

Terrorism in U.S. brings solidarity, questions and prayers in Latin America

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LAM News Service

Miami, FL (LAMNS)—Missionaries from México to Argentina are reporting a strong response as well as concern in response to the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C.

“The terrorist attacks in the USA have deeply affected the people in México,” reports LAM missionary Sue Leak who serves in Morelia. “They are extremely concerned, frightened, and trying to make sense of it all.”

From Buenos Aires, Argentina, LAM missionary Ralph Tone says that there has been genuine sympathy for the victims, but he says, those who want the United States to reassess its foreign policy have expressed some anti-U.S. sentiment.

“But this philosophical debate has pretty much taken back seat to the shock, surprise and concern about terrorist activity here in Argentina,” Tone says. He reminds that, “This country was rocked by two terrorist bombs against the large Jewish population here (in the early 1990s). Argentina also has the largest Muslim population in South America.”

In Buenos Aires, Tone says, “Churches are praying, and coincidentally, a huge gathering of evangelicals (the largest in Argentine history--estimates as high as 400,000) happened just a couple of days after the attack and prayers were offered for the States, and world peace.”

Meanwhile, many missionaries report genuine sympathy for the United States in the wake of the attacks that left more than 6,000 dead or missing.

LAM missionary Campbell Horn, who directs a Christian camp in Costa Rica, says that “after the bombing people came up to us at the local truck stop where we had stopped for lunch to apologize and say how sad they were for us and our country. I had to tell them that I was Canadian but that I too felt the way they did.”

Sheila Dudney, an LAM missionary in Costa Rica, says that such expressions of sympathy toward North Americans have had “a unifying effect on the Gringos and the Costa Ricans.”

“On the Sunday following the attacks, during the worship service, the pastors of our church, Iglesia Bíblica Nazareth, asked all Americans present (including LAM missionaries and language students) to come forward and the church as a body prayed for us” reports LAM missionary Tim Sanders from Costa Rica.

“Senior pastor Estuardo Ochoa, former rector of ESEPA seminary and one of the most highly regarded pastors in Costa Rica, wore a black New York Yankees baseball cap

from the pulpit during the entire sermon as he preached on the life of Jesus from the gospel of John,” Sanders recalls.

LAM missionary Jean Spahr reports from Colombia that she was unaware of her emotions until she broke down weeping when she saw the American flag on the front door of her church. The pastor explained that the flag display was to demonstrate that they were standing with the U.S. in the tragedy.

From Seville, Spain, LAM missionary Carolyn Kerr reports, “Spain has been affected deeply by Basque terrorism for years, and readily sympathizes. They also recognize that this attack has been an attack not just on the U.S. but on democracies all over the world.”

Missionaries from Latin America working among Muslims, “tell of unprecedented responsiveness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the “closed” countries where they work and of growing fears and prejudices directed toward Arabs and Muslims in the workers’ home countries,” reports LAM missionary Tim Halls who works with an agency sending Latin Americans to work in Muslim regions. “They are concerned that the coming conflicts not be turned into imagined conflict between Christians and Islam. They are concerned for national believers in their countries of service. Other concerns include the economic impact on the sending countries in Latin America and their ability to support their missionaries.”

“There is much prayer oriented toward seeing more workers from Latin America sent to serve people in the Muslim World and sharing the testimony of Jesus Christ,” Tim reports.

As in the United States, pastors throughout Latin America have addressed the theme of violence and fear in their sermons. “Using the text from Matthew 24, our pastor talked about how these things NEED to happen,” reports Sue Leak. “He said that is in God's plan. He said that we need to recognize that no matter how well the economy is or isn't, God wants more than anything else for us to have Him as our priority and He will use whatever necessary to help us see our need for Him.”

In Costa Rica, LAM missionary Craig Rice reports that, “In the worship service at Vineyard Christian Fellowship, the pastor asked that the expatriates present come forward for prayer. Later that day, we attended the Escazú Christian Fellowship (an English-language congregation), at a service in which some of those in attendance work at the United States Embassy. This service focused a great deal of its time on prayer, on being aware of how important it is that we attempt to avoid the sin of hate at this time.”

LAM missionary Laura Vivanco from Mexico reports that the churches there have maintained an emphasis on prayer, praying that the outcome of these tragic events would be a spiritual revival in the United States.

The pastor of the English-language Capital City Baptist Church in Mexico City preached on the responsibility of all people to pray for their enemies, especially for the terrorists,

reports Donna Waguespack, an LAM missionary there. “The service was a turning point for many of us,” she says. “It was comforting to be together and to remind ourselves through the pastor’s words that God is in control.”

In response to the events, many Christian organizations are speaking out. Typical is the Latin American Evangelical Confraternity (CONELA) says LAM missionary Catharine Padilla from Buenos Aires. In a message to President George W. Bush, CONELA said, “we join in solidarity with the people of North America in this lamentable moment of pain and irreplaceable loss. We pray to our all-powerful God for help and counsel to those families in pain.” CONELA also asked President Bush to seek a peaceful solution to the situation and said that it “rejects the use of violence to resolve differences.”

The Miami Herald reports that polls conducted throughout Latin America show that, in spite of strong U.S. support from the region’s governments, up to 80 percent of the general population is against a military response to the terrorist acts and a similar number is opposed to the involvement of Latin American troops in any military action.

The events have opened doors of opportunity for ministry. LAM theologian John Stam explains, “I have been asked to speak on the subject everywhere I go, and to present some round tables. People are stunned, with deep pain but also fear and confusion.”

“The churches have responded with solidarity with us as missionaries and with a lot of prayer,” reports LAM missionary Carolyn Kerr from Spain. “There have been all-night prayer meetings in some churches, motivated not so much by fear as by the realization that this is really a critical time in world history and the Lord has commanded us to pray for kings and all those in authority. For the first time in a long while I have felt like prayers have gone global instead of being centered on just their own lives and families. In this sense, the crisis has been good.”

Alan Mullins, an LAM missionary who serves in Brazil, reports that for several days after the attack, missionaries in the southern part of the country were asked to remain at home. “The churches have been holding prayer meetings and special services in most of the cities of Brazil to pray for the USA and what is to come.”

In México, Sue Leak says “the churches have set up times of fasting and vigils of prayer. They are seeking God’s face for the future as well as praying that many will turn to the Lord in this time of crisis.”

The terrorist acts have also motivated her personal ministry. “I feel a true sense of urgency to share the Lord with everyone that I can,” she says.

Latin America Mission works in partnership with churches and Christian agencies throughout Latin America and supports missionaries and projects in many Latin countries as well as in Spain. LAM is seeking to place new missionaries throughout the region. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami, FL 33152, by e-mail at info@lam.org, or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission’s web site

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Terrorism in U.S. brings solidarity, questions and prayers in Latin America, *LAM News Service*, Sept 26, 2001