

## CHAPTER II: PRECEDENT RESEARCH

In his 1992 dissertation, *Urban Ministry Factors in Latin America*, John Hall studied 139 churches in five Latin American countries: Guatemala, Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras and Peru. In his study he found that there were definite ministry patterns that distinguished "larger" churches from "smaller" ones. Hall's research identified seven variables that were common in large Spanish-speaking churches.

1. Decisive and motivating pastoral leadership.
2. Worship that is emotional and includes liberations from demons.
3. A growing circle of leadership and involvement in service ministries
4. The biblical and theological development of church members.
5. Broad membership participation in evangelism and training.
6. An awareness of the church's benefit to the community.
7. Rejection of certain administrative and structural limitations (Hall, 183).

These were contrasted with four variables that Hall termed "institutional maintenance factors," which were commonly found among "smaller" Spanish-speaking churches:

1. Membership participation in church decisions.
2. Worship that is socially homogeneous and without liberations.
3. Church use of a manual.
4. The perception that preaching is more important than praise in worship (Hall, 183).

In his last chapter, on Research Recommendations, Hall notes that a weakness in many church growth studies in Latin America has been the failure to recognize the importance of pastoral leadership (Hall, 198). Hall goes on to say that while his study evaluated some leadership characteristics of pastors, this is still a "virgin field" in Latin

American church research. Hall comments, "What, if any, relationship exists between the pastor's personality, theological education, church characteristics, and socio-cultural factors needs further research" (Hall, 199).

Among his findings about the leadership characteristics of the pastors of larger Spanish-speaking churches were:

1. The leaders were directive, ones who knew the will of God for the church and were willing to assume the risks necessary to lead them there.
2. Pastors of large churches recognized the need to train and involve their church members in evangelistic efforts.
3. The pastors worked hard.
4. They had vision.
5. They were positive.
6. They stressed growth in spiritual character, obedience, and faithfulness to the Lordship of Christ in their preaching and teaching. (Hall, 201,202)

This study is valuable to the research being presented in this paper because it shows the important role the pastor plays in forming the church. This study seeks to verify and expand on Hall's findings by focusing on gathering information that would increase our understanding of the worldview of Spanish-speaking pastors as ministers and professionals.

In 1995, Jorge Gómez investigated the reason why people desert evangelical churches in Costa Rica. His work was entitled *Protestant Growth and Desertion in Costa Rica: Viewed in the Relation to Churches with Higher Attrition, Lower Attrition, and More Mobility Rates, as affected by Evangelism (i.e. Message and Method) and Discipleship (i.e. Including Church Discipline and Congregational Life)*. Gómez sought

the reasons for church desertion using three categories; churches with high attrition rates, churches with high mobility, and churches with low attrition rates.

The objective of Gómez's study revolved around two questions:

1. What were the characteristics of the churches with lower desertion rates in comparison with those with higher desertion rates?
2. What relationship does this profile have to the reasons given by people who have left the evangelical church (Gómez, 4-5)?

The study investigated these questions by looking at the practices of Costa Rican churches in the areas of evangelism and discipleship of their people. The study of these areas was used to identify those factors most often mentioned as to why people left the evangelical churches.

In all, Gómez interviewed 104 ex-evangelicals and 981 evangelical church members in 50 churches representing 16 denominations. He also interviewed 71 pastors and included their insights in his study (Gómez, 13).

Through interviews and data analysis the study found five reasons people left the evangelical church. These were:

According to congregation members people left because of:

1. The personal conduct of the people who left the evangelical church.
2. The lack of a discipler or someone to help them in their spiritual walk.
3. The bad conduct and testimony of church members.
4. The bad conduct of the pastor or leadership.
5. Pressures from friends or family members

According to the pastors the five most frequent reasons were:

1. The lack of a discipler or someone to help the members in their spiritual walk.
2. The bad conduct and testimony of church members.
3. The bad conduct of the pastor or leadership.
4. The personal conduct of the people who left the evangelical church.
5. Pressures from friends or family members (Gómez, 531).

Though the reasons for leaving are the same for both church members and pastors, it is interesting to note the priority order given by each group. Congregation members tended to put more emphasis on the responsibility of the individual believer and list the role of the discipler/pastor in positions two and four, while pastors listed these same reasons in positions one and three. This may demonstrate that the pastors see themselves as playing a more important role in the retention of people in the church than do the church members. For that reason it is important to know about the ministry and lives of the Costa Rican pastors and to understand their opinions.

Other factors brought out by the study reinforce this need to understand more about the role of the pastor in the church:

1. A higher percentage of church members do not have leaders to whom they can go for advice or help when having personal or spiritual problems.
2. Only a small percent of people (10.5%) believed the leadership's input was one of the main factors for spiritual growth.
3. A very low percentage of people (7.7%) may be drawn to a particular church because of the leader's charisma.
4. Also, according to table 85 (Gómez p.50) only a small percent (11.0%) of congregational members indicated that one of the most important aspects in their congregational life had been the personal spiritual help given to them by the leaders (Gómez, 540).

In conclusion, Gómez identified four groups vulnerable to desertion.

1. Members born Protestant
  2. New believers
  3. Young adults
  4. Men
- (Gómez, 223-225)

The study found that churches with higher attrition rates and high mobility shared several important characteristics revolving around a deficiency in the areas of evangelism and discipleship. These characteristics are:

1. A higher percent of people who leaned toward a theology of universalism, perfectionism, and antinomianism.
2. The evangelistic message was less Christ-centered.
3. A greater emphasis on prosperity and healing.
4. Less teaching in the area of apologetics.
5. Less willingness to work with other churches in evangelism.

In contrast, churches which retained their members were demonstrated to have the following characteristics in common:

1. Programs for new believers and discipleship programs for the congregation.
2. More emphasis on training their members to disciple others.
3. More access by the people to their leaders when they needed personal and spiritual advice.
4. Church discipline was practiced.
5. Better retention of those groups more prone to desertion (i.e. members born Protestant, new believers, young adults and men) (Gómez, XXXV).

### **Conclusion**

Through the Hall and Gómez investigations we can see that the role of the pastor is pivotal in the development of a healthy congregation, though there may be a difference in how church members perceive that role as opposed to the way the pastors perceive it.

The fact that pastoral leadership is key to the healthy development of churches is clearly demonstrated in both of these studies. Both studies also made attempts to include the opinions of the pastors in their interviews and survey instruments. What was not fully developed in either of the studies is a profile of these pastors in terms of their personal lives and their opinions about their ministry environment. There is a need therefore to

gather data and opinions concerning the life and ministry of Costa Rican evangelical pastors.