

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON PROLADES HISPANIC PROTESTANT MEGA-CHURCH RESEARCH IN THE USA

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INTRODUCTION

In October 2011, during my visit to Orlando, FL, to participate in the dedication ceremonies for the new Dr. Justo L. González Center for Latino/a Ministries -- sponsored by the Association for Hispanic Theological Education - Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana (AETH), housed on the campus of Asbury Theological Seminary in Orlando - I had the opportunity to visit two Hispanic mega-churches in the Orlando metropolitan area on Sunday, October 23rd, courtesy of Dr. Fernando Cascante, director of the Justo Center, who was born and raised in Costa Rica and is an old friend of mine.

Although I was born and raised in the USA (central Arkansas and southern California), I have spent the last 40 years of my ministry based in Costa Rica (since April 1972) as a missionary researcher, educator, writer, editor and translator. However, during the 1980s and 1990s I spent a great deal of time in southern California and other areas of the USA in ministry and fundraising activities, which provided me with an opportunity to network with Hispanic leaders and organizations across the country. It was during those visits that began to discover that some Hispanic churches did not fit the stereotype of small congregations of poor immigrants, rather there were a growing number of large Hispanic congregations of middle-class Mexican Americans and second and third-generation immigrants from Latin America.

One of those churches was pastored by the Rev. Danny de León in Santa Ana, CA, Templo Calvario of the Assemblies of God, which had more than 2,000 people in attendance of a given Sunday in its morning worship services. Templo Calvario was one of the first Hispanic mega-churches in California that I came to know about personally. I discovered that there were other large Hispanic congregations in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia and Miami as well as in major cities in Texas and elsewhere.

However, it was not until early in 2011 that I began to define and develop a new research project on Protestant mega-churches in Central America, which began with visits to San Salvador and Guatemala City in April. My colleagues and I visited 6-8 mega-churches in each of these major cities on a given Sunday in order to verify that they were indeed mega-churches and to document our visits by means of personal interviews and photo journalism of the interior and exterior of the churches we visited. The respective preliminary reports about our visits to mega-churches in both capital cities, as well as the general project description and helpful research tools, are available at: http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/cam/megachurches_cam.htm

During October my research assistant and I began to conduct similar visits to Evangelical mega-churches in the San José metropolitan area of Costa Rica, and this research and documentation process will continue through the month of November.

After my initial visits to San Salvador and Guatemala City in April, I began to develop plans for conducting similar research on Hispanic Protestant mega-churches in the USA as part of our ongoing national study of Protestant denominations with Hispanic ministry in the USA, which began in January 2010 under my direction. Our website for this national study is located at: <http://www.hispanicchurchesusa.net/>

Consequently, we created a series of new web pages for the study of Hispanic Protestant mega-churches in the USA at: http://www.hispanicchurchesusa.net/megachurches/megachurches_hsusa.htm

REPORTS ON OUR VISITS TO MEGA-CHURCHES IN ORLANDO, FL