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El Paso
Baptist
Mission

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The El Paso Baptist Publications Mission has a most colorful history. We who make up the Mission stand in the lengthening shadows of some of God's most courageous and tenacious servants.

It is impossible to study the history of the Mission without studying the beginnings and history of the Baptist Spanish Publishing House. Those who serve in that institution will receive a thorough orientation as to its history. The purpose of this historical statement is to briefly relate that of the Mission.

Those missionaries who make up the EPBPM, along with those who have retired, share one thing in common - they have been called of God. And, in one way or another have made their way to El Paso to participate in the ministry of the printed page.

Mr. & Mrs. J. E. Davis, generally thought of as the founding fathers of the BSPH, were the first missionaries of this Mission although they served all their lives as a part of the Mexican Baptist Mission.

After being appointed on July 5, 1904, the Davis family arrived in Toluca, Mexico on Dec. 4 of that year. With the "press fund" of \$ 455.00 (money collected for this purpose prior to leaving the USA) he set up a press and a paper cutter in the kitchen of their home. Soon tracts and other small items were being produced. The seeds had been sewn that would one day become both the BSPH and the EPBPM. The first large job was produced in the Spring of 1905 when Davis was asked to print El Expositor Bíblico and Nuestros Niños both of which were edited by J. G. Chastain.

Soon after the Davis family moved to the city of Leon. They left Toluca on Christmas day of 1905 and arrived at their new home on the 27th. The 'printing shop' was set up in two rooms of their home and on Jan. 12, 1906 the first piece of work was rolling off the press.

The first book to come off the press of the Publishing House was a Spanish translation of Immersion, the Act of Christian Baptism by J. T. Christian. The second was a Spanish edition of A Short History of Baptists by H. C. Vedder. This was the beginning of what has become a steady flow of sound doctrinal literature that has continued to the present.

With the outbreak of violence in Mexico on November 10, 1910 the future of this young ministry hung in the balance. The fires of revolution spread rapidly and all but stopped the flow of literature. The Davis family moved to Mexico City and soon he felt that he had to remain there, leaving someone else in charge of the work in Leon.

In spite of the pressures of the revolution Davis continued to write the El Expositor Bíblico, sending it to Leon to be printed. He tried to go back to Leon and continue the work, totally cut off from his family. There was a time when he heard from them only once in eight months. He finally suspended the work in Leon and set up a press in Mexico City. That proved to be short lived. On May 10, 1916 the United States State Department urged all the remaining North Americans to leave Mexico as soon as possible. Davis and his family left by train to Vera Cruz on June 26, 1916, leaving most of their possessions behind. There they boarded a refugee ship and arrived in Tampa, Florida, with about 650 other folks, on July 8, 1916. Thus the struggle to keep the Publishing House in Mexico ended. Though Davis thought that the move to the United States would be temporary, it has never returned.

Three places were considered as possible sites for the relocation of the publications ministry: New Orleans, El Paso and Barcelona, Spain. El Paso was favored because Davis felt it would be easy to move from there back into Mexico at the close of the revolution. The Mexican Mission voted in June, 1917 that the Publishing House be located permanently in El Paso and that the equipment be brought from Mexico as needed. The question came up once again as to a permanent location in June, 1921. The Mexican Mission passed a resolution urging the FMB to decide on a permanent location for the publications ministry.

The publishing ministry moved from one cramped quarters in El Paso to another in the early years. Davis purchased a small print shop that was operating in rented quarters and had the type sent from Mexico City where it had been stored. The first two buildings occupied in El Paso were on Campbell Street. Later, in 1925, a small plant on Myrtle Avenue was purchased from the First Baptist Church of El Paso and the Publishing House had a new home at a cost of \$ 40,000.00.

The purchase of a property outside the city limits of El Paso in 1937 was a giant step for the publishing ministry. The building had been constructed by the Home Mission Board to be a tubercular sanatorium. The sanatorium had come to a halt due to the economic pressures of the great depression. The building was to be shared by the Publishing House and the Mexican Baptist Seminary which had been moved from Saltillo, Mexico to San Antonio because of anti-religious laws passed in Mexico. The new facility was located about eight miles from the city limits on the foothills of the majestic Mt. Franklin. Later, in 1953, the area was annexed into the city.

In 1938, although Davis had reached the age of retirement, he asked the FMB to allow him to continue to work as long as his health would permit. Who could possibly replace him and continue the ministry of the printed page in Spanish that had become so very important in the over all ministry of so many churches? Providentially, it seems, Frank and Pauline Patterson were appointed in February, 1939. With a background in printing they finished language study in December, 1940 and arrived in El Paso in January, 1941.

From the general editorial work and being the business manager, Frank Patterson became the director of the Publishing House in April, 1943, upon the retirement of the Davis family.

The Mexican Baptist Seminary moved to Torreon, Mexico in 1946, thus allowing the Publishing House to expand into the needed facilities, and its ministry continued to grow. Orville Reed said, "without doubt the work of the Publishing House has influenced Baptist missionary work in all the Spanish speaking world more than any other single institution". Dr. W. L. Howse, of the Sunday School Board, after making a trip through Latin America agreed. He was impressed by the number of people who became Baptists as a result of reading the literature published by the Publishing House.

In January, 1950, the Publishing House was given new status. They would no longer be a part of the Mexican Mission. The budget of the publications ministry was becoming very heavy for the Mexican Mission. There was a need to relate to all the countries on the same basis. These were among the chief reasons for which on January 9, 1950 The Baptist Publishing House Mission was formed. The missionaries that made up the new organization were the Pattersons, the James W. McGavocks, the Hiram F. Duffers and Margaret McGavock. Frank Patterson was elected to serve as president and Miss McGavock was the secretary.

This small group received reinforcements through the years as the needs for more literature throughout Latin America grew and as God called others into the ministry of the printed page.

For many years the Mission carried on the administration of the Publishing House. As the needs appeared the organization of the Publishing House expanded to more efficiently carry out the ministry. When the FMB divided Latin America into two distinct areas of work the Publishing House became a part of one geographical area. However, its ministry continued to be to all of the Spanish speaking world. Now, with all the changes, it became more evident that the publications ministry needed a broader administration than just that of the local Mission.

In 1973 the El Paso Publishing House Mission adopted the Program Base Design as a planning tool and the work of long range planning was continued. In January, 1975, when the final draft of the Program Base Design was approved for the Baptist Spanish Publishing House, a decision was made to have a separate Program Base Design for the Mission. That came into being in May of the same year.

In the long range planning the Mission recommended to the FMB that the composition of the Board of Trustees for the publishing house be international in its representation. That plan was accepted by the board in Dec., 1974 and the decision became effective in July, 1975. Thus the Mission passed to this international board the administration of the Baptist Spanish Publishing House.

The Mission continued to work with the Baptist Spanish Publishing House as a fraternal organization but without the responsibility of administration. Each missionary became responsible to the Publishing House in the area of his/her assigned responsibilities. That left the Mission responsible for missionary housing, missionary transportation, fellowship, spiritual growth, etc., for its own and was relieved of the greater work it had done through the years of directing the work of an institution that had grown from such a small beginning to become an organization that served all the Spanish speaking world.

The Publishing House began printing literature in English in 1976, entitled Caribbean Bible Lessons on a contract basis. In 1980 the FMB requested that the Publishing House provide space in order that the editorial work for those lessons also be done in El Paso. With the arrival of missionaries related to this new ministry, but not officially related to the Baptist Spanish Publishing House, the Mission was enlarged. This prompted several changes for the Mission including its name. In the updating of the Program Base Design for the years 1981 - 1985 the name of the Mission became The El Paso Baptist Publications Mission.

The ministry of the printed page has outlived revolutions, economic depressions, world wars and geographical divisions of Latin America by the Foreign Mission Board. From the kitchen of the Davis family to the adequate facilities in El Paso, growth has come due to the efforts of God's missionaries who knew that God had called them, envisioned the importance of the printed page and had the courage to carry on the work in spite of the obstacles. Those who make up the EPBPM will always stand, and misinister, in the shadow of those great people.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The El Paso Baptist Publications Mission members are expected to work in accordance to the biblical foundations for missions in the Program Base Design of their corresponding publications entity and shall submit themselves to The Baptist Faith and Message adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, May 9, 1963, and any subsequent doctrinal statements of the Southern Baptist Convention, whenever they are approved.

RELATION OF THE PUBLISHING MINISTRY TO MISSIONS

Our concern is to firmly believe the biblical bases for the publishing ministry. Since the printing press had not been discovered when the Bible was written, few Scriptures can be found for justifying directly a ministry of printing and publishing. "Scripture" itself means a writing (graphae - 2 Pet. 3:16) or what is written (grammata - 2 Tim. 3:15). The Scriptures were duplicated by professional copyists or scribes. To have books (biblia - writing on sections of papyrus rolled into scrolls) and parchments (membrana - writing material made from animal skins) to read was important to Paul during his Roman imprisonment (2 Tim. 4:15). He urged Timothy to give attention to reading (1 Tim. 4:13). A few other Scriptures could be collected to show that the written word was significant to the early Christians, but the primary thrust of our concern is in another direction.

Since our publishing entities were established as a missionary enterprise and their continuing work supports the spread of the gospel, there is justification in focusing on the biblical foundations of missions.

Literature is related to all areas of mission work, and to a large degree, the content of materials published will determine the pattern and direction of missionary work. A publishing entity dedicated to missionary outreach shares in the success or failure of that outreach. Since the content of the materials published is so influential on the success of the missionary enterprise, our respective publishing entity must look to authoritative sources for missionary strategy and guidance in its work. The Bible is the authoritative source of missions; therefore, what the Bible has to say about missions is relevant to the supportive missionary ministry of publishing. The ministry of the Baptist Spanish Publishing House and of Caribbean Christian Publications is concerned with the total scope of missions: evangelizing the lost, providing materials for worship, providing materials for teaching and training Christians.

Editorial work is an important area of missionary work because it makes doctrines and teachings permanent and multiplies the ministry of the Christian writer. It is supportive to every area of missionary work.