical engineering and Ligia public accounting. For his ministerial studies, Guido Luis took courses at the Nazarene Seminary of the Americas in Costa Rica, while Ligia studied at SETECA (Theological Seminary of Central America) in Guatemala.

Since his conversion in 1981, Guido Luis had the conviction of being called to the ministry. Ligia was converted in 1979 and has always served the Lord. Ligia joined the *Alpha and Omega Movement of the Student and Professional Crusade for Christ*, where she learned vital principles for a stable and continually developing Christian life. Her passion to win others led her to different places in her country of birth, where with megaphone in hand she announced in the towns where she visited about salvation through the work of Jesus on the cross, and this same passion led her to travel throughout Central America with the same message. She became an excellent disciple-maker by forming leaders with “a revolutionary fire from heaven.” That is why she came to Costa Rica and Guido Luis was among those who received discipleship training from her. She received ordination as “an apostle from the Lord” and has received acknowledgments on her own merit including an honorary doctorate.

Guido Luis joined the Alpha and Omega Movement while attending university in Costa Rica, and there the first steps of his leadership formation began after a group of young missionaries from the movement arrived, and in the group came Ligia. While in the movement they worked together, she in the different schools in the area presenting the film Jesús, and Guido Luis evangelizing in the campus and classrooms of the faculties of the University of Costa Rica. Nine months later they were married.

“In their local church, whose apostle today is Dr. Rony Chaves, they became involved in part-time ministry until the day they began their full-time work, where they served in different areas, from the administrative to the spiritual. “Ligia excels in her passionate way of exhorting for action in ministry, and Guido Luis in his passionate way of teaching deep scriptures with a simple and practical approach. Being with the Apostle Rony Chaves they grew in the ministry taking charge of the youth, discipleship groups, counseling, praise, evangelism, and teaching to the church and to ministers who were linked to that ministry.” In both of them, there was always a guideline that has served them for what they have achieved and continue to achieve: fervent prayer, simple and passionate evangelism, and practical teaching for daily living.

After praying for six months and leaving their posts for those who would replace them, Guido Luis and Ligia began a new phase of their ministry. Leaving everything, their home, position and ministries in that church, they started from scratch while living in their parents' house and re-

ceiving their support; they lived with their two children in a single room. There, they began to hold their first meetings in a garage in March 1989 with six people, including Guido Luís, Ligia, Doña Julia (Guido’s mother) and a few others, including a brother who gave them their first 20 chairs.

From that small beginning was born what is now called MANA (*Misión Apostólica Nido de Águilas*). The new church always advanced vigorously in terms of winning souls, and by inviting other believers to attend. It became necessary for the church to change buildings each time more people attended than could fit in it; in thirteen years they moved twelve times, not because they were thrown out, but because they were moving into a larger building.

After having worked with small groups in homes from the beginning, and even having traveled to Korea to see the largest Evangelical church in the world that also uses a small group strategy, Guido Luís and Ligia decided to build on this methodology; they adopted the model called G12. At first this model worked very well, as it was something new and different. For eight years Guido Luis and Ligia trained leaders to guide the “cell” groups; however, the task of "making each member a leader" and other responsibilities began to have a negative effect; some of the members began to attend other churches looking for a place where there was not so much pressure.

Nevertheless, their ministry continued to grow and prosper. After several years of holding meetings in a large warehouse in La Uruca, with a capacity for about 5,000 people, the church now has its meetings in a large banquet room at the Crowne Plaza Corobicí Hotel, near La Sabana park in San José, with Sunday services at 7:00 / 9:00 / 11:00 am.

Apostles Guido Luís and Ligia continue to lead their “apostolic ministry” by guiding other pastors with their churches as part of the RED MANA, which is composed of pastors and churches that are leaving their former organizations (denominations or independent associations) and are taking shelter under the RED MANA. “They continue to expand the apostolic ministry internationally while believing that God will give them more than one church in every country in the world.”

Source: http://www.guidoluis.com/?page_id=34

Between 1990 and 1999, the following ministries were founded in Costa Rica.

1990	Champions for Christ Christian Center / Centro Cristiano Campeones para Cristo	Costa Rica
1991	International Christian Fraternity / Fraternidad Cristiana Internacional	Costa Rica
1992	Disciples of Christ Christian Association / Asociación Cristiana Discípulos de Cristo	USA
1992	Abundant Life Church / Iglesia Vida Abundante (Coronado, Ricardo Salazar)	Costa Rica
1993	Pillar of Fire Ministry Association (God Speaks Today Church) / Asoc. Ministerial Pilar de Fuego (Iglesia Dios Habla Hoy)	USA
1993	International Wesleyan Churches / Iglesia Wesleyanas Internacionales	USA
1994	Korean Presbyterian Mission, Peace and Love Churches / Misión Presbiteriana Coreana, Iglesias Paz y Amor	Corea
1994	Latin American United Pentecostal Church / Iglesia Pentecostal Unida Latinoamericana	Colombia
1995	The Vineyard Fellowship of Escazú / La Viña de Escazú (founded by Chris & Andrea Dearnley)	USA
1996	New Life Association / Asoc. Vida Nueva	Costa Rica

1997	Heavenly Banquet Christian Association / Asoc. Cristiana Banquete Celestial (Fuente de Vida)	Costa Rica
1997	Eternal Rock Christian Association / Asociación Cristiana Roca Eterna	Costa Rica
1997	Showers of Blessing Worship Center / Centro de Adoración Lluvias de Bendición	Costa Rica
1997	International Charismatic Mission / Misión Carismática Internacional	Colombia
1997	House of Prayer / Casa de Oración	Costa Rica
1997	Passion for Souls International Apostolic Community / Comunidad Apostólica Internacional Pasión por las Almas	Costa Rica
1999	Presbyterian Church in America / Asoc. Cristiana de Centroamérica – Iglesia Presbiteriana en América	USA

1992 - Christian Church-Disciples of Christ / Asociación Iglesia Cristiana Discípulos de Cristo

This denomination began as an independent congregation in Siquirres, Limón province, in 1992, and it became affiliated with "The Christian Church-Disciples of Christ" in the USA in 1994. According to the national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES in 2000, 11 churches and two missions were reported, with 1,029 members nationwide. In 2013, 14 churches and two missions with about 1,100 members were reported in the provinces of Limón and Cartago. The president of this association is Arturo Gutiérrez with headquarters in Siquirres, Limón province.

Source: <https://www.oikoumene.org/es/familias-de-iglesias/disciples-of-christ-churches-of-christ>

1993 - Abundant Life Association of Churches / Asociación de Iglesias Vida Abundante

Socioreligious investigations carried out by PROLADES in 2011 discovered the existence of eleven evangelical mega-churches in the San José Metropolitan Area (AMSJ), with a combined total attendance of some 40,570 people in their worship services on weekends (Saturday and Sunday); the average attendance per church was 3,688 people. One of these mega-churches is the **Abundant Life Christian Community** (popularly known as VAC = *Vida Abundante Coronado*), located in the San Antonio de Coronado district, an eastern suburb of San José.

In addition, PROLADES conducted a special “case study” of VAC, with funding from Asbury Theological Seminary’s *Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements*, located in Wilmore, Kentucky, USA. VAC (located on its own large property in San Antonio de Coronado, San José) had an average attendance of about 2,963 adults and youths at weekend services during the period January 2013 to May 2015.

In May 2015, the average attendance at VAC services and weekend activities during 2015 was the following: Saturdays at 6:00 pm (800 adults in worship plus about 275 college and university students in parallel activities); Sunday services at 8:00 am (550 adults and youth), 10:30 am (1,200 adults and youth) and 5:00 pm (500 adults and youth), for a total of about 3,325 adults and youth (in addition of about 400 children in parallel activities on Sunday mornings), for a total attendance of about 3,725 people.

According to Senior Pastor Ricardo Salazar (a college graduate who was a professional soccer player in Costa Rica for several years), VAC was designed as "a church for spiritual seekers," where people can meet in a non-formal setting of contemporary Christian music and worship of God, with a strong emphasis on family – inspired in part by the leadership and ministry style of “Willow Creek Community Church” near Chicago, Illinois, USA – “where broken lives could be

restored, new horizons found, and a deeper spiritual life developed in the context of a neo-Pentecostal church.” VAC holds several annual conferences during several nights of the week and on weekends, with a focus on family issues.

All members of VAC’s pastoral team of about 12 people, with their respective teams of trained leaders, offer a multitude of ministries and services to VAC members and the community. VAC offers a variety of small groups that meet in private homes during the week, led by trained lay people (for prayer, Bible study, discipleship, fellowship, etc.), as well as special groups that meet in VAC buildings at night during the week and on Saturday afternoons and evenings to deal with special topics for women, men, couples, singles, divorcees, codependents, etc. In addition, VAC offers an orientation class for new attendees every two months, and pre-baptismal classes (“First Steps,” three sessions) for new Christians; baptismal services are held periodically, with an average of 400 baptisms a year.

The growth of VAC in Coronado has produced leadership for the formation of ten sister churches in Costa Rica, which compose the *Asociación de Iglesias Vida Abundante* (with a total weekly attendance of about 8,360), in addition to some associated churches in Ecuador, Chile, Cuba and the USA (New York City Metropolitan Area).

Outside the main entrance to the VAC auditorium is an indoor patio where a bookstore sells Bibles, Christian literature, Christian music cassettes and DVDs, and the sermons and Bible studies of VAC pastors and guest speakers, etc. Also, there are tables around the courtyard where helpers offer special services before, during, and after services: the opportunity to sign up for various programs (small groups, discipleship classes, seminars and workshops, camps, field trips, etc.), and to buy grocery bags that the helpers will then fill and distribute to needy families. In a building near the main entrance to the auditorium, there is a cafeteria where VAC members and visitors can buy food and drinks before, during and after Sunday services.

VAC maintains a modern and attractive Internet site where users can read and view a presentation of VAC's various ministries and activities, listen to and watch videos of worship services and sermons, and download these files to their computers at no cost. During to the Sunday worship services, users can listen to and watch live broadcasts from the auditorium (“live streaming”) on the VAC video channel at: <http://vida.churchonline.org/>

VAC founded the “Costa Rican Christian School” (pre-school, primary and secondary education) that operates in the VAC facilities in Coronado and both share the use of buildings, parking lots and recreational fields for their respective activities. The combined VAC and Costa Rica Christian School campus is protected by a 24-7 private security service with officers guarding the main entrance and strategic points inside the buildings and parking lots, especially during office hours and church activities at night and on weekends.

It should come as no surprise that the membership and physical size of VAC has grown from a very humble start in 1993 as a "house church," given the quality of its leadership, its vision, mission and message ("Making each member a disciple of Jesus Christ"); the dynamics of its congregational life that has attracted a large number of people to VAC that became a “mega-church” in 2001 with more than 2,000 members. By March 2015, VAC had a total attendance of about 3,725 people in its weekend worship and praise services.

1994 - International Wesleyan Church / Iglesia Wesleyana en Costa Rica

On 26 June 1968, the *Pilgrim Holiness Church* and the *Wesleyan Methodist Church of America* joined forces, thereby formally establishing **The Wesleyan Church** (TWC) in the USA with

affiliated church bodies in many foreign countries.

Source: <http://www.wesleyanapr.org/origen.html>

In December 1994, Dr. Steve Babby and missionary David Ellis of TWC signed a partnership agreement with Costa Rican pastor Álvaro Sánchez, which is how the *Wesleyan Church of Costa Rica* began with four organized churches. The first district superintendent was Pastor Roberto Barrantes, from 1994 to 2004. From 2005 to the present, the second district superintendent has been Pastor Luís Azofeifa Peraza of *Iglesia Wesleyana Sol de Justicia* in Grecia, Alajuela province. Now the Wesleyan Church of Costa Rica has more than 20 organized churches and 33 associate pastors, with the mission and vision of planting more churches throughout the country.

Source: <https://www.slideshare.net/iglesiaswesleyanascostarica>

In 1986, "The Rose of Sharon Christian Mission" in Barrio Tournón (San Francisco de Guadalupe, Goicoechea, San José) was an established denomination with 25 affiliated churches and missions, with about 4,000 members. In 1990, 30 congregations with about 6,000 adherents were reported. But there were a number of problems in the administration of this denomination (especially in the "mother church" under General Pastor José Luis Madrigal Chacón) during the 1990s that resulted in the closure of some "daughter churches" and the return to the "mother church" of some of the members, while other "daughter churches" became independent from the "mother church" in Barrio Tournón de San José. In 2001, there was only one Central Church and six missions nationwide reported by the *Misión Cristiana "La Rosa de Sarón."*

In early 1995, four of the congregations that had been "daughter churches" of the *Misión Cristiana "La Rosa de Sarón"* organized to form the **Wesleyan Church Association of Costa Rica** (AIWC – *Asociación Iglesia Wesleyana de Costa Rica*) with a Pentecostal fervor but affiliated with the Wesleyan Church International (a Holiness body) with headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. As of August 2001, there were 30 affiliated churches with about 3,000 AIWC members. Two of the main AIWC leaders are Roberto Barrantes (President, Concepción de Tres Ríos, La Unión, Cartago) and Luis Azofeifa Peraza (Vice-president, Grecia, Alajuela).

According to the national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES in 2013-2014, there were 28 churches with the name "Iglesia Wesleyana" in the PROLADES database but they were divided into two groups: the AIWC reported 11 congregations and the group that left this denomination reported 17 congregations. We do not know the reason for this division.

1996 - Federation of Vineyard Churches / *Federación de Iglesias La Viña de Costa Rica*

The first Vineyard churches in the USA were planted in 1975. By 1982, there were at least seven "Vineyards" that made up a small community of churches. Kenn Gulliksen started a church in Hollywood, California, in 1974. In 1975, "obeying the instruction he received from God," he officially gave the name "The Vineyard" to this association of churches, and he led them for about five years. In the early 1980s, Gulliksen felt that he should ask pastor John Wimber to take the lead in this growing movement. The official recognition of this transition took place in 1982: the emergence of what would be called "The Vineyard Association of Churches."

John Wimber's influence profoundly shaped the theology and practice of The Vineyard churches from its earliest days, and until his death in November 1997. "When God called John, he was," in the words of an article in *Christianity Today*, "a drunk pop musician and drug addict,

who converted at the age of 29 while smoking one cigarette after another during a Quaker-led Bible study.”

In his first decade as a believer, Wimber brought hundreds of people to know Christ. By 1970, Wimber was conducting 11 Bible studies that included more than 500 people. Wimber bore so much fruit as an evangelical pastor that he was called to head the Charles E. Fuller Institute for Evangelism and Church Growth in Pasadena, California. Later he became an adjunct professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, also in Pasadena, where his classes set attendance records. In 1977, Wimber resumed his pastoral ministry and planted the Calvary Chapel in Yorba Linda, which later became Vineyard Anaheim, a mega-church of over 2,000 members. During this time, the conservative evangelical paradigm through which Wimber understood the ministry of the church began to expand. George Eldon Ladd's theological writings about the “Kingdom of God” intellectually convinced Wimber that all the biblical gifts of the Holy Spirit must be active in the church today.

Encounters with two Fuller Seminary missiologists, Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, as well as experienced missionaries and international students, gave Wimber credible evidence to combine evangelism with healing and prophecy. As he became convinced of God's desire to be active in the world through all the biblical gifts of the Spirit, Wimber began to teach and train his church members to imitate the ministry of the kingdom of Jesus. He began to "do things" from the Bible, about which he had previously only read.

Pastor Wimber and his congregation, composed primarily of former Quakers, began to seek God in the intimacy of worship. Through this they experienced the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and saw a significant revival of the gifts and an increase in conversions. It soon became apparent that the church's emphasis on the experience of the Holy Spirit was not shared by some leaders within the Calvary Chapel movement, so Wimber's church left this movement in 1982 and joined the Association of Vineyard Churches.

Over time, the Vineyard movement grew to become a network of more than 2,200 churches around the world. According to its leaders, “it seeks to combine the best of the evangelical tradition, with its focus on imitating the character of Christ and respect for Holy Scripture, with the best of the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions of receiving the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for life, ministry and acts of service.”

Source: <https://vineyardusa.org/library/que-es-la-vina-nuestra-historia/>

The Vineyard's work was founded in Costa Rica in 1996 when the first two churches were born: La Viña del Este (San Pedro, Montes de Oca, and later they moved to their new temple in Salitrillos, Montes de Oca) and La Viña del Oeste in Escazú, San José. In 2001, the existence of three organized churches with about 500 members at the national level were reported (PRO-LADES National Directory, 2001).

La Comunidad La Viña del Este was founded by Carlos and Nubia Chacón, together with Otto and Giselle Kladensky, in 1996. The meetings began in the Colegio Monterrey library with a group of approximately 14 people. After seven years of meeting in different locations near the central area of San Pedro, La Viña bought a plot of land in Salitrillos de Montes de Oca, where it currently has its facilities.

In 2008, the work in Costa Rica became an association independent of the international headquarters under the leadership of Pastor Carlos Chacón as National Director. There are currently 17 established churches of La Viña in Costa Rica. According to the national study of evangelical work in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES in 2013-2014, there were 10 affiliated churches

and five missions (15 congregations) with about 1,500 members (an average of 100 members per congregation).

In addition, the “Harvest Vineyard Fellowship” was established near La Sabana park in San José during the 2000s, with worship services conducted in English on Sunday at 10:30 am.

1997 - World Center of Miracles Passion for Souls Ministry / *Ministerio Centro Mundial de Milagros Pasión por las Almas*

In 1997, the “Passion for Souls Church” took its first steps as an evangelistic ministry for the purpose of “winning souls for Christ.” With the motto “There is no time to lose, there are many souls to win!” Pastors William and Shianny Magaña have led this ministry of faith “to diligently develop the Lord’s dream for Costa Rica.”

After 15 years of constant growth (1997-2012), the Passion for Souls Church had acquired an auditorium seating about 2,000 people on Avenida 10 in a southern part of San José, with services held on Tuesdays at 7:00 pm, Wednesdays at 9:30 am, Fridays at 7:00 pm, Saturdays at 5:00 pm, and Sundays at 5:00 am, 7:15 am, 10:30 am and 4:00 pm. It was estimated that about 5,000 people attended the Sunday worship services in 2012.

The Crusades for Family Healing, Nights of Faith and Miracles or Impact Groups are examples of the vocation that the pastoral team of Passion for Souls Church has and that is being reproduced by affiliated groups of people, not only in Costa Rica but also internationally thanks to its missionary efforts that have already begun in the USA, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, as well as Spain and Italy in Europe and many places in Africa.

Passion for Souls Church is led by a Pastoral Team of six couples with more than 800 leaders who are divided into work teams oriented to Evangelism, Women with Purpose, Praise, the Arts, Business Vision, Impact Groups, Theological Education, Communications, Missions, Youth, Consolidation and Service (diakonia = service to those in need).

Adapted from: <http://www.pasionporlasalmas.com/nosotros.php>

However, the leadership of Passion for Souls Church has been severely criticized by many Evangelical leaders, and by the Costa Rican Evangelical Alliance Federation, for teaching and preaching the controversial “prosperity gospel” that encourages believers “to give more of their money to the church in order to receive greater blessings from the Lord, including personal empowerment, health and material prosperity.”

See: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/topics/p/prosperity-gospel/>

A national study of the Protestant movement in Costa Rica conducted by PROLADES (*Programa Latinoamericano de Estudios Sociorreligiosos*; previously known as PROCADES) in **2000-2001** identified the 24 largest Protestant denominations in Costa Rica, based on the number of baptized church members reported by the respective headquarters or based on estimates by PROLADES. *A Brief History of the Twelve Largest Protestant Denominations in Costa Rica, 1890-2000* (Holland 2008), gives a comprehensive overview of the major denominations.

The 2000-2001 national survey identified 210 church associations with 2,367 local congregations (churches and missions) distributed as follows: non-Pentecostal groups (908 or 41.5 percent) and Pentecostal (1,459 or 58.5 percent). In the table below, the 14 Pentecostal groups (marked with an *) reported 1,318 congregations (70 percent of the total) and 123,400 members

(65 percent of the total). This confirms the fact that the Pentecostal denominations were growing faster than the non-Pentecostal ones between 1978 and 2001.

The total Protestant church membership (over fifteen years of age) was estimated at 228,657, and the total Protestant population at about 800,000. The 24 largest denominations in terms of membership had 82.3 percent of the total Protestant church membership in the country in 2000 (see table below).

**TABLE OF THE TWENTY-FOUR LARGEST
PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS IN COSTA RICA, 2000**

	NAME OF DENOMINATION OR CHURCH ASSOCIATION	DATE FOUNDED	NUMBER CONG.	NUMBER MEMBERS
1	*Assemblies of God	1944	294	46,900
2	Seventh-Day Adventist Church	1897	132	31,350
3	*Church of God (Cleveland, TN)	1937	380	19,000
4	*The Rose of Sharon Christian Mission	1976	5	12,500
5	*Evangelical Foursquare Gospel Church	1953	99	9,900
6	Association of Costa Rican Bible Churches (AIBC, LAM-related)	1921	134	8,772
7	Central American Evangelical Churches (CAM-related)	1891	69	5,925
8	*Pentecostal Holiness Church	1918	76	5,850
9	*Worldwide Missionary Movement (MMM)	1963	140	5,000
10	Methodist Church of Costa Rica (UMC-affiliated)	1917	50	5,000
11	+National Evangelical Church Council	1978	41	4,100
12	+Pentecostal Church of God, International Mission	1970	118	4,000
13	Independent churches of Christ (<i>a capella</i> , not a denomination)	1967	38	3,800
14	*Apostolic Assembly of Faith in Jesus Christ (Oneness Pentecostal)	1959	34	3,550
15	Bible Baptist Churches (Baptist Bible Fellowship related)	1958	20	3,442
16	Conservative Mennonite Conference	1962	21	3,000
17	*Trans World Mission Association	1970	17	3,000
18	*International Charismatic Mission	1989	1	3,000
19	*Church of God of Prophecy	1970	64	2,500
20	*United Pentecostal Church (Oneness Pentecostal)	1976	33	2,250
21	Church of the Nazarene	1965	33	2,006
22	*Door of Faith Missionary Community	1975	16	1,600
23	National Union of Baptist Churches (UNIB, Southern Baptist related)	1944	22	1,527
24	Baptist Convention of Costa Rica (CBCR)	1944	31	1,400
	SUBTOTAL: 24 LARGEST DENOMINATIONS		1,880	189,372
	SUBTOTAL: OTHERS		390	39,285
	TOTAL		2,270	228,657
	NOTE: SORTED BY NUMBER OF MEMBERS			
	Source: PROLADES, 2001			

Note: a brief history of all of these 24 denominations has been provided in this document, while the history of many of the smaller denominations and church associations was not included for lack of reliable information.

Between 2000 and 2010, the following groups were founded in Costa Rica.

2000	Evangelical Free Church of America / Iglesia Evangélica Libre de América	USA
2007	UNIB and CBCR merged to create FABCR = Federación de Asociaciones Bautistas de Costa Rica / Federation of Baptist Associations of Costa Rica	Costa Rica
2008	Impact Vision Ministry / Ministerio Visión de Impacto	Costa Rica
2008	Theos Place Movement / Movimiento Theos Place	Costa Rica
2010	Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod of Canada / Iglesia Luterana-Sínodo Misuri de Canadá	Canada

2008 - Vision of Impact Ministry / *Ministerio Visión de Impacto*

The Vision of Impact Ministry (VIM) “was born from a word that God gave to pastors Iván and Lucrecia Vindas in 2006, where God told them that multitudes were going to be delivered to them so that they could shepherd them with love and care.” On 10 December 2008, they started a cell group with 60 people, and on that day the vision of what was to be Vision of Impact Ministry was imparted.

On Sunday, 4 January 2009, the Vision of Impact Church officially began with 120 people. Three months later, three services were held each Sunday; from that day “a supernatural revival broke out.” Over the years, VIM had to move to different locations, which were converted to auditoriums, but as time went by, VIM had to move to larger ones due to its growth.

Now VIM meets in a large warehouse building in Desamparados with a capacity of more than 1,500 people, where three services are held on Sundays and one on Thursdays. “We are seeing the restoration of thousands of families, physical and financial miracles in people, and the formation of hundreds of disciples, since VIM firmly believes in the great commission to go and make disciples through the Model of Jesus.” Also, this ministry is characterized by the development of social work, with projects such as *Granero de Amor* ("Food for the needy").

Adapted from: http://www.ivanvindas.org/?page_id=103

2008 - Theos Place Movement / *Movimiento Theos Place*

In 1989, Benjamin Sasso, a young Costa Rican businessman concerned about a lack of evangelism among the upper class in Costa Rica, started a Bible study among some of his friends. The group grew and developed as the “United for Christ” movement. In 2007, some of the leaders of “United for Christ” decided to transform itself into a church. This did not correspond to the original purpose of Benjamin Sasso and Debbie Kessler Sasso and they started a new movement called “Theos Place” in 2008 with the purpose of evangelizing and discipling the higher-educated who live mostly in the western part of the San José metropolitan area.

Why the name “Theos Place”? During the course of many weeks and much discussion among the leaders, the name “THEOS PLACE” was chosen for this new Christian organization for several reasons. The first is because Theos in Greek means God. It is “of Him and for Him” that this organization exists. Then they decided to complete “Theos” with the word “Place” because they thought it sounded better that way. Furthermore, it was their desire that the people who would come to Theos Place would “meet God in that place.”

“Once we begin an intimate relationship with God, Theos Place is your heart, your mind, it is the place where you meet to approach Him, it is your home, your workplace, your desk or your

bed. If you want to see it in a simple way, anywhere you are can be a place of God, but it is your personal and exclusive decision to do so.”

With the name chosen, it was very easy for the leaders to decide on the symbol that represents this organization. The symbol corresponds to the first letter in the word Theos, called Theta in Greek, and whose simple graphic expression is: θ.

Adapted from: <http://www.theosplace.org/perfil/porque-theos/>

This movement has grown and now has around 500 active participants divided into six groups. Each group holds a weekly preaching meeting. In addition, there are a total of 43 Bible study groups that meet weekly and organize six camps a year. Three people work full time in administration. At first materials from the USA were used, but now Debbie Kessler-Sasso has prepared most of the studies that are given. There are 200 volunteers who help in the meetings and dedicate themselves to social service activities in the San José metropolitan area and in the Talamanca mountain region among Indigenous groups. In view of the purpose of attracting those who do not feel comfortable in attending a regular church service, this movement is not associated with any Christian denomination. More than half of the participants declare themselves to be Catholics, and of the rest, many have no religious preference.

Adapted from: <http://www.theosplace.org/actividades/charlas/>

During 2013-2014, PROLADES conducted its latest national study of the Protestant Movement in Costa Rica with the support of the Costa Rican Evangelical Alliance. Below is a summary of the results of this study.

**TABLE OF THE 36 LARGEST
PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS IN COSTA RICA, 2014**

#	DENOMINATIONAL NAME OR ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES	CHURCHES AND MISSIONS	MEMBERS
1	Assemblies of God / Asoc. Cristiana de las Asambleas de Dios (includes several mega-churches)	514	80000
2	Seventh-day Adventist Church / Asoc. de Los Adventistas del Séptimo Día	231	72832
3	Church of God / Iglesia de Dios del Evangelio Completo (Cleveland, TN)	364	37770
4	Association of Costa Rican Bible Churches (AIBC, LAM-related) / includes the Templo Bíblico mega-church in downtown San José.	145	25561
5	Oasis of Hope Church / Iglesia Oasis de Esperanza (mega-church)	20	14000
6	Methodist Church of Costa Rica / Iglesia Evangélica Metodista en Costa Rica	110	12000
7	Worldwide Missionary Movement / Movimiento Misionero Mundial (MMM)	180	10000
8	Pentecostal Holiness Church / Iglesia Santidad Pentecostal	83	8000
9	Pentecostal Church of God, International Movement / Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, Movimiento Internacional	132	7377
10	Church of God of Prophecy / Iglesia de Dios de la Profecía	56	7362
11	International Church of the Foursquare Gospel / Iglesia del Evangelio Cuadrangular	84	6000
12	Trans World Missions / Misiones Transmundiales	39	6000

13	The Rose of Sharon Christian Mission / Misión Cristiana La Rosa de Sarón (mega-church)	8	6000
14	Baptist Bible Fellowship-related churches / Avance del Compañerismo Bíblico Bautista (John Barnes, missionary)	50	5005
15	Council of National Evangelical Churches / Concilio de Iglesias Evangélicas Nacionales	44	5000
16	Federation of Baptist Associations of Costa Rica / Federación de Asociaciones Bautistas de Costa Rica (merger of CBCR + UNIB)	33	5000
17	Passion for Souls International Apostolic Community / Comunidad Apostólica Internacional Pasión por las Almas (mega-church)	2	5000
18	Evangelistic Christian Center of Zapote / Cristiana Centro Evangelístico de Zapote (mega-church, was with Assemblies of God)	6	4895
19	Abundant Life Christian Community / Comunidad Cristiana Vida Abundante (mega-church)	8	4500
20	Vision of Multitudes Ministries / Ministerios Visión de Multitudes	5	4500
21	Independent churches of Christ / Iglesias de Cristo (<i>a capella</i> - 2008 statistics)	63	4410
22	Apostolic Assembly of Faith in Jesus Christ / Asamblea Apostólica de la Fe en Cristo Jesús (Oneness Pentecostal)	56	4000
23	Kingdom Takers Church / Maná Internacional (mega-church)	22	3800
24	United Pentecostal Church / Iglesia Pentecostal Unida (Oneness Pentecostal)	52	3500
25	Association of Central American Evangelical Churches / Asoc. de Iglesias Evangélicas Centroamericanas (CAM International, Moravia)	57	3000
26	American Baptist Association / Asoc. Bautista Americana en Costa Rica	37	3000
27	City of God International / Ciudad de Dios Internacional (mega-church)	4	3000
28	Association of Christian Churches (1) Asoc. de Iglesias Cristianas (David Ramazzini)	22	2800
29	Freewill Baptist Churches / Asoc. Pentecostés Bautista de Unción y Santidad	37	2780
30	Association of Christian Churches (2) Asoc. de Iglesias Cristianas (Jorge Borbon & Victor Loaiza)	20	2600
31	Maranatha International Ministries / Ministerio Mundial de Fe y Poder Maranatha (Apostle Hahum Rosales - Chicago, IL)	12	2500
32	Association of Missionary Baptist Churches / Asoc. de Iglesias Bautistas Misioneras (Roberto Heflin)	23	2000
33	Maranatha Springs of Water Christian Church Association / Asoc. Cristiana Iglesia Manantial de Vida de Costa Rica (Jorge Luis Soto)	11	2000
34	Impact Vision Christian Association / Asoc. Cristiana Visión de Impacto (mega-church)	1	2000
35	Forgiven to Love and Serve Association / Asoc. de los Perdonados Para Amar y Servir (Comunidad Pas)	1	2000
36	Shalom Christian Community / Comunidad Cristiana Shalom (mega-church)	1	2000
TOTALS		2533	372,192

The 36-largest Protestant denominations in Costa Rica (listed above with more than 2,000 members each) reported a combined total of 2,533 congregations (churches and missions) with a total membership of 372,192, which represented 68 percent of the total number of congregations

(churches and missions) and 80.4 percent of the total Protestant membership nationally, according to the PROLADES survey of 2013-2014.

- This survey identified 488 church associations (155 of which were members of the Costa Rican Evangelical Alliance Federation) that are registered in our national database of church associations (legally incorporated entities), which reported 465,330 church members and 3,752 congregations (churches and missions).
- The average size of these congregations (churches and missions) nationally was 124 members per congregation.
- The 62 largest associations of churches (with more than 1,000 members each) reported 2,875 congregations (churches and missions), with a total of 404,929 church members; this represents 77.4 percent of all the congregations and 87.4 percent of the church members nationally.
- The 426 smaller church associations (with fewer than 1,000 members each) reported 839 congregations (churches and missions), with a total of 58,216 church members; this represents 33.6 percent of all the congregations and 12.6 percent of the church members nationally.
- The proportion of local congregations (churches and missions) in our national database of church associations that represent non-Pentecostal groups was 1,332 (35.5 percent) and Pentecostal 2,420 (64.5 percent).
- The proportion of church members reported by all of 488 these church associations was as follows: non-Pentecostal = 174,753 (37.5 percent) and Pentecostal = 290,577 (62.5 percent).

PROLADES created an on-line “Resource Center on Evangelical Work in Costa Rica,” which presents the results of the 2013-2014 national study along with other historical documents (in Spanish); it is available at: <http://www.prolades.com/costarica/menu/MENU-PRINCIPAL-NEW.htm>

It should be noted that some of the current Evangelical mega-churches now have more members than some of the older Protestant denominations and church associations in Costa Rica (see table above). For an overview of the 2011-2015 PROLADES study of mega-churches in Central America, including Costa Rica, see the following documents:

http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/cam/megachurches_cam.htm

* * * * *

Mass Communications. Evangelicals entered the field of mass communications during the 1940s when they founded radio station TIFC “El Faro del Caribe” in 1948 in San Francisco de Dos Ríos (a southern suburb of San José), sponsored by the Latin American Mission, which was the first evangelical radio station in Central America and the second in Latin America. Today, this evangelical station, whose motto is “Illuminating the Path of Life,” operates on two frequencies: 1080 AM and 97.1 FM. Another evangelical radio station with a Pentecostal tradition was founded in 1982 in San José, called “Radio Sendas de Vida,” which operates on 89.5 FM. The Adventist radio station “Asociación Radio Lira” was founded in 1983 in La Ceiba de Alajuela; and this station, called “Una Voz de Esperanza,” operates on two frequencies: 1540 AM and 88.7 FM.

The Cristovisión Association of Costa Rica operates a radio station, “Radio Celestial” on the 1360 AM frequency, and a television station, “Cristovisión Canal 31,” that is broadcast throughout the country on the UHF frequency. Enlace Canal 31 is a Pentecostal television station that is broadcast via satellite, whose programming in Spanish is aimed at the Spanish-speaking population worldwide, under the motto “The image that comes from above,” thanks to its strategic alliance with the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) of Santa Ana, California, USA.

Both TBN and ENLACE have been criticized strongly for openly supporting and promoting the “prosperity gospel,” also known as the “health and wealth” or “name it and claim it” gospel, which became popular in the USA and Latin America through Pentecostal “televangelists” such as Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, Jimmy Swaggart, Jim and Tammy Faye Baker, Pat Robertson, Robert Tilton, Benny Hinn, Morris Cerullo and Joel Osteen, along with many others.

See: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/opinions/outlook/worst-ideas/prosperity-gospel.html>

University education. There are four Protestant universities in Costa Rica that operate with official government authorization under the supervision of the country’s Council of Higher Education (CONESUP): the Adventist University of Central America (UNADECA), founded in 1986; the Latin American Biblical University (UBL, formerly the Latin American Biblical Seminary, 1924), founded in 1997; the Evangelical University of the Americas (UNELA), a merger of the Missiological Institute of the Americas (IMDELA, 1982) and the Nazarene University of the Americas (UNAZA, 1992), which became UNELA in 1998; and the Methodist University of Costa Rica (UNIMET), founded in 2001.

Ecumenical organizations. Most of the more conservative Protestant denominations and independent church associations are members of the **Costa Rican Evangelical Alliance Federation** (*Federación Alianza Evangélica Costarricense, FAEC*), which is affiliated with the **World Evangelical Alliance (WEF)**. The FAEC is involved in a variety of activities, such as responding to emergency situations (specifically, natural disasters), coordinating inter-denominational events and programs (50 FAEC commissions now exist at the national level), and representing the Evangelical Community before government authorities. In 2014, the FAEC reported 260 members among denominational bodies, autonomous church associations, and para-church ministries.

The more liberal and progressive groups are associated with the **Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI)**: the Evangelical Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (German-speaking), the Costa Rican Lutheran Church (ILCO), the Costa Rican Federation of Baptist Church Associations (FABCR, affiliated with American Baptist Churches in the USA), the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (a split from the AIBC, now associated with the Presbyterian Church USA), the Episcopal Church, the Moravian Church, and the Faith and Holiness Pentecostal Church (founded in Cartago). CLAI is affiliated with the **World Council of Churches (WCC)**.

Other Religions

Although the Protestant population grew significantly in Costa Rica between 1960 and 1990, this period also witnessed the arrival, growth and geographical expansion of other religious movements. Today, about three percent of the population are affiliated with “**other religions,**” which in the context of Costa Rica includes independent Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, non-Protestant Christian-based groups (also called “marginal” Christian groups), and non-Christian religions.

The existence of independent Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions in Costa Rica is a recent phenomenon. **Independent Western Catholic jurisdictions include the following:**

- **Ecumenical Catholic Church of Christ**, Diocese of Our Lady Mother of God, Apostolic Administration of Central America, Panama and Cuba. It traces its apostolic succession through the Syrian Jacobite Orthodox Church and the Old Catholic Church of Utrecht. This denomination is led by Mons. Sebastián Herrera Plá in Costa Rica and Mons. Karl Raimund Rodig, Ecumenical Archbishop of Miami, Florida.
- **Community of Communities of Our Lady of Guadalupe** is led by Mons. Higinio Alas Gómez in Urbanización La Aurora, Heredia, and there is an affiliated church in Panama.
- **Reunited Apostolic Catholic Church**, Diocese of Central America, Panama and the West Indies. The church in Costa Rica is led by Archbishop Mons. Pablo José de Jesús María (secular name: Francisco Eduardo de la Espriella Torrens) and Assistant Bishop Mons. Rodrigo Antonio López Chaves, with headquarters in the suburb of Desamparados, Province of San Jose. The international headquarters are in the Archdiocese of Ciudad de Guarulhos, Sao Paulo, Brazil, founded by Mons. Carlos Duarte Costa, Obispo de Maura (1888-1961), of the Brazilian Apostolic Catholic Church, which is also known as the Free Orthodox Church of Ibero-America. These ecclesiastical bodies are also affiliated with the Sacramental Apostolic Church (Mons. Bishop Jordi Alejandro Von Jesus in Vienna, Austria), One Holy Catholic Apostolic Orthodox Church (Miami, Florida) and the Byzantine Catholic Church, Inc. (BCCI), led by Patriarch Mar Markus I (Mark I. Miller in Los Angeles, California).

Independent Eastern Orthodox jurisdictions include the following:

- **The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR)** began in 2004, when the Russian immigrant community (about 1,000) began holding monthly services in private homes in the San José metro area, led by visiting priests from the USA: Daniel MacKenzie or Georgio Salatanov. In 2008, construction began for the country’s first Russian Orthodox chapel in San Isidro de Coronado, Province of San José, under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Association of Costa Rica.
- **The Autocephalous Orthodox Archdiocese of Costa Rica, Byzantine Rite**, is led by Mons. Nicolás I (secular name: Carlos Alberto Gómez Herrera) in San José, with chapels in Ulloa de Heredia and San Isidro, Vásquez de Coronado. This denomination is affiliated

with the Orthodox Apostolic Catholic Church (ICAO) and the Orthodox Church of Latin America, Diocese of Central and South America (IOLA), with International headquarters in Huntington Beach, California, under Archbishop Jorge Rodríguez-Villa of the Archdiocese of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which is part of the **Old Catholic Orthodox Church**.

- **Orthodox Church of Costa Rica, Byzantine Rite** (*Asociación Iglesia Misionera Apostólica Ortodoxa de Costa Rica*), is led by Bishop Mons. Pancracio de San Procopios (secular name: Carlos Retana) in the city of Guápiles, Limón province. This small denomination is a split from the group led by Mons. Nicolás I (secular name: Carlos Alberto Gómez Herrera) in 2003.

The following “marginal” Christian groups in Costa Rica that emerged from the Protestant movement, mainly in the Americas, are the following:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon Church) began work here in 1946 and the Costa Rica Mission was organized in 1974; from about 70 members in 1950, the Mormon Church grew to about 300 members in 1968, to 3,800 in 1977 and to 7,000 in 1997.

Official history: The Office of the First Presidency (in Salt Lake City, Utah) authorized President Arwell L. Pierce of the Mexican Mission to add Costa Rica to his mission in July 1946. He visited the country in September of that same year. The first missionaries, Elders Robert B. Miller and David D. Lingard, arrived in Costa Rica about this same time in early September. They presented the president of the Republic with a copy of *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. The first missionaries left Costa Rica in 1948 to avoid a national revolution but returned in time to enjoy a Pioneer Day celebration with Church members on 24 July 1949. The first conference of the Church in the country was held 7 June 1950, and about 70 people attended. A local unit (branch) was organized on 25 August 1950, and property for the first chapel was purchased in 1951. During the 1950s, the Church grew slowly, with several visits from General Authorities. In 1952, the Central American Mission was organized apart from the Mexican Mission. In 1965, the Guatemala-El Salvador Mission was organized and included Costa Rica. The Costa Rica Mission was organized 20 June 1974, with the first district conference held in August 1968 with 296 people in attendance. The San José Costa Rica Stake (diocese) was created 20 January 1977, with Manuel Najera Guzmán as president, and a month later the area conference was held in San José. At that time, there were 3,800 LDS members in the country. LDS President Gordon B. Hinckley visited Costa Rica on 29 January 1997, and spoke to about 7,000 members.

Source: <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/facts-and-statistics/country/costa-rica>

In 2017, there was one Mormon Temple (located in San Antonio de Belén, Heredia), 10 districts (stakes) and 80 congregations (wards) and 48,840 “members” as reported in 2017. Now, the LDS official website for Costa Rica (2020) gives the following information: one Mormon Temple, 10 districts (stakes) and 79 congregations (wards) and 51,320 “members.”

Source: <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/facts-and-statistics/country/costa-rica>

However, there seems to be an exaggerated number of “members” in the statistics given in these official reports, since the latest statistics equate to an average of 659 members per congregation (ward). The headquarters of the Mormon Church are in San Pedro, Montes de Oca. The auditorium of this building, which houses the largest Mormon congregation in the country, may hold about 500 people while the other Mormon wards (local congregations) throughout the Costa

Rica may hold an average of 200-300 people, according to observations made by the PROLADES research team. By our calculations, the total Mormon membership in Costa Rica should be about 23,900 people, which is less than half the size of the total membership of 51,320 reported by official sources in 2019-2020 (see website data). Nevertheless, the Mormon Church in Costa Rica has experienced significant growth since 1997 when it reported 7,000 members.

The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society (known as Kingdom Halls of Jehovah’s Witnesses): 447 congregations and 31,423 “teachers of the Bible” (2017). These statistics equate to an average of 70 members per congregation. The Jehovah’s Witnesses have experienced remarkable growth in Costa Rica due to their aggressive door-to-door evangelistic and literature distribution activities. In terms of its membership and number of reported congregations, the Jehovah’s Witnesses in Costa Rica present a major challenge to the three largest Protestant denominations (see below, statistics are from the 2013-2014 national study by PROLADES):

#	DENOMINATIONAL NAME OR ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES	CHURCHES AND MISSIONS	MEMBERS
1	Assemblies of God / Asoc. Cristiana de las Asambleas de Dios (includes several mega-churches)	514	80000
2	Seventh-day Adventist Church / Asoc. de Los Adventistas del Séptimo Día	231	72832
3	Church of God / Iglesia de Dios del Evangelio Completo (Cleveland, TN)	364	37770

The growth of both the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses in Costa Rica is evidence that these groups have been able to attract to their ranks some Catholics and Evangelicals (mainly nominal believers who have been disengaged from the religion of their parents) by offering them a different kind of religious experience due to their appeal as a more vigorous brand of religion (authoritarian) that offers their followers “the only true way of salvation” as claimed by both the LDS-Mormon Church and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Both of these organizations, as well as the one described immediately below, are not part of the Protestant movement because their doctrines and practices deviate from those that define Protestantism.

The Light of the Word Church (“Iglesia del Dios Vivo, Columna y Baluarte de la Verdad, La Luz del Mundo”)—founded in Guadalajara, Mexico, in 1934—began work in Costa Rica in the 1960s, with its first chapel located in Barrio Cuba de San José; it now claims to have more than 10,000 members in about 80 congregations throughout the country.

This is a quasi-Oneness Pentecostal (non-Trinitarian) organization that recognizes its “Apostle” (whoever that may be at any given time) as “the only true Apostle of Jesus Christ on earth,” who receives direct revelation from Him that is taught by the Apostle to his flock in many nations, mainly in Latin America and the Caribbean, but also among Hispanics (mainly Mexicans and Mexican Americans) in the USA. La Luz del Mundo practices a form of restorationist Christian theology centered on its three maximum leaders: “Aarón” (born Eusebio) Joaquín González (1896–1964), his son Samuel Joaquín Flores (1937–2014), and his son Naasón Joaquín García (born 1969), who are regarded as modern-day apostles of Jesus Christ. The governing “Apostle” serves as both the spiritual and administrative leader of the Church.

The 2000 Mexican census reported about 70,000 members five years or older nation-wide, and the 2010 census reported 188,326 members of any age in Mexico, while official “La Luz del Mundo” sources claimed more than five million members worldwide in 2000, with 1.5 million

members in Mexico. “La Luz del Mundo” teaches that it is “the only true Christian Church founded by Jesus Christ on earth,” and that all other Christian denominations are heretical. However, the maximum leaders of this religious group have been faced with numerous criminal charges – abuse of authority, financial mismanagement, illicit enrichment, sexual abuse and other human rights abuses – both in Mexico and in the USA since the 1980s.

On 4 June 2019, current “La Luz del Mundo” leader, Apostle Naasón Joaquín García, and two church followers were arrested by Special Agents of the California Bureau of Investigation after their chartered flight from Mexico landed at Los Angeles International Airport. The California Department of Justice alleges that between 2015 and 2018 Naasón Joaquín and three co-defendants committed 26 felonies, including human trafficking, production of child pornography, and forcible rape of a minor. Before being denied bail, Naasón Joaquín's bail was set at \$50 million due to fears that his followers could raise enough money to free him and that he would then flee the country. According to California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, the bail is the highest ever imposed on anyone in Los Angeles county. Other officials of “La Luz del Mundo” have denied these accusations.

Sources: <http://www.lldm.org/> / <https://oag.ca.gov/news/press-releases/attorney-general-becerra-announces-arrest-naas%C3%B3n-joaqu%C3%ADn-garc%C3%ADa-leader-religious/> / <https://www.univision.com/noticias/justicia/7-3-millones-de-dolares-en-propiedades-la-enorme-fortuna-del-lider-de-la-luz-del-mundo-y-su-familia>

The Doctrinal Evangelistic Church (*Iglesia Evangélica Doctrinal*) was founded by pastors José Isabel Rodríguez Mora and Silverio Ruda in Puerto Pilón, Colón province, in Panama about 1950 as a split from the Foursquare Gospel Church. Silverio Ruda claimed in 1986 that his denomination had about 2,000 members in Panama. During the 1970s, some of the affiliated churches were located in the southern part of Puntarenas province of Costa Rica, near the Panamanian border. Some of these churches, both in Panama and Costa Rica, later joined *The Light of the World Church* (“La Luz del Mundo”), under the leadership of Pedro Rodríguez Matarrita in 1989.

Other marginal Christian (non-Protestant) groups include:

- The God is Love Pentecostal Church and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, both from Brazil;
- Christadelphians-Christadelphian Bible Mission;
- Unity School of Christianity (also, there was a Christian Science Reading Room in San José for many years);
- Mita Congregation, the People of Amos, and The Voice of the Cornerstone (William Soto Santiago), from Puerto Rico; and
- Growing in Grace Ministries International, founded by José Luis de Jesús Miranda (a Puerto Rican), in Miami, Florida (this movement split into four factions after the death of the founder in 2013, led by some of his former chief disciples).

Non-Christian religions. In four years, 2014-2018, those affiliated with “other religions” increased from 2.0 percent to 4.7 percent (+2.7 percent). Non-Christian religions in Costa Rica include the following:

- Amerindian animistic religions: according to the 2010 census, about 100,000 people self-identified as Indigenous / Amerindian (seven ethnolinguistic cultural groupings with animistic practices): <https://www.iwgia.org/en/costa-rica.html>;
- Popular Catholicism: a mixture of Catholic and animistic beliefs and practices;
- Baha'i Faith, which began in Costa Rica in 1940 in San José – its website claims there are about 4,000 members in about 30 communities throughout the country, especially within the indigenous communities of Bribri, Cabécar and Guaymí: <https://bahai.cr/>;
- Judaism (several traditions with about 3,000 participants): <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/CR>

The following religious groups are extremely small in terms of the active participants:

- Buddhism (6 groups);
- Hinduism (at least 25 groups);
- Chinese religions (10 groups);
- Islam (3 groups, one mosque); and
- Western Esoteric groups (more than 25);
- African-derived belief systems; and
- Ancient Wisdom-Occult traditions.

For details, see: PROLADES. *Directorio de Grupos Religiosos en Costa Rica, 2017* (San José, Costa Rica, February 2017) at: <http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/cam/cri/cri-reispn-latest.pdf>

Among practitioners of **Amerindian animistic religions** (Bribri, Cabécar, Maleku and Boruca tribes) and **Popular Catholicism** there are “specialists” who practice witchcraft (*brujería*), shamanism (*chamanismo*) and folk healing (*curanderismo*), while 43 percent of the population admitted to believing and participating in such practices, as reported by Demoscopía in a national poll conducted in November of 2001. For information about religious beliefs among the Amerindian peoples of Costa Rica, see: <https://www.everyculture.com/Middle-America-Caribbean/Boruca-Bribri-and-Cab-car-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html>

The small **Jewish** community (about 3,000) is centered in San José and includes Orthodox, Ultra-Orthodox, Reform and Messianic Judaism. The Israelite Zionist Center (Ashkenazi Orthodox) is the main Jewish community institution in Costa Rica and is responsible, among other things, for maintaining and promoting religious activity, mutual aid, charity, formal and informal Jewish education, and care for the elderly. The Israelite Zionist Center is located in the Rohrmoser neighborhood of the Pavas district of San José; it is responsible for administering the Ashkenazi Orthodox Synagogue, the Orthodox cemetery, and the social and educational facilities.

Sephardic Jews arrived in Costa Rica during the Spanish colonial period from the Iberian Peninsula, Brazil or other parts of Latin America. During the early 20th century, Jews began arriving in Costa Rica from Europe (mainly from Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Austria, Romania and Hungary). The first wave of Jewish immigration began in 1925, with Jews fleeing poverty and discrimination in Europe. The second wave of immigrants were Holocaust survivors, who came to Costa Rica, usually, to meet their relatives who had arrived earlier. The newcomers organized a community that would provide religious, social and educational services to its members. The

Israelite Zionist Center of Costa Rica was founded in 1934 as a communal entity, formally constituting itself as an association in 1937.

Most of the Jews in Costa Rica are Orthodox, led by the rabbi Gershon Miletzki of the Ashkenazi Orthodox Synagogue. There is also a Reform Jewish community, the B'nei Israel Congregation of Costa Rica (about 300 members), founded in 1989 and led by Rabbi Rami Pavolotzky with his wife, Rabina Daniela Szuster. The ultra-Orthodox Chabad Lubavitch is officiated by Rabbi Hersch Spaltzer. Also, there are small groups of Messianic Jews who meet in private homes, mainly in the Central Valley.

Islam. There are about 150 Sunni Muslim families in Costa Rica, which are served by the Islamic Association of Costa Rica led by Secretary General Dr. Abdul Fatah Sasa, a Palestinian-born medical doctor who arrived in Costa Rica in 1972, and Sheik Elsafi Abdel Aziz, an Egyptian imam; the mosque (*Mezquita de Omar*), built in 2002, is located in the Montelimar neighborhood of Calle Blancos de Goicoechea. The Muslim Cultural Center / *Centro Cultural Musulmán de Costa Rica* is located in Alajuela and led by Rashida Jenny Torres, a Costa Rican convert to Islam who leads a small group of women converts. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community (founded in 1889 in India) was established in the Costa Rica as recently as 2013.

The older Western Esoteric groups are: Freemasonry, established in Costa Rica in 1865 by Jesuit priest Francisco Calvo; the Theosophical Society (1890s, Tomás Povedano de Arcos); European Spiritualism (1908, Ofelia Corrales); the Liberal Catholic Church (1920s, José Basileo Acuña Zeledón); European Rosicrucianism (1920s, Esther de Mezerville); Grand Universal Fraternity-Mission of Aquarius (1950s), from Venezuela; and the Ancient & Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC, from California, USA), arrived in Costa Rica in 1968.

For a history of **Freemasonry** in Costa Rica and its influence in politics, literature, education and society in general, see :

https://www.academia.edu/4799327/La_Masoneria_en_Costa_Rica_POR_RAFAEL_OBREGO_N_LORIA and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freemasonry_in_Costa_Rica

In addition, there are several **African-derived belief systems** in Costa Rica: the **Myalism-Obeah traditions** were introduced by Jamaican and other West Indian immigrants in the Province of Limón during the 1870s, whereas **Pocomania** (aka Pocomia, Revivalism) and the **Native Baptist movement** arrived during the 1930s and produced a negative reaction in the local and national press against native-born West Indians and Jamaican immigrants on the Caribbean coast by Hispanic Costa Rican authorities, both locally and nationally. Some of these African-derived belief systems may still be practiced in secret by some Costa Ricans of West Indian descent (Creoles, Afro-Caribbeans) in Limón Province. During the 2000s, a small group of **Boboshanti Rastafarians** (native to Jamaica) was formed in San José among non-black *mestizos*, who established a commune in Desamparados.

Also, there are small groups of **Wiccans** (Neo-Pagans) and **Satanists** (worshippers of the Biblical Satan) in the Central Valley who are part of the **Ancient Wisdom-Occult traditions**.

Religious change in Costa Rica. A public opinion poll conducted in 2002 by IDESPO, a research institute of the National University in Heredia, showed that between 1995 and 2001 about eight percent of the population of the San José Metropolitan Area (population 1.1 million)

had “changed their religion,” with Catholic adherents declining and Protestants increasing as well among those identified with “**other religions**” and “**no religion.**”

Non-Religious population: In four years, 2014-2018, those with “no religion / no response” increased from 9.0 percent to 14.7 percent (+5.7 percent) of the Costa Rican population. Most of the people listed in these categories were born or raised as Roman Catholics, Evangelical Protestants, or in other Christian groups, and later separated from their parents' religion for different reasons.

Sources

- Aguilar, Carlos H. *Religión y Magia entre los indios de Costa Rica de origen sureño*. San Pedro, Montes de Oca, Costa Rica: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 1965.
- Alford, Deann. “As Goes Costa Rica, So Goes the World?” in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, July 2003: 325-332. Available at: http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/cam/cr/Alford_CRica_EMQ.pdf
- Amundsen, Wesley. *The Advent Message in Inter-America*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1947.
- Anderson, Duane. “The Costa Rican Pastor: His Person and His Ministry,” a Doctor of Ministry dissertation for Columbia Biblical Seminary and School of World Missions, Columbia, SC (October 1999). Available at: <http://www.prolades.com/cra/docs/chip/chipdiss.htm>
- Anderson, Justice C. *An Evangelical Saga: Baptists and Their Precursors in Latin America*. Xulon Press, 2005.
- Barry, Tom. *Costa Rica: A Country Guide*. Albuquerque, NM: The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, 1989.
- Biesanz, Mavis Hiltunen, et al. *Los Costarricenses*. San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 1979.
- Biesanz, Mavis Hiltunen, et al. *The Ticos: Culture and Social Change in Costa Rica*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999.
- Bieske, Sigifredo W. *El explosivo crecimiento de la iglesia evangélica en Costa Rica*. San José: Editora Jossmay, ca. 1990.
- Bozzoli, María E. *El Nacimiento y la Muerte entre los Bribris*. San José, Costa Rica: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 1979.
- Catholic Hierarchy website for Costa Rica (2015). Available at: <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/cr.html>
- Chomsky, Avi. "Afro-Jamaican traditions and labor organizing on United Fruit Company plantations in Costa Rica, 1910," in *Journal of Social History*, Summer, 1995. Available at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2005/is_n4_v28/ai_17149975/
- Conferencia Episcopal de Costa Rica (Roman Catholic Church) website: <http://www.iglesiacr.org/2018/index.html>
- Cook Bewick, Guillermo. “Análisis Socio-Teológico del Movimiento de Renovación Carismática con referente especial al Caso Costarricense.” San José: Publicaciones INDEF, 1973.
- Demoscopía, S.A. *Fe y creencias del costarricense*. San José: Demoscopía, febrero de 1996.
- Demoscopía, S.A. *Encuesta de y creencias del costarricense*. San José: Demoscopía, diciembre de 2001.
- Dussell, Enrique, et al. *Historia General de la Iglesia en América Latina*. Volume 6, *América Central*. Salamanca, España: Ediciones Sígueme, 1985.
- Erikstad Andersen, Liv Karin. “Protestantism in Costa Rica: Pentecostal Growth and Catholic Response,” Master’s Thesis in History of Religions, Department of Cultural Studies, University of Oslo, Norway (Autumn 2001).

Edelman, Marc and Joanne Kenen (editors). *The Costa Rican Reader*. New York City, NY: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989.

Glazier, Stephen D. (editor). *Encyclopedia of African and African-American Religions*. New York City, NY: Routledge, 2001.

Gómez V., Jorge I. *El Crecimiento y la Deserción en la Iglesia Evangélica Costarricense*. San José: Publicaciones IINDEF, 1996.

Grimes, Barbara F., editor. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. 12th ed. Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1992.

Grubb, Kenneth G. *Religion in Central America*. London: World Dominion Press, 1937.

Harpelle, Ronald N. "Ethnicity, Religion and Repression: the Denial of African Heritage in Costa Rica" in *Canadian Journal of History*, April 1994. Available at:

www.thefreelibrary.com/Ethnicity,+religion+and+repression:+the+denial+of+African+heritage+in...-a015180249

Harpelle, Ronald N. *The West Indians of Costa Rica: Race Class and the Integration of an Ethnic Minority*. Montreal (Canada) and Kingston (Jamaica): McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.

Holland, Clifton L., editor. *World Christianity: Central America and the Caribbean*. Monrovia, CA: MARC-World Vision, 1981.

Holland, Clifton L. *Directorio de Grupos Religiosos en Costa Rica, 2009*. Available at: <http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/cam/cri/cri-relspn.pdf>

Holland, Clifton L. *A Brief History of the Twelve Largest Protestant Denominations in Costa Rica, 1890-2000* (2008). Available at:

http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/cam/cri/12_largest_denoms_CR_2000.pdf

Holland, Clifton L. "Ethnic and Religious Diversity in Costa Rica." Documents available on the PROLADES (Latin American Socio-Religious Studies Program) website at:

http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/cam/cri/diversity_cri.htm

Holland, Clifton L. "Ethnic and Religious Diversity in Central America: An Historical Perspective," a scholarly research paper presented at the 2005 Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR), 4-6 November, in Rochester, New York; S9: Religious Conversion in Latin America; Conveners: *Henri Gooren*, Utrecht University, and *Virginia Garrard-Burnett*, University of Texas at Austin.

Holland, Clifton L. *The Charismatic Renewal Movement in Costa Rica*. San José, Costa Rica: PROLADES, February 2010; available at:

http://www.prolades.com/documents/charismatics/crm_in_costa_rica-holland2010.pdf

Holland, Clifton L. *Public Opinion Polls on Religious Affiliation in Costa Rica, 1983-2017*, available at: http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/cam/cri/cri_polls_1983-2017.pdf

Holland, Clifton L. *Toward a Classification System of Religious Groups in the Americas by Major Traditions and Family Types*. San José, Costa Rica: PROLADES, 2018. Available at:

<http://www.prolades.com/cra/clas-eng.pdf>

Jeter de Walker, Luisa. *Siembra y Cosecha*. Tomo 1, *Las Asambleas de Dios de México y Centroamérica*. Deerfield, Florida: Editorial Vida, 1990.

Latinobarómetro. *El Papa Francisco y la Religión en Chile y América Latina: Latinobarómetro 1995 - 2017*. Santiago, Chile: Latinobarómetro, January 2018.

Mandryk, Jason. *Operation World Professional Edition DVD-ROM*. Colorado Springs, CO: Global Mapping International, 2010.

Marín-Guzmán, Roberto. *A Century of Palestinian Immigration into Central America: A Study of their economic and cultural contributions*. San José, Costa Rica: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 2000.

May, Sally and Clifton L. Holland, editors. "A Research-in-Progress Report on Protestant Mega-Churches in Costa Rica" (December 2011), available at:

http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/cam/report_megachurches_crica-rev3.pdf

- Molina, Iván and Steven Palmer. *The History of Costa Rica*. San José, Costa Rica: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 1998.
- Montalbán, Luis Rubio. *Los Adventistas en Costa Rica ... un siglo de avance*. Costa Rica: published by the author, 2002.
- Nelson, Harold D., editor. *Costa Rica: A Country Study*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983.
- Nelson, Wilton M. *Historia del Protestantismo en Costa Rica*. San José, Costa Rica: Publicaciones INDEF, 1983.
- Oviedo Cervantes, Jorge E. *Renovación Carismática Católica en Costa Rica*. Heredia, Costa Rica: published by the author, 2003.
- Pew Research Center. *Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, November 2014.
- PROCADES. *Directorio de Iglesias, Organizaciones y Ministerios del Movimiento Protestante: Costa Rica*. San José: PROCADES/IINDEF, 1978.
- PROLADES. *Directorio de Iglesias, Organizaciones y Ministerios del Movimiento Protestante: Costa Rica*. San José: PROLADES/IMDELA, 1983.
- PROLADES. *Directorio de Iglesias, Organizaciones y Ministerios del Movimiento Protestante: Costa Rica*. San José: PROLADES/IMDELA, 1986.
- PROLADES. *Directorio de Iglesias, Organizaciones y Ministerios del Movimiento Protestante: Costa Rica*. San José: PROLADES/IMDELA, 1989.
- PROLADES. *Directorio de Iglesias, Organizaciones y Ministerios del Movimiento Protestante: Costa Rica*. San José: PROLADES, 2001. Available at: <http://www.prolades.com/costarica/directories.htm>
- PROLADES-RITA Database. *Perfiles de Nuevos Movimientos Religiosos en Costa Rica, 2001-2003* (37 profiles in Spanish), available at: <http://www.prolades.com/profiles/perfiles2.htm>
- PROLADES. *Un Análisis de la Obra Evangélica en Costa Rica en Perspectiva Histórica, 2013-2014*: <http://www.prolades.com/costarica/menu/Un%20Análisis%20de%20la%20Obra%20Evangelica%20en%20Costa%20Rica,%202013-2014.pdf>
- PROLADES. *Directorio de Grupos Religiosos en Costa Rica, 2017*. San José, Costa Rica, February 2017.
- Read, William R., et al. *Latin American Church Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969.
- Schifter Silora, Jacobo and Mario Solera Castro. *El Judío en Costa Rica (1900-1960)*. San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 1979.
- Smith, Randal David. "Rethinking the Latin America Mission: Utilizing Organizational History to Inform the Future," a Ph.D. dissertation for Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY (May 2001). Available at: http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/cam/cri/rethinking_the_LAM-smith_dissertation.pdf
- Steigenga, Timothy J. *The Politics of the Spirit: The Political Implications of Pentecostalized Religion in Costa Rica and Guatemala*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001.
- Steigenga, Timothy J. and Edward L. Cleary, editors. *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007.
- Taylor, Clyde W. and Wade T. Coggins, editors. *Protestant Missions in Latin America: A Statistical Survey*. Washington, DC: EFMA, 1961.
- U.S. Department of State. *International Religious Freedom Report 2016: Costa Rica*. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/269214.pdf>
- Valverde, Jaime. *Las Sectas en Costa Rica: Pentecostalismo y conflicto social*. Sabanilla, Costa Rica: Editorial DEI, 1990.
- Vargas, Carlos Alonso. "Beginning from Roblealto: The Origin and Development of the Charismatic Renewal in Costa Rica." Typewritten manuscript, dated March 8, 2009.
- Wagner, C. Peter. *Look Out! The Pentecostals are Coming*. Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1973.
- Woodward Jr., Ralph Lee. *Central America: A Divided Nation*. Third Edition. New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999.