

Planting New Churches Using the G12 Model
“Palabra de Fe” Congregation
Aurora, Colorado

The city of Aurora, Colorado is a suburb of Denver and has a population of approximately 275,000 people. For many years, since its founding, the majority of people in Aurora were Euro-American, with a minority population consisting mainly of Hispanic and black people.

As has happened with many populations and places in this country, the demographic composition in Aurora has been changing for many years. What used to be a community composed almost exclusively of Euro-Americans is now a much more diverse population, with a great percentage of Hispanics.

Aurora’s Community Baptist Church was founded in 1950, and for many years the church had a very fruitful ministry in the Aurora area. A beautiful sanctuary was built with a capacity for 400 people. The church also built a large pastoral residence and school-style educational building. As the years went by and the population started changing, the membership of the church diminished and its members became senior citizens. The church seriously considered selling the property and dispersing the congregation.

It was then that the pastor, the Rev. LeRoy Fox, planted in the hearts of the few members of the congregation this idea and vision: instead of closing the church, they should consider giving life to a new congregation whose members reflected the existing population in Aurora.

After much reflection, consideration, and especially prayer, church members shared their vision with us, inviting us to engage in dialogue and finally requesting help in searching for a person to come and start a Hispanic congregation in Aurora.

Oscar and Vianey Lopez

In December 2005, I received a call from Pastor Oscar Lopez, in which he shared with me his desire to work with our denomination and to know about opportunities to start a new church under our sponsorship.

I had never met Pastor Lopez, and did not take any action except to let him know that I would call him later.

At that time I had also received calls from two of our American Baptist regions, telling me about their desire for starting Hispanic congregations and requesting help in finding workers.

One of Pastor Oscar Lopez’s qualities is persistence—and he was very persistent! We managed to arrange a meeting, and after a few interviews, phone calls and emails, I received testimony in my spirit that Pastor Lopez was a person we could count on to start a new church.

Oscar and his wife Vianey had already planted a church in the Miami area, and the Lord had blessed and multiplied that ministry. We are currently doing the paperwork in order for that church, located in Homestead, Florida, to become part of our denomination. This church was established under the cellular model known as G-12.

For my part, I had been studying this model for a long time. I read all the books published about it, and then had several interviews with denominational leaders from southern California, where there are more than 20 American Baptist churches successfully using the model.

One of the regions interested in starting a Hispanic church was ABC of the Rocky Mountains. I have had several conversations with members of the Aurora Community Church in particular. This church, like others in our denomination, had experienced reduction in attendance and membership because of demographic changes in the area. The population that once was composed mainly of Euro-Americans had become a majority Hispanic population. The church's situation was so critical that very few alternatives were at hand. Having prayed and searched for divine guidance, the church decided, in a step of faith, to extend an invitation to Pastors Oscar and Vianey Lopez to establish a Hispanic congregation.

For the Lopez family it was also a step of faith, since they were leaving their friends, their church and many other things in order to come to a place practically unknown.

For us it was also a step of faith. The model of the cellular church, although very effective, is a relatively new model within our denomination.

The Vision

Weeks before accepting the invitation to start a new church in Aurora, the Lopez family traveled to Colorado with the purpose of "recognizing the ground" and confirming in their hearts that this was, in fact, where God was calling them to ministry. In driving around the streets of Denver and Aurora, Oscar shares that God placed a deep burden in its heart for the people. He tells us that when seeing the crowds, he saw them "like sheep without a shepherd." It was in that visit that Oscar and Vianey confirmed in their hearts the ministry to which the Lord had called them, and also decided that they would stay in Colorado.

We need to mention that in the Rocky Mountains region, our denomination did not have a single Hispanic church. The only Hispanic church we had closed its doors years earlier.

We also must mention that the cellular movement is one of multiplication. The vision that the Lord put in the heart of the Lopez family was not only to win souls for Christ, but also to multiply the congregation's testimony through planting new churches in different areas of the state, doing training and discipleship of new leaders.

Implementing the Vision

Oscar and Vianey moved to the city of Aurora in April 2006. When I went to visit them the following September, the church already had a regular Sunday attendance of

about 85 adults and 35 children. Midweek attendance at Bible studies was about 35 to 40 people, not including children.

Considering the fact that this new church started with the Lopez family and the pastor's grandmother, such numerical growth in a relatively short time motivated our desire to understand with more depth the tactics and methodology they had used.

Steps for the Implementation

Promotion After many hours of prayer and fasting, Pastor Lopez and his wife went out to the streets around Community Baptist Church of Aurora. Beforehand, they had prepared professional-quality posters with the address, phone number, and schedule of services of the new congregation along with the names and photos of the pastoral couple. The posters were distributed daily for two weeks before the first worship service.

An advertisement, also professionally prepared, was placed in a prominent place, announcing the beginning of a Hispanic congregation in the community.

Two weeks after their arrival, the first service took place in the basement of the pastoral residence, with an attendance of 14 people.

Radio Another very important means of spreading the message of salvation and introducing the new ministry was the radio. From the beginning, Pastor Lopez told us of his intention to begin a radio program, which started May 1st under the name "Tiempo de Impacto" (Time to Impact).

"The radio is an indispensable vehicle of ministry," says Pastor Lopez. "The messages are encouraging, with a positive tone that highlights the power, the grace and above all, the forgiveness of God." The radio has publicized the new ministry in the cities of Denver, Aurora and other nearby towns.

After just three weeks of services in the basement of the pastoral house, the space could no longer hold the increasing congregation. The English-speaking congregation, pleased with the results and anxious to help, then invited the Hispanic group to have their services in the church sanctuary.

Evangelistic Campaigns and Concerts Evangelistic campaigns and concerts are other ways Pastor Lopez shares this ministry, in addition to presenting the message of salvation. Christian bands well-known among Hispanics are invited for a concert, and sometimes a special preacher. In these services people are invited to receive Christ as their personal Savior, healing prayers are offered, and people are invited to recommit their lives to God.

Cell Groups After two months, the first cell group started with five women, under the leadership of Vianey Lopez. Currently, Vianey is in charge of five cell groups, and in each group a person is being trained to be leader of the group in the near future. When these cell groups reach 15 people, the group is divided to form a new cell. Not all the people that attend the cell group attend the church services, although church attendance is the one of the purposes.

Encounters In this model of cellular church, the people who decide to be an active part of the vision are required to participate in an “encounter.” Participants attend a three-day retreat in a hotel or retreat center with one of the pastors, and strengthen their faith and commitment to serve God.

Discipleship Lessons and Leadership School Oscar and Vianey Lopez regularly hold classes for discipleship and for new believers.

In the cellular church model, known as G-12, there are four fundamental operational principles:

- Winning
- Consolidation
- Discipleship
- Sending

It is our prayer and desire to stimulate and create a movement to multiply new congregations in our denomination. There are many fields and areas such as Colorado where we need workers to do ministry. Let us all, then, “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into the harvest field.”