

Hispanic church in Houston supports ministry in Senegal

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HOUSTON—Pastor Moises Flores and members of Iglesia Bautista del Redentor understand their missions calling extends far beyond the Houston city limits—even to West Africa.

Ten years ago, Flores visited the church's former pastor, Jorge Camacho, who was serving as a missionary in Egypt. Camacho talked about his experience in cultures where Christianity was not the norm, and their conversation inspired Flores. He wanted Iglesia Bautista del Redentor to become a missional church.

“My experience with Camacho was like a school of missions,” Flores said.

Helping the House of Hope

Two years later, Flores traveled to Senegal to see if his church could assist a ministry called House of Hope. He met Gilbert Rowe, a pastor from Costa Rica who relocated to Senegal to work with children known as *talibés*.

In West Africa, a *talibé* is a boy who is given over to a *marabout*, or teacher, to learn the Quran, Flores explained. Often, the *talibés* are abused and forced to beg for money on the streets, he added.



Pastor Moises Flores of Houston enjoys time with children in a village in Senegal. (Photo courtesy of Moises Flores)

Rowe and his family wanted to offer them an alternative, so they took in 20 boys to live with them at the House of Hope. The boys there learn Spanish, English and French, Senegal's official language.

Rowe's goal at House of Hope is to help the children become equipped for a better future by preparing them for college, Flores said. While the children receive a formal education, they also learn vocational skills such as welding, painting and carpentry, and they study the Bible.

As these boys have grown up, many of them have become church planters in the villages where their families live.

Emphasis on starting churches

Flores felt confident his congregation could support the church planting initiative. A few years earlier, he had helped to plant 15 churches in the Houston area, working with Jesus Guillen, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Redencion in Houston, and Abel Aguirre, pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Fortaleza y Esperanza in Sugar Land, and the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Iglesia Bautista del Redentor has visited House of Hope at least once a year since 2010, helping to develop a medical missions program to assist church planters in each village.

“We provide medical clinics for free, and at night we invite them to hear about Jesus,” Flores said.

While Senegal has freedom of religion, the U.S. Department of State in 2011 [reported](#) “societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief or practice.” The State Department report also pointed to preferences the government gives to Muslims it does not grant to members of other religions.

Some families have rejected children who convert to Christianity, Flores added.

Flores and his partners in church planting—Guillen and Aguirre—founded Desafio Mundial—Global Challenge—in 2015. The organization developed an egg farm to support Rowe and his ministry, and it brings in about \$1,000 a month.

Iglesia Bautista del Redentor, Iglesia Bautista Redencion and Iglesia Cristiana Fortaleza y Esperanza together contribute \$6,500 annually to House of Hope to support 13 staff.

Steps in the missional journey

Iglesia Bautista del Redentor supports five of the staff members at House of Hope—a global outreach the congregation never expected, Flores acknowledged.

However, rather than making plans based on resources the church possesses, the congregation recognizes the importance of “having faith and being obedient,” Flores said.

“The gospel has to be preached to all the nations,” he said. “We want to be a part of that.”

Recently, Iglesia Bautista del Redentor took another step of faith in its missional journey. Oscar Cerna, a member of the congregation, left Houston to serve at House of Hope at least two years. His home church and Desafio Mundial will provide his financial support as he works in Senegal.

Under Rowe’s guidance, Cerna will help disciple 16 young men. Each weekend, he also will assist the ministry of First Christian Church in Babak, which was started in 2016.

“Many of us may think God’s calling in our lives may require too much,” Flores said. “But being faithful is to trust God will provide for us, as well.”

Editor’s Note: The 14th paragraph of this story was edited Feb. 6 to correct an error.