



LATIN AMERICAN CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES, INC.

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We are presently experiencing an extraordinary *kairos* moment in the development of the Church around the world. The growth and the maturity of the Church and its impact on Latin America requires that its leaders articulate the faith with relevance, diffuse their ideas, reflect upon the new challenges, and help the People of God to respond to them. In addition, it is necessary to formulate new strategies in order to penetrate with the Gospel the academic and cultural centers of information, opinion and socioeconomic and political realities. A generation of leadership is arising in Latin America that has the necessary background to carry out academic studies at a Ph.D. level. However, every day it is more difficult and costly for these persons to do doctoral studies outside the context of Latin America. The Latin American Doctoral Program (**PRODOLA**) seeks to respond to this need.

The Church of Jesus Christ has the fundamental responsibility for the development of Christian leaders. The Church must train those called to this leadership and follow in a manner that seeks to be clearly faithful to the biblical models. As educators and Christian mentors we are at the service of the churches and mission agencies to help them fulfill their responsibility in the formation of leaders at the highest level, striving so that the theoretical content of the Christian faith may be in tune with the church's practice in ministry. Thus, we cooperate together in forming the kind of leaders that the Church needs, persons who possess a biblical pastoral vision and demonstrate a high level of expertise in the fulfillment of its mission.

The pastoral vision of **PRODOLA** is anchored in an integrated understanding of the Gospel and in a clear commitment to Kingdom values. Emphasis is given both to the content of the faith as well as to its practice, giving special emphasis to pastoral praxis in the Latin American context.

Within this frame of reference, the relationship between teachers and students is characterized by collegiality, teaching by example, and participation in collaborative efforts, in an environment of mutual accountability and discipline. Both teachers and their disciples are active agents in the formative process in the construction of knowledge. It is hoped that both will experience substantive changes as a result of their life together; that is to say, that both will work for the integration of content with daily life. This means that the program aspires to that type of learning that gives priority to the formation of persons over and above the creation of programs and activities. These are the fundamental factors that will guide evaluation throughout the entire educational process.

The vision of **PRODOLA** is a Church equipped to participate in the mission of God in the redemption and transformation of Latin America.

The Mission of **PRODOLA** is to offer contextual theological education at a Ph.D. level with a creative methodology in order to equip the leaders of the Church.

At the beginning of 2000, Pablo Deiros, Ph.D., and Charles Van Engen, Ph.D., shared their concerns regarding the need to provide additional theological and missiological formation for those serving as faculty in Bible schools and seminaries throughout Latin America. As a result of this initial conversation, in consultation with other colleagues and through much prayer, Latin American Christian Ministries (LACM) was born. This non-profit organization would be the initiator of, and foundational support for, the program.

In March of 2001, **LACM** convened 35 Latin American Protestant professors from twelve countries and represented twenty-three denominations, mission agencies and theological institutions in Miami, Florida. Together they prayed, dialogued and dreamed over how an advanced theological education program might be created. It was there that the vision for a doctoral program was formed to which they gave the name **PROGRAMA DOCTORAL LATINOAMERICANO (PRODOLA): Latin American Leadership Development Program**.

At this Miami Consultation, an Administrative Council was named, consisting of nine professors who represent the continent. Since May of 2001, the Administrative Council has met regularly in order to develop the infrastructure for **PRODOLA**, to formulate the program of study and to extend the networks of personal, institutional and financial cooperation.

In February, 2003, exactly one year ago, on behalf of the Academic Council and as Dean of the Latin American Leadership Development Program (LALDP), I had the joy of sending out the following announcement.

*It gives me great joy in Christ to announce the launching of the **Latin American Doctoral Program (PRODOLA)** anticipated to begin in early 2004.*

*PRODOLA is an educational project leading to an academic doctorate in theology (Ph.D.) in Latin America. The program involves a multi-denominational community of Latin American professors working together in a School of Post Graduate Studies, organizationally linked to the Evangelical University of the Americas (**UNELA**) in Costa Rica and functions under the auspices of the Latin American Christian Ministries, Inc. (**LACM**) in Glendora, California. The members of the Academic Council made up of 9 Latin American professors who represent the continent have worked diligently for the past two years in defining the program, describing the courses, developing the calendar of events, and shaping the myriad other details necessary to create such a program.*

The process of creating this doctoral program has been arduous, exciting, and satisfying. What began as a dream has in just a few years become a reality with the joyful participation of colleagues who are committed to the vision and the task.

At the moment, we are finalizing the academic recognition with the government of Costa Rica of fifteen professors with Ph.D.'s through the Evangelical University of the Americas. Together they constitute the faculty of PRODOLA. There are several dozen more Latin American professors throughout the region who have expressed their willingness to serve as teachers, mentors, and directors of theses.

The first group of candidates will begin their studies in early 2004, with plans to have them graduate four years later. Intensive two-week courses will be combined with individual academic research guided by a supervisor. The first group of candidates will be selected from a list of persons recommended by the professors of PRODOLA.

We praise God that in November, 2003, the core faculty of PRODOLA were accepted and academically accredited by the government of Costa Rica, recognized within the university system of that country. Work continues in gaining the second phase of the Costa Rican government's accreditation having to do with their approval of the entire study plan of PRODOLA.

We are so grateful to God that through the concerted effort of many folks throughout the continent, between May and November of 2003 the Academic Council was able to accept 27 persons to form the first group of candidates for PRODOLA. This first group of candidates will gather during the first two weeks of February in Londrina, Brazil for the official inauguration of PRODOLA.

What a joy to realize that these brothers and sisters come from the following countries: Argentina (2), Bolivia (2), Brasil (3), Colombia (1), Chile (1), Costa Rica (1), Ecuador (4), Guatemala (1), Honduras (1), Mexico (2), Paraguay (1), Perú (1), República Dominicana (1), and Venezuela (6). They represent an equal number of different denominations, mission agencies and churches.

We ask for your prayers for these sisters and brothers. They are all very busy people with pastoral commitments, teaching assignments, and responsibilities in their organizations and ministries. They have already devoted a lot of time to the pre-reading that is required in preparation for the first two courses in February 2004. And there is much work ahead of them.

The Lord willing, on February 2, 2004, we will worship together at the South American Theological Seminary in Londrina, Brazil in a service of inauguration of PRODOLA and as the beginning of the first two intensive courses. Representatives of the Board of Directors of the Latin American Christian Ministries, representatives of the Evangelical University of the Americas, members of the Academic Council and the new candidates – all of us together, God willing, will be arriving in Londrina the 31st of January. We hope to visit various churches in Londrina on Sunday, February 1.

The first course will begin at 8:00AM on February 2 with Dr. Enrique Guang offering, "Methodology of Investigation." In the evening we will hold the celebration of inauguration of PRODOLA. Dr. Guang's course will be meet from 8:00AM to 5:00PM Monday through Friday, February 2-6. Dr. Mariano Ávila will offer "Hermeneutics and Theology" during the week of February 9-13.

The calendar for the following intensive courses for 2004 and 2005 can be found in this same web site.

We ask for your prayers for all those involved in the inauguration of PRODOLA and for all of us who are involved in this project. Many will be making a great effort to travel to Londrina, Brazil and we ask your prayers for them.

If you, beloved reader, are interested in receiving more information about PRODOLA, you can find that in other pages of this same web site, or you can feel free to contact me, Dr. Charles Van Engen at administracion@prodola.org.