

Latin American Report

LCJE International Conference

The work of LCD in Latin America is basically done through personal contacts with people involved in Jewish evangelism and Jewish ministries. Recently we have expanded our work by reaching out the Spanish-speaking congregations and churches in United States and Israel.

Argentina is still the country that hosts the largest Jewish community in Latin America. Jewish evangelism in Argentina goes back to the 1930s, when thousands of refugees from central Europe began to settle throughout the country. At its peak, right after World War II, they were almost 700,000 Jews living in Argentina. It was then that formal missionary outreach to the Jewish people began when the Hebrew Christian alliance of America sent its first missionary, Arthur Glass, to Buenos Aires. Then in 1932 the first Hebrew Christian Church was formally organized. Since then Jewish missions began to expand and by the 1970s there were five missionary organizations working among Jewish people. Today the work continues through Jewish missionary organizations, messianic Jewish Congregations and the evangelistic endeavors of evangelical churches. Although the number of Jewish people in Argentina has decreased, the importance and influence of the Jewish community in Argentina has not diminished. I have been in touch and visited most congregations in Buenos Aires, where the largest number



of Jewish people live.

Argentina has been in the news recently due to the ongoing investigation of a terrorist attack that occurred in July 18, 1994, when a terrorist group linked with Hezbollah and Iran blew up the headquarters of the Association of Argentine Jewish Organizations (AMIA). This attack was the largest terrorist attack in Argentine history and the largest against any Jewish organization since World War II. With the dead toll

reaching almost 100 people and 350 injured, it left an open wound in the relationship between Argentina and the State of Israel. Although the attack was investigated, nobody was brought to trial. Recently the Argentine Congress appointed a special investigator, Alberto Nisman, a prominent judge, who after conducting an exhaustive investigation came to the conclusion that the attack was the work of Hezbollah with the support of Iran. Then the investigation took a tragic turn when Nisman, the special prosecutor, who was Jewish, was murdered the day before he was to present his report to Congress. Nevertheless, the Argentine press was informed beforehand of some of the findings, and what the special prosecutor was to inform Congress in a 680 page report was that although the Argentine President, Mrs. Christina Fernandez de Kichner, and the Foreign Minister, Marcelo Timmerman, a Reform Jew, knew the names and affiliation of the terrorists, they decided to cover it up in order to obtain a lucrative economic agreement with Iran. Because such a cover-up is punishable by law, the special prosecutor called for the indictment of both the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. With the murder of the special prosecutor, the political and social situation in Argentina erupted into turmoil. Those who defended the populist president instigated anti-Semitic attacks, while Congress and the judicial decided to deal with the severity of the charges. Argentina is a major tourist attraction for Israelis, and last February a hotel in a skiing resort that had dozens of Israeli guests was torched and the guests physically attacked. Simultaneously they began to appear signs in many hotels stating "NO ISRAELIS ARE WELCOME," although such a thing is illegal. Anti-Semitism is on the rise, and many Argentine Jews are seriously considering moving to Israel.

Evangelical churches are openly supporting the Jewish community, and the Argentine Pope, Francis I, received in the Vatican a delegation representing the Argentine Jewish community and he expressed his heartfelt support towards the Argentine Jewish.

Today there are about 26 messianic Jewish congregations throughout Argentina, the largest of them led by Pastor Jorge Goldstein. I meet with Jorge Goldstein regularly, and although he has taken a sabbatical for health reasons, the work of his congregation is being carried out by 12 Associate pastors, six of them in Buenos Aires, and six in other parts of the country. Jewish evangelism in Argentina received a boost several years ago with major campaigns carried out by Jonathan Bernis, director of Jewish Voice Ministries. Today, Pastor Goldstein continues to work in cooperation with Jewish Voice Ministries. They had similar campaigns in Montevideo, Uruguay, and as a result three congregations were started.

Chosen People Ministries continues to reach out through its messianic centers in Buenos Aires. Few months ago one of the two messianic centers where Chosen People Ministries carries out its missionary work, was taken over by squatters at a time when the property was to undergo remodeling. Fortunately the property has been recently returned to Chosen People Ministries after the police evicted 12 families that had illegally taken over the property. A novel way in which Chosen People Ministries is reaching out is by hosting Israeli backpackers. Most likely, after major repairs to one of the centers are completed, it will be used to host Israeli youth visiting Argentina. The work of Chosen People Ministries in Argentina is carried out in cooperation with the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention of the United States. Rick and Christine Kunz are in charge of leading the work of Chosen People Ministries in Argentina. Regrettably because of serious health problems in their family, the other missionary couple, Randy and

Sandy Whittall had to return to the United States. Chosen People Ministry is looking for a national director to continue and expand the work in Argentina.

I am in touch with several ministries working in Brazil among the Jewish community. Brazil is home to 250,000 Jews, most of who live in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Nevertheless, there is apprehension from the evangelical community towards Jewish missions due to the fact that many who claim to be Jewish have embarked in “Judaizing” the churches thus creating misunderstanding and confusion. Brazil has over 30 million evangelicals, most of whom have a positive attitude towards Israel. It is noteworthy that the Universal Church—which has over 20 million members worldwide and 8 million in Brazil where is based—, has recently inaugurated the new Temple of Solomon in São Paulo. This enormous edifice covers two city blocks and is a replica but twice the size of the biblical Temple of Solomon. At the opening ceremony they had as special guests the President of Brazil and the Ambassador of Israel. In spite of the expressed love for Israel, very few of these mega-churches seem to be interested in reaching out with the gospel to their own Jewish people. I've been in touch with several organizations that are involved in Jewish evangelism throughout Brazil, and God



willing I will visit Brazil and the coming months where I have been invited to speak in several churches and messianic Jewish congregations.

Our Latin American ministry has expanded to reaching out the Spanish-speaking messianic congregations and churches in the United States. In November of 2014 we had the first conference in Miami, Florida, home to 75,000 Spanish-speaking Jews, to promote

Jewish evangelism among churches. The theme of this conference was "Evangelizing the Jewish People in the Last Days." A similar conference was held in New York City this March to promote Jewish evangelism among the churches.

Over the past 10 years thousands of Spanish-speaking Jews have immigrated to Israel, and today they are 16 Spanish-speaking messianic Jewish congregations in Israel. The largest number of Spanish-speaking Jews in Israel comes from Argentina; nevertheless, there are Spanish-speaking Jewish people in Israel from almost every Latin American country. I just finished the first Spanish outreach in the city of Beersheba, with meetings also in Ashdod and Ashkelon. I'm committed to assisting these recently established Spanish-speaking messianic Jewish congregations in Israel in their evangelistic efforts.

The work of the LCJE continues to be accomplished by maintaining contact with existing Jewish ministries, promoting Jewish evangelism, and encouraging Jewish believers in their effort to reach others with the Gospel.

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