

IMTN A conversation of trainers that leads to action

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Re-thinking intercultural mission training in Latin America By Omar Gava, with Mark Hedinger and Fabian Rey

Introduction

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Chair, IMTN

Welcome to our third IMTN Bulletin. This article presents some of the questions, concerns and recent experiences of intercultural mission training in Latin America. As mission trainers it is vital that we make a space for the kind of global conversation that helps us to learn with, and from, one another. The issues raised in Latin America are relevant in other contexts. For example, the challenges of finding local solutions for effective mission training instead of ‘copying and importing’ models and methods from outside. Omar Gava is an experienced mission trainer. In his article he shares how he has been able to get vital conversations ignited using ‘Webinars’. This has led to new thinking and action. As well as summarizing some training issues in Latin America Omar and his team provide three specific examples of recent conversations that have taken place in Latin America and how this forum for dialogue is resulting in new kinds of action. One example is ‘Manarah’, an approach to training where the learning takes place through working and serving in a multicultural environment rather than in the classroom. Omar invites us to join in and think “out-of-the-box”. Please do participate in the discussion or get in touch if you have something to say!

A Latin American date for your diaries!

Looking ahead to 2016 the WEA-Missions Commission will be hosting a global consultation in Panama from 3rd – 7th October. Please do consider whether you can be there. It would be excellent if we could dialogue as mission trainers face-to-face. For more details please visit the WEA-MC website: <https://mc.worlddea.org/>

Re-thinking intercultural mission training in Latin America

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The Latin America context

Intercultural missionary training in Latin America is relatively new. It is growing alongside an increasing

awareness by church leaders that taking the Good News to the nations – and especially to the unreached – is not the unique responsibility and heritage of the Lord’s church in what have traditionally been called “sending churches.”

Background

During the 1990s a series of consultations were held to explore the topic of training. A “Profile of the Latin American Missionary” emerged, based on the formation of curricula and programs of study. This ideal missionary profile affirmed principles of a holistic training. It assumed an integrated ministerial training based on desired outcomes or competencies. These sorts of concepts had been applied in other nations with good results.

Imported training assumptions

One of the topics that created serious problems and that led to the failure of various Centers has been the assumption that a good program would:

- Be delivered within a building
- Last for a period of nine months
- Include a residential component by which administrators, trainers, and trainees would live together

The creation of learning experiences in other settings also became part of the established doctrine. In the course of time, it became clear that these foundational concepts and interactions were not applicable in some nations (for instance, Cuba), due to the situational reality under which the trainers and trainees live and move in those nations. Good programs began to close their doors.

Challenging questions

Evaluating this problem, we grew to understand that the root of the issue grew from the use of models and methods “copied and imported” (copy-paste method) from countries whose reality and financial capacity made those forms possible. The questions that we faced were:

1. How to create a successful program within another structure?
2. How to train without having property, and with inadequate educational elements?
3. How to train in the absence of books (both in terms of quantities of books and the best titles of books) and with scanty digital resources?
4. How can we have successful training when the students and mentors do not live together?
5. How to develop intercultural skills within a mono-cultural context and without the ability to provide immersion experiences for the trainees? (For example, leaving Cuba was not possible)

until two years ago).

Re-thinking our Missionary Training using ‘Webinars’

In June of 2014 we began a new conversation using ‘Webinars’ with Latin American trainers and other guests. We identified forms of training that could rightly be called, “out of the box” or “breaking paradigms.” The characteristics we were looking for included:

1. Programs that closely related to the practice of the Lord Jesus and the Apostles
2. Training that was more relevant in the socio-cultural context in which we work
3. Programs that were economically and logistically possible to be implemented and sustained.

New kinds of training were shared and talked about. For example, a program in Argentina began unconventionally, transporting students to various distinct provinces. This plan included provision of hospitality by the different congregations, taking teachers to the students instead of students to teachers. In the location where the students stayed, they practiced gospel ministry within the distinct people groups where they were housed. Another program began to function in a location where numerous Arabs, principally Muslim, live. The students interacted with these people, some of them staying in the homes of Muslim families learning their language and culture. The motto is: “While I Serve, I Learn”

As colleagues began to think and act “outside the box” various answers to the “How to” questions emerged and could be shared via the Webinars. It is almost two years ago since I began promoting Webinars on the topic of “Re-thinking our Missionary Training” and we have moved forward in our thinking. The purpose is to dialog with an open mind and an open attitude to discover how we can make our training relevant within the different environments and circumstances in which we work.

The Webinar process

It is worth mentioning something about the process of the Webinars. The importance of genuine interaction does not decrease simply because the content is transmitted by internet. In order to facilitate personal interaction, we began with an exchange of the resumes and CV of the various Webinar participants. In this way, even though somewhat formal, we were able to introduce the 20 – 25 participants to one another. Besides that, many of the trainers had known each other for many years. Beyond the relationships that were thus established, we used an internet platform that permitted the exchange of ideas. Each Webinar session was enriched with a time of Q and A as well as comments by listeners about possible points of application. You could say that it was not only the

content of the webinars that was important, but the very process also led us to “out of the box” conclusions.

If you would like to read examples of the Webinar conversations please read the additional documents: Case Studies from Latin America. I would like to share what has happened in these discussions as a way to open the dialogue for all who would like to contribute a case study that they consider appropriate. Through the Webinars we are opening the mind, leaving our four walls, thinking outside the box. The case studies illustrate the need to consider all of the new alternatives and everything that would permit us to interpret the best way to do missionary training. The idea is to know what is happening in the world, what variables there are; so that we interact and learn from one another. We do not pretend with our conclusions to instruct anyone, but rather to share, learn, and even modify what we have received, which up to now has been sufficient for us. All of this has happened with an open mind, thinking outside the box.

Learning by interacting and reflecting with others

As Latin Americans, we have not had interaction with other circles, and it is time that we do so because we are eager to do so and in need of learning. We are now in a work of interaction, of reflection, and of learning. Please join us!

Our thanks and appreciation for your contributions, even in advance!

If you would like to participate or contribute to a Webinar please email Omar on <omargava@hotmail.com> or IMTN on <info@missionarytraining.org>

Bulletin No. 3 Appendix Webinar Case Studies December 2015

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Topic 1: ‘MANARAH’ A program of simultaneous service and continuing education

Ethos of training: “While I Serve, I Learn”

Who am I? Dealing with student identity

Generally speaking, candidates enter a Training Centre with virtually no position other than "trainee". The expectation has been that upon completing their training, candidates would move into service (their mission field). Today, this practice continues with the training of people who have the status of trainee or student. In Manarah the idea is that people enter the training program not only to be trained but to serve at the same time. In Manarah the position of the student is a worker/missionary and not a trainee/student.

Description of Manarah: 'While I serve, I learn'

Manarah is a service program that provides continuing education in the style of Jesus. What did Jesus do? He was with His disciples. In contrast we generally have the idea of a professor or teacher who teaches - and a student who learns. The teacher trains by transmitting his knowledge, but students do not see the teacher in action. In the case of Manarah, the "Jesus style", the teacher also does the work, teaches, and models.

Manarah is a novel alternative form of training and service - in an environment that is multicultural, multi-faith, multilingual, self-teaching, service-based, and involved in secular work. An example of the kind of environment is the Ciudad del Este, with fifty ethnic groups living together in the Triple Border region, a place like many others within our Americas. Here we find the potential to train and serve, and at the same time to engage in secular employment.

Manarah training takes place in a context that includes language schools and centres for learning trades, arts, and obtaining professional degrees. In the one city where we work, there are language schools and schools of trades and arts, cost-free and of excellent quality. The possibilities of developing and/or learning a trade gives an answer to the "why" and "for what purpose" of being in the area, a question that especially Muslims (Arabs, Bengalis, Pakistanis) ask.

We have worked in this way for four years now, providing on-going training and service in cities and regions where Muslims live. We are considering the possibility of expansion into other cities with similar characteristics.

This process allows an adaptation appropriate to the reality of the place where one is living. Everyone has the status of missionary. Theoretical content is contextualized within the realm of practice. Above all, this permits reflection from within a context, and within other similar contexts, resulting in adequate immersion, preparation, training, and service.

This model provides continual training that permits one to take full advantage of biblical, theological, and missiological perspectives with self-directed resources and on-going service. It is one thing to learn "how to reach the Muslims" within a classroom, without having any Muslims close by; it is another thing to learn and then go to the streets and put the learning into practice. What we have seen in the results of the Manarah model encourages us to search for others who could benefit from this approach. We would invite the Training Centres to leave the places where they are, and go to places where they can have an immediate investment - direct and daily, and where it is possible to develop teaching and practice "in situ."

Some advantages of Manarah

Church involvement:

As pastors, we have our doubts about whether a candidate who is sent for training will return to the church or whether we will see him/her develop into a missionary. With a programme like Manarah, the church is involved and knows that the sent one is being trained BUT is also serving and involved in missions. We gain ground and space, mutually involved as the church also plays a role in this training.

Provides crucial experience:

For some, it is not possible to begin mission training because of a lack of life experience, especially a lack of cross cultural experience. Well, many of us began to pastor or be parents without experience, and even now we continue learning along the way. We cannot wait for a candidate to earn his/her doctorates in missiology before we send them.

Economically sustainable:

Manarah also addresses the realities of the fluctuating economic situation in Latin America. In Manarah, we live together in rented apartments, developing our activities there, within the neighbourhoods where Muslims live. This approach results in reduced costs. The missionary in that field is serving, many of them as school teachers who work in Muslim schools, receiving support from the school to sustain their own homes. They have access to the Muslim community, and have an excellent testimony as a consequence of

their professional work.

Intense training:

Short, intense training has been offered that combines theory and practical training in 10 days. Theory is taught in the mornings. Practice in the afternoons. Between 40 to 80 people from different parts of Latin America come. We offer first and second levels in the main city. Intense training has functioned in Panama for three years, and for the second time is being offered in Venezuela.

Flexible training:

Manarah has been developed as a flexible learning program. For example there are sixteen modules offered in four, two-month sessions per year, with two classes taken each two month period. The PENSUM – Manarah Latin Intensive program offers eleven courses, and the PENSUM – degrees in Intercultural Studies, have more than twenty-six courses. These courses are all taught by experienced and recognized professors.

The focus of Manarah has been the Muslim world, but the same region has the possibility of doing similar work with Buddhists and with Hindus. Other Centres could also work as sister missions, related to Manarah.

Continuing Training:

The program “While I serve, I learn” has a specific timetable, but it does not end there. Instead, it transforms itself into an ongoing programme of service and training.

Topic 2: The Multiplication of Disciples and Simple Churches Webinar with Curtis Sergeant

Context

The church is growing in the world more rapidly than at any other moment in history but there is a problem: The world’s population is growing more rapidly than the Church is growing. There are more non-Christians living today than in any other moment in history. We must look for ways to reach these people – and the faster the better.

The idea of multiplying churches is God’s idea. In the Bible, we find the word “church” used in three distinct ways: The Universal Church - all believers from all times; The churches within a city or region - for example the church of Jerusalem or the church of Ephesus or the church of Asia and, lastly A group of people who meet within a house (a simple church or a house church).

The idea of “simple churches” is not what normally comes to mind when we hear the word, “church”. How can we multiply churches that meet in homes - without buildings, professional staff, or budget? Multiplying disciples results in multiplying these house churches.

Some points to consider

1. Mutual responsibility

Growing in our walk with the Lord means practising love, and doing so in a way includes accountability. We are not talking of a legalistic attitude. There is a close relationship between love and obedience (John 14:15, I John 5:3). There is a responsibility to give what we have received to others as well. In the spiritual economy one receives more when he/she gives more.

2. Feeding yourself (self-sustaining)

Correct interpretation and application of the Scriptures.

One tool for application is the three part Bible Study:

1. Look back to consider what was learned and applied from the last study, and how that study was shared with other people.

2. Look up is the idea of looking at a portion of the Bible (from memory with oral learners), and then talking about it with a set of questions.
3. Look forward. In prayer, each one thinking and praying, "God, with whom do You want me to share this passage, and how do You want me to apply it?"

Another tool for self-feeding is to pair up with a partner during the week and read some 25 to 30 chapters of the Word of God and then to talk about it and one's life of obedience to God, using a list of guiding questions.

3. Practicing different aspects of prayer

This doesn't only deal with speaking to God. We emphasize listening to the voice of God. Prayer is also used as a teaching tool. Standing in front of the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus, praying in public, taught about the nature and character of God.

Prayer is also a magnificent tool for evangelism. For example, "prayer walks" encourage people to be conscious of the needs of people with whom they might share and to grow a spiritual perspective.

Likewise, praying together with people to learn how to be guided by God in how to pray, and how to see from a spiritual perspective and not only from the physical

4. The Body of Christ provides mutual help for the "growth of all."

Making disciples is a team sport not an individual sport. It is not simply my walk with God, individually: it is our walk with God as we are all together one body. We need to study passages that speak of spiritual gifts (Rom 12, I Cor 12, Eph. 4, I Peter 4, etc). Also, there are passages that speak of "one anothers" (more than 50 in the NT).

5. Growth through suffering and persecution

Paul, James, Peter all speak of character traits that grow through suffering. We are equipped to minister to others by our own experience in suffering. Our faith increases. If we teach new believers about the benefits of suffering, it will help in their growth. If we do not do that, it is possible that they will experience confusion, bitterness and discouragement when they go through suffering and persecution. It can even show itself as anger and depression. God is working for the good of the one suffering through that very suffering and persecution.

6. Eyes to see where the Kingdom of God is absent

Helping people know how to be stewards of those on-going relationships such as family, friends and co-workers. This is not only so that non-Christians come to faith; it also helps Christians to mature more and more in faith.

There is also the point of searching for and reaching those who currently have no social interaction with Christians. Help to identify "men of peace" or "homes of peace."

7. Training Cycle (metaphor of a father teaching his son to ride a bicycle)

Model:

The child can watch someone ride a bike. That is a way to make it clear that it is within the realm of possible for him, too, to ride a bike. This step does not take much time.

Assist:

The father, helping his child get on the bike, keeping the bike steady and staying at the child's side while the child feels what it is like to ride the bike. It is important to note that it is the child, not the father, who is on the bike. This stage does not require extended time. The most common thing is that the child falls and is hurt ... but we help him to get back up and get on the bike again. It is a necessary part of learning to ride a bike.

Watch:

This is the longest time period. The child must learn to get on the bike and begin to ride. He learns how to steer, how to stop, how to go through an intersection, how to deal with going uphill or downhill. He must learn where it is that he is safe to go, and where not. What are the important traffic laws? He must see this

progress unto the fourth generation of disciples. You must know all of the stages of the cycle of training, progressing from generation to generation.

Leave:

Once the child knows all of the necessary skills, the father can withdraw. If the child wants to ride his bike after that, "shall I call my dad?" NO! He/she now knows very well how to ride a bike.

Concluding thoughts

If we equip and train new disciples, they have the possibility to multiply themselves into other disciples. A characteristic that we see in places where the church is growing by multiplication is that it is normal for every Christian to be active in ministry.

In order to guide others, one does not have to be an adult, but merely be one step further ahead. This is what Paul meant when he said, "follow me, as I follow Christ." None of us have arrived at the measure of the perfection of Jesus Christ. We are all in the process of growing in the image of Christ.

Topic 3: Training Center, "Towards the Nations" – HLN (Hacia las Naciones)

Context

The concern arose to find a way to equip and mobilize people towards the completion of the missionary task that has been entrusted to the Church, especially calling young people who are "seated in our pews." Upon cultivating relationships with other ministries, we have found, within the unity, diversity, and plurality of the Church, an orientation that brought HLN into being to complement training provided by the Local Church.

Foundations

The Church has been called to train and send workers. The church must be involved in this task. We work together and in subjection to the spiritual formation process of the Local Church. HLN invests intensely, in its programme and at its headquarters, in the lives of a small number of candidates (12 to 15). Because this deals with life formation, the process takes place in diverse settings, among which the classroom is only one. HLN is not a strictly academic activity. HLN seeks to create learning environments not only in formal terms, but also in informal and non-formal contexts so that the wholeness of life itself might provide the learning context.

HLN takes on the commitment to function within the setting of relationships, creating a fluid interaction between participants, permanent staff, and visiting teachers. In a formative process, students remember more of the person who taught a given course than they do of the principles shared through that same course. HLN will give more importance to the life and testimony of the teachers than to the coursework that makes up the program.

HLN does not invest in individuals, but in churches. We are not interested in seeing participants separate from their congregations nor enter the programme independently. In a candidate's acceptance process, it is fundamental that it is the Church that sent them, and that the Church together with his/her close family group be those who make the decision to send him/her.

Objectives

We would like to see that the candidates carry with them:

1. A solid conviction that the quality of spiritual life is what determines success in ministry.
2. The abilities to study diligently and discover truths in the Word of God necessary to face diverse life situations.
3. The capacity to relate lovingly to people of differing backgrounds and, thanks to those same people, to establish significant ties that enrich the life and ministry of those who are involved.

4. The capacity to successfully resolve the problems and unforeseen circumstances that life presents.
5. The wisdom to know how to seek out the best people and places to gain information and needed advice for various circumstances that might arise.
6. An honest and sincere understanding of his/her own person, including strengths and weaknesses. The ability to appropriately care for one's own spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical needs.

Structure of the Programme

Participants have four months of classroom activity and three months of field work (which will eventually divide into two stages with a month in between). After that, they return for two more months in the classroom. In that classroom period, they receive a different teacher (male or female) each week. During the fieldwork, they visit approximately 20 cities (associated congregations) travelling between 6000 and 8000 kilometers, to become acquainted with and serve in the range of ministries that a church is running, including the bush areas of Chaco (original people communities) and Bolivia (Santa Cruz and Cochabamba) with work both in urban and rural areas.

1. Participants live in community and are exposed to a daily discipleship programme that permits the administrative staff to observe their behaviour in various situations.
2. Each day combines study time with spiritual discipline, work and fellowship.
3. Participants are exposed to a teacher (male or female) who shares the community experience with the participants and teaches classes about various topics. Participants take approximately ten courses grouped together as: Personal Life, Family, Ministry Tools, the Church, Bible, and Doctrine.
4. Each week also includes a time during which the participants join together as apprentices with a local ministry that has a solid track record.
5. During each week, the candidates meet for shared devotions, and also participate in home meetings directed by the permanent staff of the programme. This time is especially oriented towards reflection about the challenges that they are facing day by day and the formation of mature and holy character in the midst of these situations.

Upon completing the cycle, the aim is to re-insert participants into the active life of the Local Church that sent them, so that they share what has been learned and continue with the formation process that was initiated by the Church leadership.

The HLN model offers particular strengths where the denominations and church leaders are strong and are coordinated for the work of missions and ministry training. The interaction of local church with this model of ministry training goes beyond mere symbolic leadership of church officials in the training process; in fact, the leaders themselves take a significant role in choosing, sending, training, and re-inserting candidates into the life of the local church.