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## COMIBAM-INTO THE FUTURE OF A CONTINENTAL MISSION MOVEMENT

COMIBAM has just turned 25! At our recent 2009 International Assembly in Bogota, Columbia, Dr. Rodolfo Girón reminded us of our beginnings. In 1984, Luis Bush and a small group of pastors and leaders in Central America sensed the Lord urging them to mobilize the Iberoamerican church to reach the world with the message of Christ. A movement was born in response to the God's Word and the knowledge of millions completely unreached with the Gospel—entire large and small ethnic groups with no Christian witness, no Bible and no ministry or organization

dedicated to work among them. At the end of the First Iberoamerican Missions Congress (1987, COMIBAM, Sao Paulo, Brazil), a strong commitment was made to transition from being a mission field to becoming a mission force.

This emerging (now emerged) movement continued to impact church leaders and the body of Christ. Thus, COMIBAM was established as an entity to mobilize missions and offer the church and emerging mission agencies a venue for collaboration. Churches and individual Christians began responding—and



the number of missionaries, denominational mission departments, missionary agencies and other related organizations began to grow. Research showed there were about 1,300 Iberoamerican missionaries at that time, many serving in within their own cultural groups.

Over the following decade, significant expansion occurred. By 1995, there were over 4,000 missionaries. There

was much need to facilitate the training and equipping of missionaries, help sending organizations in practical ways, develop member care networks, carry-out research, publish books and other materials, and so much more. In 1997, COMIBAM organized the Second Iberoamerican Missions Congress in Acapulco, Mexico. Many new missionaries were now serving in fields geographically and culturally distant and in every area of the world.

To discover the state of Iberoamerican missions, two separate research projects were conducted in 2006. One was a statistical study, which revealed more than 9,000 Latin missionaries, many serving long-term. The second research project took a deeper look at the missionaries themselves—their families, training, financial and spiritual support, their ministries, their future plans and other aspects. The results were published for the Third Iberoamerican Missions Congress, held in Granada, Spain in 2006. God has been moving and creating the transition from the dream to the reality of a new mission force!

The COMIBAM network is formed from local national mission movements in twenty-four countries. For the last three years, the COMIBAM leadership team has worked to evaluate and shape the new structure and strategies needed to serve the Iberoamerican missions community and their partner networks around the world in response to the changing world. COMIBAM must remain dynamic and be able to respond in an active way to the new challenges and opportunities in missions.

New vision and mission statements were reviewed and approved at the International Assembly in Colombia this past November, along with a detailed strategic plan and budget. The vision statement reads *“Ibero-America taking the whole gospel to all peoples”*; the mission statement affirms, *“Serving the Body of Christ in Ibero-America, cooperating in the creation of reflection, service and opportunities so that the Gospel can reach the ends of the earth.”* While continuing to serve our missions community in many ways, COMIBAM will focus on four main focus areas: mobilization, training, sending, and field support.

As COMIBAM works to fulfill its mission and role in the greater plan of God to reach every nation, people and tribe, there are four unchanging elements we have identified as the core to what we are and must be. Our four core elements are: people, vision, dedication and collaboration.

We are a network of **people**, under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, ordered to go to every people. Our mission is only relevant and biblical if it relates to people! And it is to be done by people! We want to value, respect, serve and empower each one of these individuals who have responded to the call of God, whether they serve out in a remote location or in their local church missions committee.

There is a clear **vision**, a purpose, which defines and drives this community called COMIBAM: obeying the Great Commission! It has been exciting

and encouraging to see more churches, denominations, mission agencies and missionaries grasping the vision and accepting the mandate.

This task has never been and will never be an easy one! Without serious commitment and sacrifice, it can not be done! We are seeing these dedicated, vision filled people, who are also very capable, well equipped and gaining in experience, now serving God and His Kingdom all over the world! And we need more of those, we want more of those!

Now, we will certainly not get very far without the relationship and cooperation, which is working together with the whole body. Alliances are very much part of our fiber. After all, we are an alliance of twenty-four different mission entities, which themselves are cooperative national groups! But it is not easy! It requires a commitment to relationships. We also have very strong formal and informal relationships with other organizations. But know there must be more. We want more partnerships with more organizations and networks around the world. We must speed up the work! We must collaborate!

We have a rich and fruitful past! And we are committed to building on it to see bountiful results, of people hearing the Gospel, accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, churches being established, believers being disciplined and going out to reach others. God will guide all of us, and use us for His Glory! ●