



Amazon Journal

by Chad M. Miller

“Report On Colombia”

May, 1999

The Land Of The Drug Lords

What a place! For me, Colombia conjures images of terrorists, jungle, kidnappings, executions, and drug lords. I've got to tell you, its all true and very real. There are military, police and security everywhere. The nightly news is full of reports about hostages, terrorist attacks and economic disaster. What a place!

Dwight Marable, the director of Missions International, and I landed in Barranquilla, a city of 1.5 to 2 million people on the north coast of Colombia. Barranquilla is a beautiful city surrounded by the Magdalena River and bustling with people. The first thing you encounter when you get off the plane is security and military police. The drug trade and civil war have taken a terrible toll on the country and culture. Barranquilla is one of the safest parts of the entire country. The Colombians kept telling me that this is a paradise compared to the rest of the country. I'll just have to take their word for it.

Our purpose for this trip was to share our Cell Explosion project with the pastors of Colombia. Cell Explosion is a program to train pastors and church leaders how to use evangelistic small groups to build their churches and start new ones. We have introduced Cell Explosion in Brazil, Peru, Argentina and in the United States and this was our first contact with Colombia. What a surprise! We knew the Colombian pastors were eager for our program, but we had no idea the extent and size of the revival that is occurring on the northern coastal cities of Colombia. Thousands and thousands of people are swarming to churches, packing soccer stadiums and starting up home churches with hundreds of people overnight.

It is amazing.

One of my first questions to the pastors was if they had any small groups in their church. One of them said he was the only one who had tried small groups. It was a totally new idea that has not been tried among the evangelical churches. I asked him how many groups he had. He said he had 50. I was shocked! Then he told me he had about 500 people coming to his small groups which he just started in his church 3 weeks ago. 3 weeks ago? Wow! But the biggest surprise was to come. I found out that he got 50 volunteers from his church to invite their neighbors to a meeting at their house. The 500 people coming to these groups are all unchurched and unsaved. They have almost all never even been into a church before. One of his leaders simply put a sign out in the front of his house for a few days inviting anyone that wanted to come to a meeting for prayer and to hear about Jesus. 65 people came! This is a time of unprecedented opportunity where God has raised up a great ripe harvest!

For 3 days we led a training conference for about 75 leaders from 6 churches. This was the first time the idea of small groups has been introduced to the evangelicals. The hunger for the gospel is more than we in the US can ever imagine. It is so easy to get people to hear the gospel. One of the churches we worked with worships about 1500 people in 4 services on Sunday morning in about half the space we have at Walker Station. It's not impossible. I saw it. Every square inch was used to pack people in. Sardines in the can have a lot of moving around room compared to the tight fit in these services. It is amazing. I've never seen such hunger for the gospel. A lot of it has to do with the violence and the harshness of the Colombian economy. When the US cracked down on the drug lords a number of years ago, they took all their money out of Colombia for safe keeping. As the drug lords have either been arrested, killed or left the country, all the wealth went with them. Colombia has had civil war since the 1950's. From a spiritual perspective, this is what God has used to make the Colombians ripe for harvest. It's hard to grasp, but the big picture is really God's work. I met a Baptist missionary couple in the airport who confirmed what we saw. Baptist "home groups" are attracting up to 250 unsaved people and closing down whole blocks in neighborhoods when their meetings are going on. It seems like in the last year, there has been enormous response to the gospel with minimal effort and no real strategy. When the Colombian pastors heard we were coming with our evangelistic small program, they wanted to bring more than 40 pastors along with leaders from each church. But because this program is still in its pilot stage, the seminar was limited to 6 churches. Dwight, who has been all over the world and seen a lot in his mission work over the last 20 years has never in his life seen or heard of such a thing.

Amazing! As you can imagine, I have stories I can't wait to share with you. It was a great training conference.

When I think about my trip, I realize that I'm just one ordinary American pastor who made one trip and shared small group concepts that almost every church leader and pastor in the US has known about for years. It's not rocket science. It's the simple stuff, like what is a small group and how do you lead one and keep it evangelistic. Everyone at Spirit of Life knows this stuff backwards and forwards. But to the Colombian pastors and leaders, this is the greatest harvest tool they have every encountered. It is hard to imagine how many people will accept Christ and go to heaven because of one simple seminar.

I feel so blessed by God to have had the chance to help the pastors and leaders in their harvest of Colombia. I want each of you to know that your prayers, support and encouragement to continue this work has made a big difference in the Kingdom of God. In the Sundays ahead as we count the growth that God is bringing to Spirit of Life, let's not forget how He has used our church to also bring literally thousands and thousands of people to a church in Colombia. It is amazing.

(I am looking forward to seeing each of you Sunday. We are going to have a great day.)

God bless you richly.

Pastor Miller