

A History of Some Assemblies of Christians in the United States and Canada

Robert L. Peterson

Spanish Assemblies

Spanish-speaking people coming to the United States usually locate in the larger cities. New York, Los Angeles, San Antonio, Chicago, Miami, and Houston have the largest Spanish-speaking populations, though many other cities and towns have large Spanish-speaking communities. The largest concentrations are found in the southwestern states – Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Colorado.

The earliest Spanish work connected with the assemblies seems to be in Texas, and we begin the discussion there. Ervin D. Dresch was an early pioneer in this work. Mr. Dresch's printed Gospel ministry, hymns, and Vacation Bible School material went to all Spanish countries. For many years he cooperated with Carl Ostertag in getting out his annual Gospel paper *Palabras Fieles*, whose circulation reached well over a million copies each issue.

In 1917, Mr. Dresch joined R. H. Hall, who had been a missionary in Honduras, in evangelizing Spanish-speaking people in rural communities from Michigan to New Mexico and Texas.

In San Antonio, Texas, the reading of the Scriptures in Spanish by Dresch and Hall attracted crowds of Spanish-speaking people to the Plaza, so these brothers began a mission work in that city in 1918. Soon a small Sunday school and assembly were started in a Mexican community, at 629 South San Jacinto Street. In 1945, attendance at the San Jacinto Gospel Hall was 55 in the Sunday School, with 14 Breaking Bread, representing eleven families. A weekly Gospel meeting was held at the County Jail. Open air meetings were held in the market place. Attendance at the San Jacinto Gospel Hall averaged about 65 in Sunday school and 20 at the Lord's Supper in 1967.

Visits to another area of the city resulted in souls saved. A Sunday school was conducted in a garage. Then the Mexican Gospel Hall, also called Mayfield Hall, was built at 1118 West Mayfield Boulevard. The testimony was carried on there by V. M. Rivera for many years. N.D. Short was also involved in the work among Spanish-speaking peoples in the city. In much the same way, other Sunday Schools were started in other areas both inside and outside of San Antonio.

V. M. Rivera was reared in the Roman Catholic church. On a Sunday afternoon in January 1921, near the market place in San Antonio, he heard a group of Mexican people singing a Gospel hymn, which led to his salvation.

In 1922, he moved with his family to Carrollville, Wisconsin, 12 miles south of Milwaukee, and began to do personal work among the Mexicans. The Lord honored his effort with the salvation of 17 souls. With these and some denominational believers he began a Bible study in his home. When Mr. Rivera suggested that meetings be without any denominational affiliations, some with denominational interest opposed this and separated from the group.

J. Hagelgren and John R. Hale learned of the stand the little group took and began visiting them and conducting Bible readings. They also brought Dan Dunnett who conducted meetings for several weeks, which established them in the faith. The group meeting with Mr. Rivera began to Break Bread in his home, and later met with the English-speaking assembly in Milwaukee. In November 1939, Mr. Rivera was commended to full-time ministry, and moved with his large family to South San Antonio, where he took many responsibilities at the Mexican Gospel Hall; he preached for many years in the city and nearby towns and also had a weekly program over a local radio station.

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A Spanish-speaking assembly, now called Iglesia Cristiana Evangelica in Houston began in 1958 when Alberto Martin came to the United States from Argentina to find employment. He came with David Cook, one of the sons of William and Marie Cook, missionaries to Argentina. Soon another man and his family arrived in Houston from Argentina to join Alberto. Then two others followed. The small group gathered with the Pineview Bible Chapel assembly for a short while. Then they went to the South Houston Gospel Chapel meeting where one of the brethren provided them with a garage with chairs and a piano. Here they held a Sunday School for Mexican children from the vicinity and also began Breaking Bread.

As the group grew numerically, they bought a house and remodeled it for their meetings. In this house the work took form and continued its growth. Shortly thereafter, a local Christian foundation offered them the former MacGregor Bible Chapel in Houston on Milart Street; the Argentineans bought it, calling it the MacGregor Spanish Bible Chapel.

The assembly had some fifty in fellowship in 1971, the majority of which were young couples with families. There were over 150 children in the Sunday School. Several of their youngsters took part in the Gospel meetings with instrumental ensembles.

In January 1971, just over twelve years after its humble beginning, the Argentinean assembly of Houston held its Second General Conference. Representatives from New Orleans, St. Louis, and Chicago, as well as Weslaco and Pearland in Texas gathered with the Spanish-speaking Christians of Houston to share in the conference. Brethren from the Argentine, Italy, Dominican Republic, Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and United States Remembered the Lord on Sunday. Three traveling commended workers from the

homeland, don Angel Bonatti, don Carmelo Racciatti and wife, and don Francisco Zinna and wife, ministered the Word during the conference, besides Mariano Gonzalez from Chicago and Stan Hanna from Honduras.

The assembly had a radio program in Spanish over KLVL, a commercial station, and a half-hour program over KHCB, a Christian station. Many were reached through the radio and became part of their fellowship. For quite some time they also sponsored a five-minute program over XCSH, which is heard in Mexico. Another outreach to Mexico was literature. Houston Christians distributed it from house to house in the town of Salinas-Hidalgo, south of the border.

This assembly disbanded in the mid 1980s, to be replaced by another, called the Spanish Bible Chapel in South Houston at 716 Avenue I. This in turn disbanded and Iglesia Cristiana Evangelica is now the Spanish-speaking assembly in the Sugarland area of Houston.

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David and Virginia Metler came to Clovis, NM in 1960 to work among the Spanish there. By 1967, they had established an assembly with seven families in fellowship. The work was started in a Spanish-American home with a small children's class that grew to 250 boys and girls. Parents were reached through this class, and a Sunday school was formed from it.

Most of the families in that area are quite poor; farm work is from June to November, and the winter months are very hard for them. Clothing received from supporting assemblies has been the means of keeping Sunday School teenagers in school. All the meetings are now in English since this helps them to adjust to conditions at work and school.

When the Spanish-American families are saved they clean up their homes and there is a real change in their lives. Just knowing that someone cares for them gives them a new lease on life and they seek to be testimonies to friends and relatives. Some have been active in the assembly in driving buses and teaching. Stewards Foundation helped the assembly purchase the Clovis Gospel Chapel.

The use of Emmaus Bible courses after the Wednesday night prayer meeting was helpful. A Bible study with the believers on Tuesday night usually lasted two to three hours, for the Christians were eager to know the Word of God. Brethren from Albuquerque have helped the assembly at Clovis. Mr. Gross came from Socorro, 300 miles west of Clovis, once a month. Mrs. Metler has had a major role in maintaining the work since Mr. Metler died. The work is ongoing, though small, in 1998.

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Leslie and Winifred Sandberg had been serving the Lord among the Spanish-speaking people in Arizona for many years when John Walden invited them to come and help in the Christian Home for Children in Colorado Springs, probably in about 1950, with the idea of

starting a branch of the Home for Mexican children. It soon became apparent that the Lord's purpose for them was not to do this but to go to Pueblo, a sizeable city about 40 miles south of Colorado Springs, where there was a large Spanish-speaking population, and begin a Gospel work there.

Children's Bible classes were started in many neighborhoods; these were followed by Gospel meetings to which the parents were invited. The Sandberg's adopted son, Jerardo Reyes, who had been saved in the work in Arizona, came to Pueblo and helped in the children's work. As people were saved, they were taught further in the Word, and the group of Christians began to Break Bread and function as an assembly, called Salo½ Bíblico.

Some time later, Miss Esther Hubbard, a public school teacher, came and was active in the work at Salo½ Bíblico. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Luna came after that from Albuquerque and entered into fellowship in the assembly. Mr. Luna has been serving as an elder since then. Jerardo Reyes' widow Nellie was one of the first converts in the Pueblo work; she and other members of the Reyes families continue active in the assembly. Helpers from other assemblies through the years have been Miss Grace Watson from Colorado Springs, and Miss Carla Brown (Mrs. Jim Cocking).

Today, Salo½ Bíblico is small but continues with regular meetings, Sunday School, ladies' Bible Classes, weekly neighborhood Bible classes for children and young folks, and a summer Vacation Bible School.

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In 1950, the John Ruddocks, on furlough from Honduras, the Gordon Webberleys from Mexico, and Irene Gallagher of Los Angeles started having cottage meetings for the Spanish-speaking people of East Los Angeles. Miss Gallagher had been holding Bible classes for children for five years. These workers, together with the Thropays who had been having meetings for children, started the Arizona Avenue Gospel Hall in East Los Angeles, with a Sunday school having 40 to 60 children coming each week. The Ruddocks and Webberleys worked with the adults before returning to their missionary work. In the late 1950s, Mr. L. Ferguson came to help Adam Thropay and Miss Gallagher with the children.

In the Arizona Avenue Gospel Hall were Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Chileans, Bolivians, Cubans, and some from the U.S.A. All the services for the adults were in Spanish. The work with the children and young people was conducted almost entirely in English. Some of the children professed faith in Christ. Helpers from other assemblies made it possible to invite a large number of children to Vacation Bible School, where one year the average daily attendance was 192. The assembly had an annual Christmas program in a community hall, at which time the Gospel was presented to parents.

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Iglesia Evangelica de Highland Park in Los Angeles began in the late 1970s as a neighborhood Bible study, conducted by Stan Hanna and then Irene Gallagher. Mr. Sequeira was also involved in the early days of the assembly. Richard and Nancye Yarrall,

who had been commended by assemblies in New Zealand to the Lord's work in Colombia, South America, came to the Los Angeles area in 1989 to work among the Latinos there, having received a new commendation from their assemblies, and from Avenue 54 Bible Chapel and Westminster Bible Chapel in Los Angeles.

The Spanish-speaking assembly now occupies facilities at Avenue 54 Bible Chapel. Its leaders are Jesus Robles, Alister Andrew, Richard Yarrall, and Mr. Sequeira. About 60 adults and youngsters attend Iglesia Evangelica de Highland Park.

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The Yarralls commenced door-to-door visitation in the Westminster area of greater Los Angeles while still helping at Highland Park. A Saturday night Bible study and children's classes were started in the home of an interested family. Contacts were made and some were saved. The group slowly built up and in January 1994, they began Sunday meetings as an assembly under the name Iglesia Cristiana de Westminster, closely associated with the Westminster Bible Chapel, which is English-speaking. The work has continued to grow and today some 25 families are associated with the assembly, with about 50 in attendance on Sundays.

The Yarralls maintain the Emmaus Correspondence office in Spanish, for the U.S.A. Richard has a half-hour Monday evening radio program of Bible teaching in Spanish, called "La Biblia Abierta." The local ladies also have a 4-minute radio time called "De amiga a amiga" (From Friend to Friend), prepared by sisters from Argentina.

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There are Spanish areas in nearby El Monte also. In the early 1960s, a large number of Mexican children were attending Sunday School at the English-speaking El Monte Assembly. When the El Monte Assembly later moved to Temple City, Bob Garcia, L. Ferguson, Irene Gallagher, the Tinneys, and others continued to work with the Spanish youth in the Teen Center in El Monte and elsewhere. Students from Culver City Bible School gave much assistance in this work.

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The large number of Hispanics in the southern part of California led to the formation of a Spanish-speaking congregation at Laurel Bible Chapel in San Diego in about 1990. George Mora began the work among the Hispanics by means of a Spanish Bible Class at Laurel involving an unsaved neighbor family whose children were attending the Sunday School. This work is ongoing.

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Iglesia Cristiana Evangelica in Glendale, CA has existed for many years and now is associated with the Glendale Gospel Chapel. It was known for its strong young people's

group, who visited and distributed literature; they were the major force behind the growth of their assembly.

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Asamblea Evangelica in Grand Rapids, MI began in 1995 in the home of Ricardo and Diana Tavarez. The Christians moved after that to 635 South Division, where they currently meet. The Gerena, Torres, and Garcia families, as well as the Tavarez family, were involved in the start. Jose Garcia and Ricardo Tavarez Sr. have been the leaders. Ricardo and Diana Tavarez are self-supporting, and work among Mexican, Guatemalan, and other emigrants from Central America. The Spanish-speaking assembly has Christians from Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, as well as the U.S.

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The city of Chicago had over half a million Spanish-speaking people and two Spanish-speaking assemblies in 1992. Forty-seven miles north of Chicago is Waukegan, IL with an active Spanish assembly, called Local Cristiano. Francisco and Alveolus Eyes from the Dominican Republic started and have nurtured this work since 1973. The meetings are held in an old building, since remodeled, in downtown Waukegan. The Spanish assembly is an inner city gathering and a melting pot of Colombians, Dominicans, Hondurans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Salvadorans. They carry on an aggressive evangelistic thrust.

Eladio Colon, Miguel Morales, and Miguel Calderon, besides the Eyes and others, carry the burden of the ministry to the Spanish community. Francisco Eyes, besides devoting most of his time to the Lord's work, teaches English as a second language at the College of Lake County.

The group had its early meetings in the apartment of Alberto Obregon, and moved several times before settling into the present facilities located at 146 S. Genesee Road. Their Gospel service is well attended by the unsaved. Many have found the Lord over the years through this ministry, including two medical doctors.

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In 1943, Capilla Evangelica in Manhattan, also called the 116th Street Assembly, became the first Spanish-speaking assembly in New York City. Through the years a few came to trust in Christ as Savior, but the meeting remained small. Some 35 believers Broke Bread there in 1967. About a third of this number were widows or sisters whose husbands did not share their faith. Neighborhood crime affected attendance at evening meetings.

Paul Bitler and his wife Margaret labored with Jose Hernandez in this field. Speakers at the 116th Street Assembly included Mr. C. McKinnie, who served the Lord in Chile, and Mr. Paul Clark who served the Lord in Mexico. The assembly is still active.

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Norfolk Street Chapel in downtown Manhattan started in 1963. Difficulties accompanied the work but also rich spiritual blessings, and people were saved and baptized. The area is predominantly Spanish and is an area of drug addiction and very poor surroundings, spiritually and materially. The chapel was robbed five times before 1967. Emilio Ramos worked faithfully in the assembly, visiting the sick in addition to participating in all the activities of the assembly. On his vacation he preached in Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo. Cruz Rodriguez was among the leaders in the assembly, which disbanded many years ago.

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Asamblea Evangelica in Brooklyn began in 1961 through the efforts of Agustin Lopez, Manuel Perez, Juan R. Cordova, Emilio Campos, and Miguel Colon. It was a hive-off from Evergreen Gospel Chapel in Brooklyn and has stayed at the same location – 219 Lee Avenue – and has kept the same name. Many leaders have served over the years; Hilario C. Lantigua and Juan R. Cordova, Jr. are the currently recognized elders. Rafael Fraden works at this and other Spanish-speaking assemblies in the area. Asamblea Evangelica has commended two workers to the foreign field, and has always had a large youth work. About 35 were in fellowship in 1967, and over 90 adults and young people attend Asamblea Evangelica now.

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The Spanish Gospel Hall in Brooklyn had a gymnasium in its building, where full-time worker Henry Sanchez worked with street youths. He and Paul Bitler in the Bronx brought scores of inner-city children to Pinebush Bible Camp each summer. Paul Bitler and Louis Montalvo also held meetings in a Spanish-speaking section of the Bronx.

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In the 1940s, Louis Montalvo of the Bronx, NY often traveled to a Spanish-American assembly in Lancaster, PA for ministry. The Mexican brethren there brought others from the labor camps to hear the preaching of the Gospel. Many believed before returning to Mexico.

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George and Betty Walker arrived in Miami in 1961, having been expelled from Castro's Cuba. The brethren in the 29th Street Gospel Hall in Miami offered their building for Spanish work at times it was not in use. Their neighborhood was already 75% Spanish. The offer was accepted and the new Spanish work was begun. Many were saved and an assembly was formed – Sala Evangelica.

Later, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Carter came from Santo Domingo for health reasons and the doors of the Bible Truth Chapel in Miami, on S. W. 7th Street, were opened to Spanish-speaking people. Asamblea Christiana of Miami was formed at that place as a result. James

Cochrane of the Dominican Republic, David Adams from Cuba, and J. T. Halliday, among many others, ministered at Asamblea Christiana.

Still later a third assembly was begun in the northwest part of the city, meeting at Central Gospel Chapel. Thus, in the 1970s, three Miami assemblies had both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking assemblies meeting on their premises.

SOURCE:

http://www.emmaus.edu/files/Documents/History%20of%20Brethren%20Mvt/history_14.htm