
Growth Through Evangelism

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THE SETTING

At about mid-point on the long desert coast of Peru lies Lima, the City of the Kings. This sprawling metropolis dominates the political, economical, industrial and social life of the third largest republic on the South American continent. To its ever expanding environs arrive close to a thousand immigrants per day.

This massive influx of humanity drains the countryside of its life-blood and concentrates a third of the nation's population into a city approaching the six million mark. The beacon that draws them is the hope for a better economic life. However, limited success is available only to a select few who have the required skill and good fortune to survive in what are bleak financial times for the nation. Those who do not make it sink even deeper into the economic morass. They eventually become a faceless part of the statistics that classify 72% of Lima's population as poor. Nevertheless, if offered the chance to return to their place of origin, few would accept. Over the decades enough fortunes have been made, enough advances have been accomplished, to continue to give hope to those who still flock to Lima.

Along with this chaotic demographic expansion has been the accompanying growth of an increasingly vocal and

powerful middle class. According to Peruvian standards, 20% of Lima's population is middle class. And it is this same 20% that produces over 40% of the GNP. Both economically and politically they represent the most progressive element in Peruvian society. They are also the reaping ground for an abundant harvest of souls. In the last decade, this social class has been the well-spring of unparalleled church growth in Peru. What follows is a story that is having worldwide implications for the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) as well as for other mission boards and national churches. One other contribution from this awakening to the evangelical world is a new acronym: LED or *Lima al Encuentro con Dios* (Lima Encounters God).

THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA

It was some twenty years ago that two men stepped out into the night air of Lima, knelt under the stars, and asked God for a harvest of souls in a city whose boundaries were being changed every day. One was a missionary with the C&MA; the other was a successful businessman operating in Peru. Both men eventually returned to North America, but before they did, a church had been planted that had a vision, a vision that was to propel the Peruvian C&MA into another era.

For almost fifty years, the C&MA had labored among the rural people of Peru. It was only in the 1950s that the Alliance felt free of past comity agreements to start a church in Lima. Organized in 1958 with 25 members, the church began

to show healthy signs of growth. A year later they were able to purchase an old mansion on one of Lima's major thoroughfares. With this foothold in one of the better middle class sections of the city, it seemed that the time was ripe to make an impact on that class of people.

In 1960, a strategy was devised that would involve the whole church in a 365-day effort to win souls and to disciple them. For twelve months, there was to be a two week campaign followed by two week sessions of Bible instructions for the new believer. When *Operation Evangelization* finished in 1961, the church had doubled its membership. It was most unfortunate that this methodology, although proven to be successful, was to be ignored for almost thirteen years.

In the meantime, the church continued to slowly grow and eventually peaked in the late 1960s at 180 members. In 1970, a missionary was asked to be the pastor. He accepted on condition that it be an interim position. Unknown to him or to the church, God's time for harvest in Lima had arrived.

The church, through a step of faith, had drawn up plans to restructure their old mansion so that it could seat up to 500. But before construction started, the American businessman previously mentioned had breakfast with the interim pastor. Remembering his prayer of years earlier, and burdened with the teeming masses of lost souls, he stated an opinion and posed a question: five hundred was inadequate; why not aim for a thousand?

This idea was not accepted by the

church at first. The main reason for hesitation was financial: how could they finance land and building for a structure necessary for one thousand people? But this is where God had already prepared the businessman to be available. With his money, expertise, and connections, more funds were raised. Thus, with start-up money available, the church began construction.

It was 1970 and LED—*Lima al Encuentro con Dios*—was taking shape. Though in the midst of construction, the church geared up for the event that was to change the shape of the evangelical community in Lima and all of Peru. The *Operation Evangelization* strategy was resurrected from its untimely burial of a decade earlier, missionary and Latin leadership were combined to plan a fifteen month campaign schedule, and the church was mobilized. In February of 1973, an Argentine pastor was called for the church and in November the evangelistic campaigns started. Ten years later, over 35,000 decisions would be recorded by the LED staff. This time around, with its new name, *Operation Evangelization* was not to be interred. It is alive and well in Lima and very feasibly LED could even become a paradigm for evangelizing your city.

THE CONCEPT

The following principles of LED are but the major ones. It must also be cautioned that there are numerous variations of these principles being experimented with even now within LED. Under certain conditions it may be appropriate to hold some of these principles lightly

while others are emphasized. Briefly, they are:

PRINCIPLE 1 *Growth Through Evangelism.* Evangelism became the center and *raison d'etre* for every program in the church. If Sunday School was not a place where one could hear about salvation through Jesus Christ, then it was re-structured so that that was possible. If the women's or men's group was not seeking the conversion of other men and women, then they were re-structured to accom-



In 1969, Fred and Marilyn Smith were appointed by the Christian and Missionary Alliance to Peru. Their ministry covered three areas, and the main assignment was church planting. During their last term, Fred taught in the Alliance Bible Institute in Lima while continuing his church planting ministries. He was responsible also for overseeing the production of TEE materials. In 1982, he received his Master's Degree in Missiology and is presently pursuing Doctoral studies at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is pastor of the Alliance Community Church in La Canada, California.

plish that task. Evangelism became, and remains, the heart of LED.

The major "proof" that this Principle is valid is that, after ten years of unparalleled church growth in Peru, every line on the statistical charts continues to rise. The principal churches have not peaked in their membership, in spite of overflowing sanctuaries and double services. To handle the overflow, extension churches have been founded. The church we have spoken of until now, the Lince Church, is in some way responsible for about 90% of the C&MA churches in Lima. And some of her daughter churches are already responsible for "granddaughter" churches.

PRINCIPLE 2 *Prayer Cells.* We are talking about a massive network of prayer cells developed in the local churches. They meet weekly to pray specifically for unsaved relatives and friends. We are talking about prayer meetings that start when the evangelistic service begins and end at the invitation—and then only because the prayer warriors are needed to handle the overflow at the altar. We are talking about all-night prayer meetings and fasts that claim a lost population for Jesus Christ. We are talking about a continual "blood, sweat, and tears" approach to intercession.

PRINCIPLE 3 *Leadership.* It is important that a leadership core be established that can inspire others to follow, cut through red tape, ignore obstacles (or else see obstacles as stepping stones), plan and administer the logistics of mass meet-

ings and work with others of the team since no one person can do all that is required. Without such leadership, the whole program will begin to deteriorate or careen out of control.

PRINCIPLE 4 *Evangelistic Campaigns.* To proclaim the Word of God to the people of Lima, LED mapped out an extended period (15 months) of two week campaigns followed by two weeks of Bible instruction for the new converts. With much planning and careful preparation, the best evangelists the Latin world had to offer were flown in. Travel expenses were provided by LED while living expenses and honoraria were covered by the churches involved. Exceptions were made to the latter when offerings fell below a certain standard, but as the program grew this became less and less a drain on LED funds. The evangelist was usually under a month-long contract and would preach every night (except Monday). After the campaign in one church was completed, he was used in another.

PRINCIPLE 5 *Bible Academy.* The new converts are not forgotten once they have made the decision to accept Christ. A vast network of follow-up is sent into motion. The centerpiece is the Bible Academy. It is here that the new converts learn about what they have just experienced and how this will affect their lives.

Each new convert is incorporated into a basic doctrines class which is from one to two weeks in duration. In cases where no campaign is to begin right after the completion of

the first class, there is usually a short break before the second course is instituted. And, when a campaign does follow a Bible Academy session, all classes are halted. Then a new class is started for the new converts while the original class returns for a more advanced course. Courses are added as needs arise, but usually there are from six to eight standard courses which lead to baptism and church membership.

Of all the Principles, this is the most flexible one. However, it is *never* to be neglected. Also, like everything else in LED, the Bible Academy is evangelistically oriented even while teaching doctrine. Many have discovered Christ as they attended classes with their newly converted friends or relatives.

PRINCIPLE 6 *Involvement.* The sustaining life of LED is involvement. The Mission, the National Church, and the local church all must become intimately involved in the program. If there is a weak link in any of these three, the success of the whole program will be seriously hampered.

The principle arena of involvement, however, has to be within the local church. Let me illustrate this by using the church I was involved in within LED. It was a church that had struggled for ten years with little signs of success. We (myself and four Bible Academy students) explained the Principles herein described and the way we would like to implement the program in their church. When I got to this Principle of Commitment, I stated, more or less, the following:

"Your part in this program is essential. We cannot do it without *your* help. *You* are Christians and God's Word calls *you* to be involved in his vineyard. We cannot do all that is required for us to reach El Agustino [the *barrio* where the church is located] for Christ by ourselves; we need *you*. *You* are the key to reaching this *barrio* for Christ. We have described the program; this is what *you* will have to do:

"1) Commit yourself to prayer.

"2) Commit yourself to attend all the services. Whenever the church doors are open, you need to be here if at all possible. We cannot expect the people of the community to attend if they know you are not attending. If the program is not important enough for you, it will not be considered important enough for them.

"3) Commit yourself to active witnessing to friends, neighbors, and relatives. *Bring* them to church, do not just invite them.

"4) Commit your pocketbook.

"Those of you not willing to make this type of commitment are welcome to stay, but please do not offer any advice or form obstacles for those willing to make the commitment."

The result was that thirty-five of the original members left! But the remaining fifteen made an impact on El Agustino that will last for eternity. When I left for furlough some sixteen months later, the thirty-five had yet to pass the fifty mark while the fifteen had more than 200 in attendance.

PRINCIPLE 7 *Visibility.* The LED churches are visible churches.

They are located where people can find them and they are located where people can see them. They are in highly populated areas and on heavily travelled streets. We might add that all LED churches are attractive churches which draw attention. This is one key argument for investing funds in buildings that will serve as "drawing cards". The Latin, like his North American counterpart, likes to go to church in a "nice" setting. The mentality that all Protestant churches in Latin America need to be small, out of the way, and in the poorer sections of town has proven in many cases to be a detriment to church growth.

TRANSFERRABLE PRINCIPLES

All the above is fine and good for Lima and its unique situation at this particular point in its history. But what about other cities in Peru? In Latin America? In Africa, Asia, Europe and North America? Can what is happening in Lima happen elsewhere? The answer, happily, is YES. They may have to change cultural clothing and be adapted to the local setting but these principles are transferrable.

A principal reason that we can say this is that they have *already been transferred*. In 1979, the C&MA had three churches in Quito, Ecuador. Now there are six plus a Bible School similar to the one in Lima (See IBA below). Some other sites where LED Principles are being implemented are (just within C&MA circles) Buenos Aires, Bogota, Cali, Santiago, and Santo Domingo. There is also a plan presently being examined to start such a program in Los Angeles, California.

The Alliance, after much financial struggle and investment of personnel, has discovered gold and is investing in it. Missionaries who are assigned to South American countries are sometimes routed through Lima on the way to their fields. Selected missionaries from other countries home for furlough, and nationals in North America for study have been sent to Lima to absorb what is happening. In March of 1983, the World Alliance Fellowship of the C&MA was held in Lima. One hundred sixty-two Alliance church leaders from the thirty-three nations came together for nine days of sessions, fellowship, and evangelistic campaigns held simultaneously in three of the Lima churches. The twenty-one District Superintendents of the U.S. C&MA also gathered for their annual meeting in Lima and benefited from the proceedings as well.

But the C&MA does not have a copyright on these Principles. The leaders of LED have shared with any who will listen. As a result, other denominations in and outside of Peru have taken note of the successes and are beginning to implement some of these Principles. It is recognized by all involved that success will not be equal in every case, but success can be assured by a wise and judicious implementation of these Principles within different cultures.

Readers are encouraged not to take this report as a guide where each Principle is slavishly followed. But this is a guide to Principles that *can* be implemented in your area and culture if properly adapted. Each local church needs to assess these Principles in light of its own

culture. For example: a concrete structure for one or two thousand people will be out of place even in some areas of Peru. There a structure of bamboo and grass is more appropriate. The Principle is to have a culturally attractive and adequate structure for a set amount of people that can make an impact on its own community. That may be a thousand people in a certain area of Lima or it may be only fifty people in a provincial village of a few hundred.

THE REALITY

LED, once it was fully operational, exceeded all expectations. There are so many high points that it is difficult to pick out even a few to emphasize. The following examples may not be the most important ones, but they are symptomatic of what happened and is happening.

Before the first campaign had even begun, over a hundred people had accepted the Lord. The cause: the Prayer Cells in the Lince Church that had been functioning a year before the evangelistic campaigns started.

In 1975, 36 members the Pueblo Libre Church, the first daughter church of Lince, were meeting in the hallway of a non-descript Lima home. But they had big visions. If their mother church had grown from 180 to over a thousand and occupied a tenth of a city block, then they could grow to over 2,000 and occupy a whole city block! Eight years later they have three-quarters of a city block, a church that seats 2,000 and is full on Sundays, plus being the site for IBA.

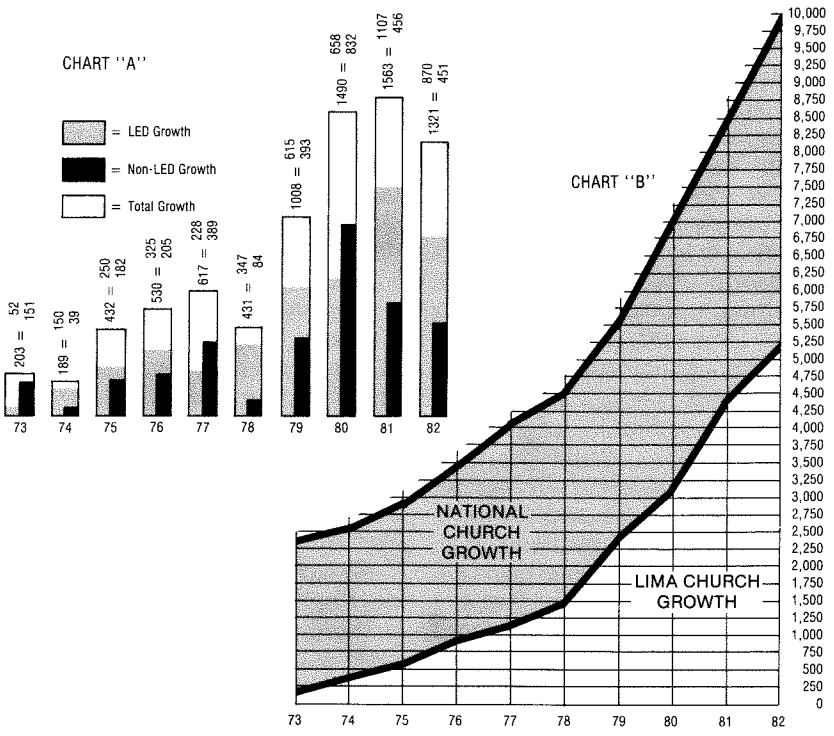
IBA (The Alliance Bible Institute)

is an uncovered jewel of LED. It was not in the original plans. It came about when over sixty newly converted young people dedicated themselves to carrying the gospel to their own people. They wanted to be trained, and they needed to be trained. Thus in 1976 forty-three enrolled in the first class. Presently IBA is fully self-supporting and even pays a small sum to the missionaries who teach. Today over 180 students are preparing for the ministry through IBA. Of the first two graduating classes, all but two are in full-time ministry. One graduate is now a missionary sponsored by the Peruvian Church to La Paz, Bolivia.

Objective 10,000 is a program developed by the National Church to triple its nationwide membership from 7,000 (1980) to 17,000 by 1985. No one doubts that it will be done.

SUEL (Seminar for Urban Evangelism and Leadership) is a program that brings in church leaders from across Latin America for a period of exposure to urban evangelism. This is accomplished through teaching LED Principles in class sessions and a nightly observance of these Principles in operation during the campaigns.

One more outstanding aspect that needs to be mentioned is the team concept. This perhaps could even be "Principle 8" as it has evolved into a key element of LED. The international team of Peruvians, North Americans (U.S. and Canada), Argentines and Germans has functioned so smoothly that few adjustments have been necessary. To some, this is a major miracle of LED, that so many



GROWTH THROUGH LED

highly visionary and motivated men and women could function as well as they do around a single table.

LED has proven that with God "all things are possible." The accompanying chart will give one a quick view of some of the progress and actuality of LED.

PROBLEM AREAS

With a program of such magnitude, problems are a foregone certainty. Some areas that LED has wrestled with are:

1) *Financial Problems.* Start-up money did not just drop out of the heavens. There was much sacrificial giving on the part of poor and

rich, national and international. There are still financial shortfalls and the program is constantly in danger of halting for a lack of funds.

One must give much prayer and consideration to the finances of such an effort before actually launching it. Many thousands of dollars were pledged and committed before LED turned its first spade of dirt or printed the first flyer. It took three years of financial effort and planning before the first campaign was held.

One major criticism concerning the success of LED is that it is dependent on foreign investment. Initially that was true, as much

sacrificial giving was done by God's people in one area to help God's people in another. However, there is a unique element to this infusion of foreign cash.

Some of the money received from outside sources had to be repaid (it was mostly re-invested in LED), but the rest was a gift. There was, however, a condition: that the "gift" portion be repaid to a revolving fund which would perpetuate the LED program. Any church that wants to receive LED funds (foreign or from the LED Revolving Fund) has to meet certain criteria of which one is called "the 20% payback". What this means is that the money received is a "loan" for property and/or building. The recipient church, after an initial grace period of six months, begins to make graduated payments that, after 25 months, equal 20% of the church's monthly income. And the payback commitment is to last *until the Lord returns!* Is it expected that the day will arrive when enough finances are generated that future "foreign" money will be unnecessary.

Added to this 20% is a 10% monthly payment to the National Church and another 5% to IBA. This then presents a real struggle for some of the LED churches as they adjust to operating on only 65% of their income. Consider also that two of the LED churches have eight pastors apiece while others have from one to three pastors on their staffs.

The key element here is the *commitment* of the local church to operate on only 65% of its budget. You take a church anywhere which will make evangelism its *raison d'être* and will invest 35% of its

budget in evangelism, and a harvest most likely will be reaped. God has proven he will honor such a commitment on the part of a local church. The church I was involved in started without a budget. In eight months, they had hired a full time pastor and later added other paid personnel. They also grew numerically as well as spiritually. God honors commitment. Do not let finances be the stumbling block that many people make it out to be.

2) *Initial Leadership Problems.* It is essential that such a crucial effort have the proper leadership. This potential problems area needs to be considered before the program even begins. The question needs to be asked, "If national leadership is not available, should it be imported?" The answer depends on what level of leadership one is referring to. In LED's case, it involved the international and local levels of leadership.

In Peru, to import a missionary as an administrator was no problem. The next step, however, was more delicate. A qualified pastor had to be found that could handle the scope of the program as well as the pressures and stresses involved in implementing it. The Alliance's educational process in Peru had not produced such a leader. As a result, the Lince Church went outside of Peru and called an Argentine pastor. This was to happen four more times before sufficient leadership was developed within the Peruvian church (*via* IBA) to fill the key posts.

In Peru's case, imported leadership caused few problems and was key to ushering LED through the critical first stages of its develop-

ment. But, by the same token, it must be stated that without some key Peruvian laymen, active from the beginning, it is doubtful that LED would be today what it is. Without key indigenous lay leaders, it is improbable that any amount of imported leadership would assure success.

The present LED team is heavily weighted in favor of the Peruvian, and will increasingly be so until it is completely in their hands. In the meantime, the relationship between Peruvian and foreigner within the LED leadership circle is excellent. I attended the session in which the National Church rejected unanimously the suggestion that there be a "written concord" between Church and Mission. Their reason: we are all brothers in Christ, equals, and the need for such a legal contract is an insult to that brotherhood. There have been problems, but the program and the level of unity continue to be very strong.

3) *Class Distinction.* There are many who would like to point a finger at LED and say that it is a middle class-centered program, and that it has catered to those who are above the level of the poor and oppressed. The first fact has some validity, but the latter one is definitely misstated.

It is true that LED had its genesis in a middle class church in a middle class section of Lima. It is true that LED is led by internationals and nationals from the middle class. It is true that LED is funded, in many cases, by middle class money. It is true that LED has raised up large middle class churches. But it is also true that LED has seen many of its

churches spontaneously spring up in many of the lower class *barrios* of Lima such as El Agustino, La Tablada, San Juan de Dios, and Comas. It is also true that a good percentage of those attending the Lince and Pueblo Libre churches are from the poorer classes of Lima's society. LED is reaching *every* social strata of Lima. Statistics or a visit to Lima would alleviate concern that LED is class biased.

A derived benefit from this phenomenon of the middle classes being converted is that God is using them as a financial base to extend the gospel from the confines of Lima to the Peruvian countryside and even into other countries. God is using many middle class converts to reach both ways on the social scale. They are persuading men and women of other classes to acknowledge that Jesus Christ died for sinners of *all* social levels.

LED is not a trouble-free program. LED is not the ultimate program. LED is just one of *many* methods God is using today to reach a lost world. It is taking place in the cities of Peru and Latin America mainly because these cities are "people magnets". It is a well-known fact that the impersonal life found in cities everywhere quickly breaks down the traditions of its inhabitants and they soon find themselves adrift in a sea of humanity without any anchors. LED is designed to provide anchors to whoever needs it, rich or poor. It is hoped that all who have taken the time to read these lines will make the effort to study the feasibility of a LED-type program in their sphere of ministry.