

## COSTA RICA VISIT REPORT

### THE MCCA'S COSTA RICA CIRCUIT

#### Revival!



Rev. Merove Madet, right, and Mrs. Madet

The reports I had heard about the state of the Methodist Church in the Limon circuit in Costa Rica had been fairly discouraging. The last member of MCB who had visited the circuit in Costa Rica had reported that none of the churches there were growing. There were no young people in the churches and very little community engagement.

Praise God- things have changed! The arrival of a new minister, Rev. Merove Madet, a Haitian Methodist, has signalled a turnaround of the circuit. His hard work in reaching out to the 5 church communities in Limon province is paying off. As I visited these churches, I heard testimonies of the goodness of God, of how God was causing more people to come to church and of how young people were coming back to the main church in the town of Limon (the church has grown from 70 to 150 people since June last year!). The Haiti District is the only growing District in the Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas, so I was delighted to discover that God is using a Haitian to grow the circuit.

#### A testimony of growth



Meet Dina. Dina is a member of the Methodist Church in a town in Limon province called Siquirres. Dina and her husband had been the only members of the church for a good number of years. They faithfully maintained the church during this time, and faithfully opened the church for Sunday service, even though they were the only members, until Rev. Merove became the circuit minister. Rev. Merove started visiting the community, introducing himself and telling those he visited about God and about the church. He opened a Thursday night service, and 8-10 people came on the first night! How many of us could say that we would faithfully stay put in the church where God has told us to

When:

MCCA: 15-17 July 2019

UBL: 17-21 July 2019

Where: Costa Rica

Who: Costa Rica Circuit of the MCCA and the *Universidad Biblica Latinoamericana* (the Latin American Biblical Institute)

Purpose:

Costa Rica Circuit

1. First partnership visit to the circuit
2. Learn more about the mission context of the church in Costa Rica

UBL

1. Learn more about UBL and the courses they offer to support LA/Caribbean Methodist students,
2. Explore how partnerships could be deepened between our theological institutions and UBL

## A province full of potential, but full of underinvestment



Vast banana plantations in Limon province

The Limon province is an important port town of Costa Rica, yet it is one of the most neglected provinces in the country. The state does not invest in its infrastructure or people, and new business tax laws and VAT are putting many small enterprises out of business. Many people in Limon leave to find work in San José, the country's capital. In fact, Revd Merove has planted the first MCCA Methodist congregation in San José, gathering the Methodist members who left Limon for the capital. He is very excited about this new mission and there are currently about 50 people gathering as a Methodist church.

## UNIVERSIDAD BIBLICA LATINOAMERICANA

The Latin American Biblical University (*UBL*) has a long history of providing theological education in the region as an ecumenical theological institute. Its students are from many denominations, from Pentecostal to Methodist, Lutheran to Presbyterian and many others. This diversity of students and lecturers enriches the theological debate within the institute, and students I spoke to testified of how studying at the *UBL* with such a variety of denominations had enriched their learning experience.

## SUPPORTING OUR METHODIST PARTNER CHURCH IN PERU

UBL is working with the Methodist Church in Peru, providing a distance learning masters in theology, in conjunction with the Biblical Seminary in South America. I spoke to the students in Peru via skype, they testified how the teaching from UBL had provided them with the theological contextual tools needed to support their diverse communities. They also testified to how their studies had changed them personally, particularly in regards to gender roles. One indigenous Methodist minister says that he now considers that he and his wife to be equal partners in raising their children and managing their household. This is a huge leap from the traditional patriarchal view of the role of women in many indigenous communities. He is now teaching his congregation a different Biblical perspective on the role of women to the one proliferated by some churches. The female ministers said that they had grown in confidence in their calling and had won the respect of their communities thanks to their theological academic studies. This is crucial, given the discrimination that indigenous women face. Having academic studies elevates the social status of ministers and gives their ministry more credibility, helping them be more effective in their pastoral care for their churches and communities.

## GREEN THEOLOGY

One of *UBL*'s current priorities is to equip churches and Christians to fight for climate justice. In 2017 *UBL* joined the Green Seminary Initiative, a US based initiative that seeks to help seminaries protect the environment from a faith perspective. The Green Seminary initiative certifies the green credentials of theological institutions on the basis of how care for the environment is taught academically but also the extent to which it is promoted in community life. *UBL* is an example to other seminaries: it has a large urban garden, has installed solar panels and water butts, is a paper free university, a single use plastic free zone, hosts regular workshops on climate change, and publishes journals on the environmental crisis and climate justice from a theological perspective. There is much to learn from *UBL* in this aspect!

## WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



Right to left: Elisabeth Cook: chancellor; Pastor Rosemary: one of the first students to do the course; Nidia Fonseca: programme tutor; Sandra Lopez

Chauvinism is alive and well in the region, despite the recent women's empowerment movements, protests in several countries and laws strengthened to protect women from domestic violence. Even in a safe and developed Central American country such as Costa Rica, domestic violence against women continues to be high, as does income inequality and gender disparity. *UBL* plays its part in supporting women by offering a women's theology and empowerment course, a course designed by *UBL* for women who have never studied before. Many of the women had to learn to read and write and voice their opinions in front of a class. This empowerment course has resulted in local Christian women growing in their relationship with God, growing in their self-confidence, and in many testimonies that were shared with me, a complete transformation of the dynamics of their households and families. These women were no longer submissive and subservient, but empowered and working as partners with their husbands. *UBL* has also been working with husbands and men in areas of masculinity. I heard a testimony of how two husbands who used to be violent against their wives completely changed their ways after agreeing to work with *UBL*. *UBL* accompanied the families with psychologists and counsellors, and they have seen a complete transformation. Praise be to God!



## WEEKEND THEOLOGY COURSES



UBL offers a basic theology course on Saturdays, open to everyone. I got a chance to meet some students on a Saturday- they came from all backgrounds and were of all ages and denominations. Some were retired yet had a hunger to know the Bible more. Some came from very conservative Christian backgrounds and had found a different God presented to them-a living and gracious one rather than a condemning, vengeful God. A God who offers an abundant life and freedom from all kinds of stigma. *UBL* and students taking the course say that they see this course as a way of helping them balance some of the more fundamentalist ways of thinking about theology. Many testified that they felt the course had helped them see Jesus through a different lens and that it was an enriching experience to study with those of different denominations.

### Key people and websites

- MCCA  
Revd Madet Merove, Circuit minister

- UBL: <http://ubl.ac.cr/>  
Elisabeth Cook, Chancellor

Green Seminary Initiative: <https://www.greenseminaries.org/#>

### Follow up actions/outcomes

MCCA: Report on visit to the MCCA Connexional office

*UBL*: send a copy of Hope in God's future and safeguarding policies.