

Expanding the

The newsletter of Wes and Maria Smith

Prayer Needs and Praises

- Pray for our seminary graduates that God would use them and give them His strength and wisdom.
- Pray for SEMCA as we work to develop a board. This is critical to our future success
- Pray for the ministry of Nueva Esperanza as they work to plant a church in the sugar cane village of Esperanza.
- Las Palmas needs an English teacher in January.

DR VISION



September, 2018

Inaugural Graduation for SEMCA

On August 26 our first three graduates of Central Caribbean Evangelical Seminary (SEMCA), completed their program and graduated with honors.

Three years ago Pastor Miguel taught Theology I as our first class in our new seminary. We started with 10 students. The next semester we expanded from just the one class to three classes. The

stress that this imposed upon our students was significant. SEMCA was designed to accommodate those who had jobs and families and could not attend classes during the day. We decided, however, that we wanted to offer traditional classes with a teacher, not a video program or an online classroom. We wanted our students to have the advantage of a live teacher with all the classroom interaction that it offered.

However, our students quickly learned what it meant to study on a college level and they STRUGGLED. First, our students were not prepared for the level of work that was expected of them. It should be noted that the educational system here in the DR is not what you have in the States. Most classwork is based solely upon memorization and very little analysis is ever done. Also, the amount of education that our students had received varied greatly. This problem is further complicated by the fact that several of our students are from Haiti, and Spanish is not even their primary language, so spelling and grammar is “off the wall.” We quickly discovered the need to add a class on writing and grammar to help our students with their required classwork.

The second major issue was that all of our students had jobs and worked till 6:00 or 7:00 each day. Trying to plan a schedule that would work for them was not easy. We had worked hard in developing a curriculum that was thorough without being excessive. We had seen plenty of Bible Institutes give men diplomas who were NOT prepared for the task of pastoring a church. We were determined not to make that mistake. We designed a degree entitled, “Professor of Theology.” The degree composed 10 classes in Biblical studies, 11 classes in ministry, and “Writing and Grammar”. Finally, they had to complete a practicum component in which they were involved in ministry in one way or another, thereby gaining practical experience. By taking three courses each semester (including 2 each summer) a student could graduate in 3 years.

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Students began the semester with a modular class which was held every night of the week from 6:00 - 9:30. Then on Saturday they came to class from 8:30 am through 3:00 pm. Normal classes began the following week on Tuesday and Friday nights from 7:00 - 9:30 pm for fourteen weeks.

The stress on our students was significant. Most came directly from work to class which meant that they did not arrive home till around 10:00 at night. Family pressures, financial pressures (most make only about \$500-\$600 per month), and academic pressures built up to the point that I was concerned for a number of them. In fact, one of our students even developed a nervous condition in which he lost the use of his one arm for about two weeks!!!

However, they persevered, and we could not be more proud. On Sunday, August 26 three of the students who began in that first class graduated. The other seminary students came to support them. A missions team of twenty people from North Point Baptist Church from Carrollton, GA came to be a part of that event. North Point prepared a reception for the family and friends of the graduates and gave each graduate a Chromebook. It was an incredible night.

Our Graduates

Carlos Rijo - Carlos will soon be taking the role of Associate Pastor at our main church in San Pedro where he has served as a deacon. He has a weekly one-hour radio broadcast on a local radio station in which he teaches from God’s Word.

Odalis Acosta - Odalis has worked with me over the past year in outreach endeavors in the sugar cane village of Esperanza. Our work there was called Nueva Esperanza (New Hope). She will take over as the director of these outreach ministries.

Edmill Robles - Edmill is working with another one of our SEMCA students, Fanfan, to plant a church in Esperanza — “New Hope Baptist Church.” Edmill and Fanfan, with the help of Odalis, have been meeting with a team of workers weekly, visiting families regularly, and preparing for their first service which will begin very soon

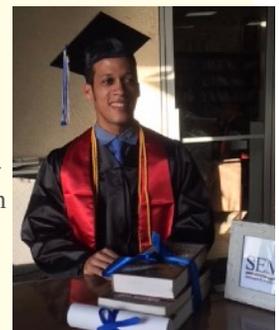
Maria and I are overwhelmed with the blessing of God upon us and our ministries. Thank you so much to all who have prayed for us, given to help us, and come to visit us on the field. Please continue to pray for the work of SEMCA, Nueva Esperanza, and our Christian school Las Palmas.



Odalis Acosta



Carlos Rijo



Edmill Robles