

ISSUE 63 FALL 2026



CELEBRATING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

FALL 2026

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TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS PUBLICATION:

**Rio Grande Bible
Ministries or
Rio Grande =**
organizational name
**Seminario Bíblico
Rio Grande or SBRG**
= Bible College
MLS = Missionary
Language School
(1955-2017)
ICS = InterCultural
Studies (2017-)
Year = Graduated or
last attended



on the cover

Images of the humble beginnings of Rio Grande Bible College reveal God's faithfulness. A Danish evangelist responded to God's call to the Rio Grande Valley to share the Gospel. Little did he dream that it would become a key training center for hundreds to fulfill the Great Commission.

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PURPOSE To make God's people aware of the needs of the Hispanic World and the role that Rio Grande Bible Institute serves to provide godly Christian leadership.

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**PRESIDENT'S CORNER**

SEEING *the* PAST CLEARLY

"What power are your reading glasses?" my wife asked. I remembered that the power is written on the inside of one of the arms, so I picked them up to see. I tried squinting, turning on the light, even holding them further away, but I couldn't read those tiny numbers! A person with presbyopia cannot easily read the small print. I suddenly understood why my mother had reading glasses everywhere...in the car, by the phone, on the kitchen counter, beside the bed...

The history of eyeglasses likely began with Cairo-born mathematician, meteorologist and astronomer Abu Ali al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham (ca. 965-1040), later known in Europe as Alhazen. He researched optics and published "The Book

History provides the lenses for us to see what we haven't experienced ourselves.

of Optics," where he theorized that light passing through a convex substance would be magnified. His book was translated into Latin in 1240, making it accessible to a broader audience.

Inspired by Alhazen's findings, monks began experimenting with quartz and produced small convex-shaped rocks that could be laid on top of writing to magnify it. They were called "reading stones."

At the end of the 13th century Murano, a small island cluster north of Venice, was the only place in Europe where white glass was produced. The *Cristalleri*, as the glassmakers were called, would grind the glass into lenses for marketing to aging scholars. At the end of the 13th century, they began setting them in wooden rings with handles, and eventually fastened two

together with a rivet, producing binocles. They had to be held in place with one hand, leaving the other free to turn pages!

Different methods of attaching them to the face included a ribbon around the back of the head, strings with lead weights that would hang over the ears, and even a bonnet with a brim that held them handsfree. In the 16th century the French developed pince-nez (which means pinch the nose), a pair with a strong spring that pinched them onto the bridge of the nose. Even the illustrious Benjamin Franklin joined the effort when he decided that it would be advantageous to see both near and far using the same glasses. He patented the bifocal lenses in 1784. Glasses are a wonderful invention that allows people to see what they cannot see with their natural vision.

History provides the lenses for us to see what we haven't experienced ourselves. In Deuteronomy 4:9, Moses instructed the Israelites to watch themselves closely and not forget the things their eyes had seen, and specifically commanding them to pass these memories down to their children and grandchildren.

Put on your reading glasses and join me in this issue of the Rio Grande Magazine as we reflect on 80 years of God's provision for this ministry!



Laurence R. Windle

CELEBRATING *80* YEARS

to SALVATION AND *to* SERVICE

Memories from M.C. Ehlert, Our Founder



OUR FIRST
THREE
PRESIDENTS

Left: William
Thompson (1965-1968)

Center: M.C. Ehlert
(1946-1965)

Right: Leonard Hanes
(1968-1981)

→ **“ALL THAT THE FATHER GIVETH ME SHALL COME TO ME, AND HE THAT COMETH TO ME I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT.”**

These are words in the 37th verse of John 6 that was pinned to my heart in 1921, the 30th day of June in the Jean Gallup dairy barn in northern Minnesota. A young man who was there as a tester for the German Guernsey Association, led me to Christ in that wonderful night. It was on the west side of a granary, after having spoken to me for several hours, and taken me in and out of my arguments. Using the lane of the Scripture and God's truth, he put his hand on my shoulder and said to me, “Ehlert, you better finish it and settle it tonight with the Lord.”

I shall never forget that. I felt His hand of love draw me. He suddenly walked out from the side of the wall where we were standing and knelt under a little white pine tree. And there under that tree he poured out his heart to the Lord, out loud and on my behalf.

Having finished prayer himself, he turned to me and said, “Ehlert, now you pray for yourself in your own words.” Now to you who have been born again and know what it means to pass from death unto life, you know what a battle a young man like me would have had all that day before, as the hounds of heaven pursued me!

My language and my talk at that time would be entirely unfit anywhere. And now to think that I should speak the praises of God and pour out my heart in prayer

over the same lips that had been used to curse and to swear with... This was a strange thing indeed, but that night, after having faced God in the Lord Jesus Christ, I can truthfully say that I passed from death unto life.

I know what I'm talking about, because I had an experience of the new birth! I thank God for that young man that came out to the farm, not as a preacher, but as a humble, witnessing servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. No preacher could have reached Mack Ehlert. But this young man, filled with the love of God and as a personal worker, succeeded in doing what

many a pastor and preacher had not been able to do for me all of those years.

I thank God for that night, and that gave me the beginning. After several years, the Lord graciously called me out into the service for His name's sake. And it's been my privilege for a few years, in my humble way, to go about preaching the gospel with my wife, Mrs. Ehlert. And we are glad to report to any young man who stands, as it were, on the threshold of service or the call for service, that if the Holy Spirit is calling you into the service, be sure that you do not say “no.”



Broadcasting the good news of the Gospel wherever they went in South Texas.

▲ All are welcome here," said the sign above the Ehlerts in their early days in the Valley.



For a number of years now we have experienced what it means to have our needs supplied in every way as God calls us to the field and supplies. We want to take this opportunity to thank our friends here and there, who by their prayer and by their support have stood by us in our humble missionary work.

God has sent us...*"Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring hither the poor and the maimed, and the halt and the blind.... Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my father's house may*

be filled." These are words from the 14th chapter of Luke, verses 21 and 23. These words have furnished us the basis for our work in the Rio Grande Valley among the Mexicans, and for several years we discovered their appeal that is worthy of anybody's honest missionary endeavor.

We left our pastoral charge in Burn's Center, Minnesota, to go out in a trailer house along the hedges and the highways, practically in the way of the meaning of this text. We've been going up and down the lanes, preaching the Gospel and in our humble way, endeavoring to reach the lost in the needy places.

Approximately 7 months out of the year, we are privileged to go down in the Rio Grande Valley among the Latin Americans and there pitch our little tents and be busy about the missionary work in the highways and the lanes. For the summer months we return again to the North for a season to do the same kind of work in the needy places in the North. And

we have this word of testimony, to the honor and glory of God, that for five years we have never needed a thing that was necessary for us to carry on a humble missionary work.

We say, to the honor and glory of God and to the comforts of those who so faithfully in prayer and otherwise have stood by us in this work: week upon week we have the great joy of contacting some people down here in the Valley. These are as wonderful people as ever lived on the earth, but poor – the poorest among the poor – living on dirt floors and under palm thatched roofs. They have nothing to tie them to the earth. And therefore, they represent what we believe to be one of the greatest missionary ventures.

We take just this little opportunity to express our humble thanks and appreciation to all of those friends who, with their prayer and with their support, have made us able for these years to continue. Thank you!

Although he didn't speak Spanish, Mr. Ehlerth shared his faith with the local people.



All were welcome to stop by their trailer and hear the good news.

GOD-GIVEN DEGREES

→ **THE LEADERSHIP
OF RIO GRANDE
BIBLE INSTITUTE
HAS ALWAYS
DESIRED ACADEMIC
EXCELLENCE,**

which meant the pursuit of accreditation recognized by the United States Department of Education.

After years of preparation and evaluation, Rio Grande was approved for accreditation by the American Association of Bible Colleges (AABC) in 1999. That achievement was welcome news for students from Bible institutes in Latin America who could transfer to Rio Grande and have a recognized degree.

Unfortunately, even after obtaining the long-awaited accreditation status with the AABC, the Institute lacked recognition by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Thus, we were not authorized to grant degrees to our graduates. (See *These Stones still Speak*, p. 147)

The Texas Board of Education considered Rio Grande as any other Texas school and required that all professors have a master's degree. The number of professors with doctorates would need to increase, with a guaranteed

wage similar to other professors throughout the state. That seemed to be an impossible requirement because, like other staff members, the professors raised their own support and did not receive a guaranteed income.

President Roy LeTourneau began to make renewed attempts to qualify for state approval to grant degrees. Preliminary applications and talks with the chairman of the Coordinating Board had taken place during both the Johnson and Hobbs administrations. However, the results had been disappointing, since the school clearly did not meet the requirements. (See *These Stones still Speak*, p.148.)

To raise the academic level of the professors, master's degrees were required. Many professors who did not have their degrees took steps to qualify. The idea of receiving a salary rather than raising support was attractive to many of the faculty. But it meant a major change for the school and a major increase in student fees. As a result, that idea was never implemented and professors are still responsible for raising their financial support.

That was a time of testing for the school, but in 2003 God brought Larry Windle back to the States from the Bolivian

mission field to serve as Rio Grande's president. He also saw the importance of offering degrees recognized by the State of Texas. In his communication with the State Board of Education, he found that their requirements had not diminished. Another requirement would be the teaching of Texas history in English, when all our classes were taught in Spanish!

After months of attempts to achieve qualification for degree granting status, Dr. Windle concluded, "I guess that God's plan is for us to be only an Institute, so we need to be content with that."

But unknown to us, God had been working on our behalf, using another Texas school in a similar predicament. Tyndale Theological Seminary was taken to court by the State Board of Education for offering degrees. Their case was in the Texas court system for over ten years, while working its way to the Texas Supreme Court. Miraculously, the Texas Supreme court ruled in favor of Tyndale rather than the Texas Board, which gave them the right to grant degrees. As a result, all of the members of the Texas board resigned.

After hearing the news, President Windle contacted the Texas Board office. Since we were already accredited and recognized by the United States Department of Education, we were told that we would qualify to grant Texas degrees as well!

Just at the point that we were willing to give up hope of granting degrees, God did the impossible and enabled us to do so. Praise God with us!

the RADIO VOICE BEGINS

THE BIRTH OF RADIO ESPERANZA

By Azalea Arreola



▲
Mr. M.C. Ehlert, broadcasting on
local station KURV

→ **RGBM'S 80-YEAR HISTORY INCLUDES THE STORY OF RADIO ESPERANZA, "THE RADIO VOICE OF RIO GRANDE BIBLE INSTITUTE."**

One of M. C. Ehlert's dreams became reality on February 6, 1983, when KOIR 88.5 FM went on the air. Today, the message broadcast from Radio Esperanza's facilities on the Rio Grande campus in Edinburg, Texas, reaches far beyond what Ehlert could have imagined. Through four radio stations, online streaming, and a mobile app, Radio Esperanza continues *touching hearts with the Word of God*.

M. C. Ehlert's dream—that the Bible Institute would have its own radio ministry—began taking shape in 1979 and 1980. A key figure in those early years was Hardy Hayes, a war veteran, radio missionary, and member of HCJB. Hayes had helped establish Christian radio stations along the U.S.–Mexico border and encouraged former president Leonard Hanes to pursue an available radio frequency in Edinburg.

In 1981, the Bible Institute applied to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for the only available FM frequency in the area. The Diocese of the Valley also applied for the same frequency, but despite the Diocese's efforts on October 13, 1981, by God's grace, the FCC granted 88.5 FM to Rio Grande Bible Institute. From that moment, God's hand became evident in guiding and sustaining the ministry.

The new station opened significant opportunities to reach Hispanics in northern Mexico. At a time when religious broadcasting faced restrictions in Mexico, Radio Esperanza was able to transmit the message of hope in Christ across the border from the Rio Grande Valley.

In 1982, construction was finished on the new building that would house classrooms and eventually, the new radio studio. The building was named in honor of the McKinney family, generous donors to Rio Grande, including for this new addition.

Leonard Hanes, who had recently retired as president, became director of radio. After the equipment was installed and the staff trained, KOIR 88.5 FM



Hardy Hayes (left)
of radio HCJB,
with Rio Grande
President Gordon
Johnson in 1983

Javier Salinas
broadcasting on
Radio Esperanza in
the early days
of the station.



Parkersburg Iowa 1938

Radio was part
of Mr. Ehler's
ministry in Iowa.



The first bumper
sticker advertising
Rio Grande's
radio ministry.

officially began broadcasting on February 6, 1983, bringing biblical teaching to South Texas and northern Mexico in Spanish, reaching both sides of the border.

Three years later, God expanded the ministry. Henry Tippie, owner of a successful commercial radio station, offered to donate KRIO 910 AM. After some preparations, the station—which had previously broadcast English rock hits—began broadcasting Spanish Bible teaching on June 7, 1986. Because AM signals travel farther than FM, the new station with its antennas directing the signal to the south, significantly extended Radio Esperanza's reach.

In 1997, construction was completed on the Johnson Communications Center, which continues to house Radio Esperanza's studios today.

God continued opening new doors. On January 10, 2008, KRIO 97.7 FM in Roma, Texas, became part of Radio Esperanza, extending the ministry's reach into West Texas and across into Mexico, serving communities with a great need for the hope in Christ.

God did it once again! On May 3, 2021, another remarkable opportunity arrived. KESO 92.7 FM, located in East Texas along the Gulf Coast and the border, stopped broadcasting classic pop-rock music and immediately began airing *El Club de las Caritas Felices* (Happy Faces Club), Radio Esperanza's children's program. This acquisition also came through God's provision, as a faithful supporter donated funds that enabled the Bible Institute to purchase the station. Through KESO, Radio Esperanza

has continued reaching new communities with the gospel including northeast Mexico.

Since its beginning, Radio Esperanza has been a testimony to God's faithfulness. As a non-commercial, nonprofit station, it has been sustained through the generous support of faithful donors who have partnered in its mission, confirming Hudson Taylor's well-known words: "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply."

Although it is impossible to count the lives transformed through this ministry, the Word of God continues to be proclaimed every day from its broadcast studios. For more than four decades, Radio Esperanza has faithfully shared the Gospel, and we are confident that God will continue using and sustaining this ministry for generations to come.

LEARNING *the* HEART LANGUAGE

By Sarah Jackson

"Special thanks to Ana Yaruro for her research."

→ HOW CAN WE SHARE GOD'S LOVE WITH THE SPANISH-SPEAKING WORLD WITHOUT SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF THEIR HEARTS?

In 1955, William Thompson and Leonard Hanes, two American missionaries, recognized the urgent need to train English-speaking missionaries in the Spanish language.

By the mid-1950s, the English Bible program at the Río Grande Bible Institute was facing a serious crisis. The low student attendance made it seem as though the doors were about to close.

However, God was already writing a new story. In the spring of 1955 William Thompson looked around and realized that because of its location on the US/Mexico border and the high population of Spanish speakers in the area the Río Grande Valley was an ideal place for a language school.

William Thompson knew well what it meant to learn the Spanish language. He had served for more than twenty years in Colombia and had received linguistic training in his work with South America Mission. He and Len Hanes took the idea to brother Ehlert, and then to the board of directors. The

results were unanimous. Everyone was in favor. He later recalled:

"We polled the faculty and the staff on the idea. They were 100% in favor even though it meant that some of the staff members would not have a ministry because they didn't know Spanish."

The first classes came together quickly. Bill Thompson taught phonetics, as his extensive missionary experience and background in linguistics had shown him the importance of communicating clearly when sharing the gospel.

Meanwhile, Len Hanes, who had a passion for technology, took on the task of developing the language laboratory. And so, in September of 1955, the Language School for Missionaries was born. Little by little, a new generation of servants began preparing to cross borders with the message of Christ.

In 1989, Dr. Gordon Johnson, a faithful servant who had led the Language School for more than twenty years, passed the baton to Dr. Manuel Gutiérrez,

a young man with a deep desire to serve. "Manny" as he is commonly known, came to Christ because of a graduate of the Language School who invested in his family.

"I became director of the language school, and I realized then that one of the language school students was the one responsible for me coming to know Christ. And now here I'm in the same school helping prepare missionaries." Dr. Manny shared, "And my thought was, okay, how many other families? How is this being repeated over and over again in different ways?"

Since 1955, the Río Grande Language School—or the Inter-Cultural Studies, as it is known today—has faithfully worked to train dedicated missionaries, prepared to share the message of salvation with clarity and passion. From South Texas to Mexico, Central America, South America, Europe, and every corner where Spanish is the language of the heart.

Today, more than 3,500 students have been trained at this school—men and women who have taken the Gospel to the most distant places and continue raising up new generations of servants who lead others to Christ.



A married couple practicing Spanish from their book, as a teacher online corrects any errors.

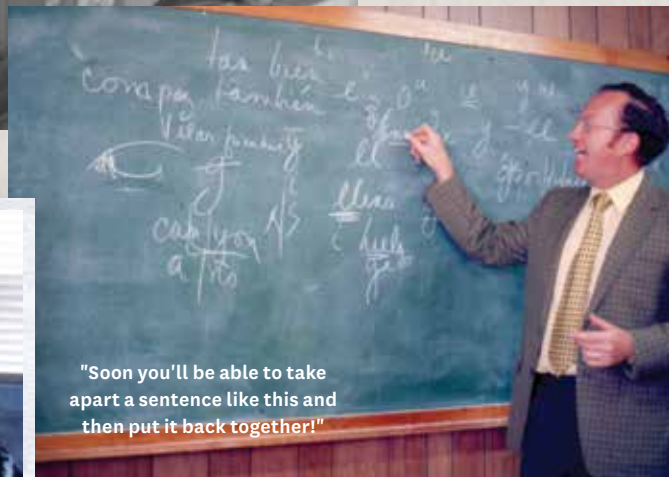
Missionaries listening to Spanish, then repeating what they heard.



"Not quite. Say it again, please."



This cheerful teacher listens and engages the students online.



"Soon you'll be able to take apart a sentence like this and then put it back together!"



CORNERSTONE PROGRAM

A ONE-YEAR FOUNDATION IN BIBLE,
WORLDVIEW, & LIFE

Building on 80 years of experience in training missionaries, pastors, and Christian educators, Rio Grande is offering foundational training to a new generation of students who are eager to serve God, wherever He calls.



**STUDY THE
BIBLE FROM
GENESIS TO
REVELATION**

**PREPARE
YOUR HEART
WITH GODLY
MENTORS**

**LIVE ON
CAMPUS WITH
A COMMUNITY
OF BELIEVERS**

**SERVE
WEEKLY IN
LOCAL
CHURCH
MINISTRY**

**BE TRAINED
FOR
WORLD
MISSIONS**

**EQUIP
YOURSELF
WITH ACTUAL
MINISTRY
EXPERIENCE**

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▲
**SCAN
TO LEARN
MORE**

APRIL 2026 - JULY 2026

HONOR & MEMORIAL GIFTS

IN HONOR OF

**DONNA ANTONIUK
& RIO GRANDE'S 80TH
ANNIVERSARY**
Patricia Haug

KEITH & OLIVIA HEPPNER
Beverley Heppner

REV. KEITH JESKE
Patricia Jeske

**REV. GORDON & GRACE
JOHNSON**
Patricia Jeske

CRAIG MAART
Jean Van Mark

JOE MAURIN
Beverly Brandon
Gail Smith

IN MEMORY OF

JEROME (JERRY) AXVIG
Claudia Axvig

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Carol Benner
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Nancy Garwick

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Paul Webb

ANN WILSON
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RIO GRANDE BIBLE MINISTRIES

CAMPUS NEWS

→ **THE ARCHIVE OF RIO GRANDE BIBLE INSTITUTE CONTAINS MANY ITEMS FROM THE ORGANIZATION'S 80-YEAR HISTORY.**

Included are documents, such as catalogs, handbooks, prayer calendars, Rio Grande magazines, and graduation programs; photographs; videos of previous years' Founders Week speakers, staff retreat sessions, and some of the courses taught; CDs of previous music groups; photos of most of the graduating classes from 1951-1979; and physical objects, such as the desk, typewriter, telephone, and Bible of founder M. C. Ehlert. Most of the items are in the library's archive rooms, with the exception of Mr. Ehlert's desk with his typewriter, telephone, and Bible, which are on display in the campus Welcome Center along with various historic photographs. Many of the historical documents are now available for viewing as PDFs in the library's online catalog, OPALS.



1952 GRADUATING CLASS PHOTO:

Included in the 1952 graduating class was Isaac Friesen, who went on to serve for 73 years in varied roles at RGBM, from milking the campus cow and beginning a chaplain ministry at a local sanatorium, to ministering in jails in Mexico, working as the school's purchasing agent, and serving on the Board of Trustees.



This was the first administration building on campus.

FIRST LANGUAGE SCHOOL CLASS PHOTO

After the launch in 1955 of a Spanish Language School for missionaries preparing to serve in Latin America, the first Language School class, pictured here, graduated in 1956.



GOD LEADS US

By President Larry Windle

We have the solid truth of Scripture. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit leading us into all truth. Careful study provides the parameters and authority for life and conduct. The avid Christian will inevitably study and meditate on these sure truths to orient the whole course of his or her life in the path and pattern of His truth.

God's will for us always includes certain features: Separation from sin unto holiness. God is holy and it is His will that we be also. Prayer and thanksgiving are always God's will for us. Doing good deeds is always God's will.

While most of our lives will be carefully and prudently lived in the pattern of His truth, is there an aspect of life where God personally, individually guides a person in specific aspects? Whom you marry, where to live, how to serve? Absolutely!

There is a divine blueprint for each one of God's people that is very personal. This plan is suited to our personalities, talents, needs, potentialities and environment. God has ordained certain specific tasks, works for each individual Christian to do. The Apostle Paul could say, "I have finished my course." He fulfilled his ministry and his work was completed.

God's plan is very detailed. He doesn't always reveal the distant future, but normally just step by step because He wants us to live in daily dependence, seeking His will in every aspect. The will of God is always good, acceptable and perfect for each believer. It may take the retrospect of a lifetime to recognize it, but for now we accept by faith that it is good and acceptable and perfect. It is a sad fact that it is possible to miss the plan of God in our selfish and stubborn ways to do our own planning. The submission of our will is an ever-present reality.

Knowing His personal will for our direction does have conditions. We must faithfully obey at each revealed point, trusting His direction, before He gives the next step. There must be a conscious decision to surrender or commit our direction to the Lord for Him to steer our path. Keeping the direction coming requires conscious separation from the world and all known sin. We must keep our mind in tune with the Lord, His Spirit, and His Word, to hear His still, small voice.

The question then comes, how does God reveal His will to the seeking individual? The truth is that God is sovereign and does not work according to a set pattern, for He deals with each person differently.

Sometimes God reveals His will through opportunities, circumstances, the wish of parents, the advice of friends, the evaluation of one's own abilities and gift set, personal inclination, the needs of the day and conscience. God often guides through verses of Scripture that speak loudly to you. He also gives a less tangible sense of peace. "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit."—that a certain course of action is good, right, or wrong.

God by circumstances sometimes closes one door and opens another. Nothing happens to the child of God by happenstance. Each item is planned or allowed by the Father. God has sometimes guided by a vision in the night! Paul saw one in Acts 16:9, 10, "Come over into Macedonia and help us." But this is very rare. God does not use this method very often today. Occasionally people seek His will by putting out a fleece. Gideon prayed that if certain things happened a certain way, then he would know the Lord's confirmation of a course of action.

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dependence,
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every aspect.





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"ONE GENERATION WILL PRAISE YOUR WORKS TO ANOTHER, AND WILL DECLARE YOUR MIGHTY ACTS."

PSALM 145:4, NASB

What a great privilege it has been to be a small part of the movement of the gospel in Latin America for several generations. None of this would be possible but for the partnership of many individuals, volunteers, and churches from across the country. Pray with us as we continue our labor for the Lord into the next generations. Please consider how you might be involved.



TO RECEIVE MORE INFORMATION CALL ROBERT ALLEN, 956-380-8125