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April 30, 2004

Posted: 5/03/04

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By John Hall

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The Union of Baptists in Latin America has elected as president a Texas Baptist church-starting strategist.

Otto Arango, director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated Church Starting Institute, was named president of the body that represents one of six Baptist World Alliance regional fellowships.

National conventions from all South and Central American nations, several Caribbean countries and Mexico are represented in the organization.

Arango said he hopes to further church-starting efforts throughout Latin America with the same strategy that dramatically is expanding Baptist work in Mexico. Through his strategy, laypeople are encouraged to become trained church starters. They start Bible studies in their homes that evolve into churches.

Using this technique, Mexican Baptists started 800 churches last year,

nearly doubling the size of the National Baptist Convention of Mexico. About 10,000 more people are enrolled in church-starting classes. Mexican Baptists are aiming for 10,000 Baptist churches in the country by 2010.

Arango is looking for similar results from the Latin American union. He challenged messengers to start 50,000 churches in 10 years. He hopes to have church-starting specialists in each Latin American Baptist church.

“To me, it's a great opportunity and platform to carry the vision across Latin American countries,” he said.

The church-starting emphasis could renew and strengthen Baptist efforts across Latin America, said Arango, who was elected to a five-year term. It also could have positive effects in areas of Spain, Canada and the United States where there is a large Latin American population, he added.

“We hope, according to our prayer, that we bring revival,” he said.

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