

Florence, The “Re-birth” of Passion for Mission

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Florence, Italy, was the center of medieval European finance and trade, and it is associated with the Renaissance that first occurred in this city and continued throughout most of Europe. The city's painters, architects, and philosophers all made Florence a model of Renaissance culture.

From the 28 to the 31 May 2014, more than 40 Alliance workers met in Florence at the Third Latino Missionary Retreat. Men and women currently serving in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa came to this city to share their field experiences, and have their spiritual batteries recharged to continue working in the cities and rural areas where the Lord called them to minister. These workers originate from Alliance churches in South America, a region that in the last two decades has been experiencing a growing interest and commitment to mission. Some of them are already veterans in the field, as Enrique and Gina Delgado (Peru) who have been serving in Japan for more

than two decades now, and there are others who are relatively new to this endeavor, as Danilo and Elaine (Brazil) who arrived in Portugal just two years ago.

Latin America As a Missionary Force

The Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary calculates that approximately 400,000 international missionaries were sent out in 2010, and nearly half of the world's top missionary-sending countries are now located in the global South, Brazil being one of them. The Alliance is part of this movement, as there are currently about one hundred workers representing many of the South American nations serving in every continent around the world.

Previous Retreats

The first Latino Missionary Retreat was held in Guadalajara, Spain, in September 2005. Eladio Medina, then president of CLA (the Latin American Alliance Fellowship) was

instrumental for this event. A little more than 20 workers participated, and they all went with high expectations because it was the first time that a Latino missionary conference had been set up for them.



First Retreat, Guadalajara, Spain, 2005

The second retreat was held in March 2012 this time in Segovia, Spain too, about 35 workers participating, almost all of them from Europe. The experience of listening to each other and praying for each other was so enriching that everybody agreed to plan a spiritual retreat every other year.

In this third retreat in Florence, this agreement was reaffirmed and a commitment was made to have the next retreat in a region other than Europe to facilitate the attendance of those who could not make it this time for travel restrictions.

This gathering served to renew the missionary call and get familiar with the projects and strategies that CLA has for the coming years. The goal of the Alliance in Latin America is not only sending out workers to the AWF sixth-region—basically the countries comprised in what has been called the 10/40 window—, but also to western nations where Latino immigration is strong, and even to some Latin American

places where national churches need help revitalizing their congregations.

Why Florence?

Florence was chosen because the Alliance in Italy is relatively new, and CLA wanted to encourage believers in this country with the presence of the Latino missionaries. The Alliance began working in Italy in 2009 when a group of Filipino immigrants planted a church in Bologna. In 2010, a couple from Argentina, Mario and Alejandra Pereyra, started another congregation with Latino immigrants in the city of Ancona. Today, Mario is the pastor of this church and the president of the C&MA in Italy as well. During this time, the Alliance has been spreading the Gospel to other cities such as Trento, Mirandola and Rome, where they work with both nationals and Latinos.



Mario Pereyra leading the service in Ancona church

It was not too long ago that the Alliance and other denominations began looking at the immigration wave as a movement designed to bless the global North. It is no secret that western Christianity has dramatically decreased lately, and observers acknowledge that evangelical immigrants from Africa, Asia and Latin America feel as the “chosen carriers” to accomplish a mission in reverse.

After the retreat one of the participants said this to me: "you have no idea how good this retreat has been to me. To see friends and colleagues that I hadn't seen for a long time, and feel part of a global movement such as the Alliance, has been a great blessing and fulfilling experience." I heard expressions like this from other workers as well who were already praying that God would provide the means to participate in the next retreat. Certainly we all could say the same, for we had indeed special days in which our missionary passion was renewed. The Lord once again surprised us all when we heard what He was doing through the Latino missionaries in different parts of the globe.

Walking the streets of this ancient and beautiful city, I thought of the influence Florence had, and the way it inspired and fostered a cultural renaissance in early modern Europe.

I like to think that this Third Latino Missionary Retreat has also been a "re-birth"—renaissance—of missionary passion not only for the Italian church but also for the international workers serving in different parts of the world. The impact of this retreat will be seen in coming years, but in the meanwhile the workers in the field will continue carrying the precious seed to sow, and will certainly return at the next retreat carrying sheaves with them.



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