

STEP



Strategic Theological Education Partnerships

Promoting Excellence in International Theological Education

by Bruce Burkholder

In 1996 we arrived in Mexico City to train national leaders. Of course, we were not ready. We spent our first four years learning the language and the culture while working with and eventually leading a church plant. But our passion for establishing a seminary that could provide excellent academic and practical training for ministry never waned. In the year 2000 we joined forces with BMM missionary Sam Hornbrook to launch the Seminario Teológico Bautista Independiente. While God blessed the ministry, it was a struggle. To be honest, we did not know what we were doing. We had been trained in theology and practical ministry, but not in the nuts and bolts of academic administration. Sadly, we did not know where to turn for help.

STEP is a new ministry team of BMM that promotes Strategic Theological Education Partnerships. As a ministry team, we are passionate about quality theological education, and we desire to come alongside BMM affiliated Bible institutes and seminaries to aid them in their pursuit of academic and ministerial excellence.

Today we launch this first virtual edition of the biannual STEP newsletter. We hope that it will be of great help to your ministry by meeting two important goals. First, we want to introduce BMM ministries and missionaries that are involved in theological education to encourage greater dialogue and resource sharing within our mission family. In this edition you will learn of the Seminario Bautista Internacional in the Dominican Republic. Second, we hope to provide timely and substantive articles on issues relevant to theological education ministries like Caleb Stein's article on page five, "The Necessity of Theological Training for Nationals."

The expectation is that we will grow together. So, please join us as we give thought and voice to the ministry of theological education.

STEP Ministry Team

God has blessed the STEP Ministry Team with godly men who have both academic credentials and significant experience in theological education and administration. It is their joy to serve the BMM theological education family.

Management Team:



Bruce Burkholder

(MDiv, DMin) is the General Director of Editorial Bautista Independiente, the Spanish publishing arm of Baptist Mid-Missions. Prior to EBI, Bruce served in Mexico City, where he helped to start and taught in the Seminario Teológico Bautista Independiente.



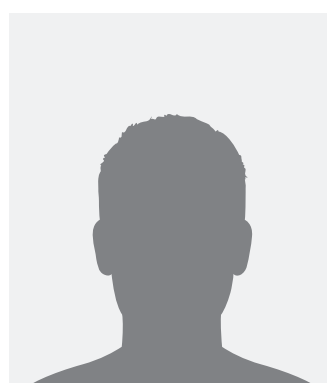
Jeremie Roy

(MDiv, ThM, DMin candidate) serves the Lord in church planting and theological education in the province of Alicante, Spain. Previously, he led the revitalization of International Baptist Seminary in the Dominican Republic, where he still teaches.



Caleb Stein

(MA, MDiv, ThM, DMin Candidate) is a missionary in Trujillo, Peru. He serves as a professor of theology in the Seminario Bautista del Perú and as a pastor of Iglesia Bautista de Getsemaní.



Scott Kenson

[pseudonym] (MDiv, DMin) grew up on the mission field in Asia and later returned to teach for eight years in a seminary in a restricted access nation. When he was unable to get a visa to return, the Lord led him and his family to another country in Asia, where they are assisting a church and working to train church leaders.

Other Team Members:

David Stilwell (Seminario Bautista del Perú, Peru)

Jon Stilwell (Seminario Bautista del Perú, Peru)

James Peavey (Seminario Bautista Internacional, Dominican Republic)

Mark Swedberg (Seminário e Instituto Batista Bereiano, Brazil)



Dominican Republic

Seminario Bautista Internacional

by Scott Kenson

In the initial STEP newsletters we will feature various theological training institutes around the world in which BMM missionaries are working. This newsletter features a relatively new institute in the Dominican Republic - Seminario Bautista Internacional.

“Will you help us start a seminary?” was the request made of BMM in 2006. The request was made by a local church association comprised of over twenty independent Baptist churches called the Asociación Dominicana de Iglesias Bautistas (Association of Dominican Baptist Churches). BMM had initially entered the Dominican Republic in 1949, and the church association was started in 1956. Now years later, during the 50-year anniversary celebration, the association was asking BMM to return to start a seminary to train Dominican pastors. There already were several informal institutes up and running, but the pastors in the association saw the need for advanced Bible training for their future pastors, so they asked BMM for help.

Eleven years later in 2017, BMM missionaries Jeremie Roy and James Peavy, in cooperation with the local church association, launched the Seminario Bautista Internacional. In their first year, six Dominicans helped to share the teaching load, and 20-30 students completed

the first year of the academic program. Today there are fifteen Dominicans (eight of whom are pastors), who hold advanced degrees, that teach at the seminary alongside two missionaries. They currently have 50-60 students enrolled in this academic year.

The seminary classes are primarily conducted online, with three locations in local church buildings where students may take classes. If students are unable to come to one of these locations, they may view the classes on their phone or laptop.

With a desire to see the seminary program continue even after missionaries leave, the seminary is striving to be fully supported by local funds. Because there are no full-time professors that require a salary and because they do not have a residency program, the seminary's expenses are minimal. The result is that 66% of the operational cost of running the seminary is covered by tuition and funds supplied by the local church association.



Left Photo: 2021 Graduation
(back row) professors
(front row) graduates

Right Photo: Board of
Director's Meeting



The seminary offers bachelor's degrees in Pastoral Theology and Christian Ministry. They also offer an associate degree in Bible. During the first few years the seminary could not offer general education courses, so the students obtained those credits from the local university. Recently the seminary has added these general education classes to their curriculum. The seminary has also developed elective classes specific for the local context, including courses on personal and ecclesiastical finance.

When asked what the next steps for the seminary would be, President James Peavy identified accreditation as the next main goal for their programs. Accreditation would provide accountability and help them see potential blind spots in their program, ensuring both academic excellence and institutional advancement. His prayer is that they might obtain this recognition in the next 2-3 years.

A secondary goal is to implement a program devoted to personal discipleship. Training

Christian leaders involves more than academic training. It requires an emphasis on character development. The program is a form of mentorship where they assign students to work under local pastors to be disciplined and learn the practical side of ministry in the Dominican Republic.

A third goal is the development of a master's program within the next five years. As education levels on the island rise and as pastors have more people in their church with advanced degrees, it is helpful for the pastors themselves to gain the critical thinking skills that come through an advanced degree program.

Please feel free to reach out to James Peavy at jamesandlaurennpv@gmail.com with any questions about this ministry.

The Necessity of Theological Training for Nationals

by Caleb Stein

The Great Commission is fundamental to all that we do as missionaries and theological educators. We are to go to the farthest reaches of this planet and preach the gospel, making disciples who know the truth and are equipped to make more disciples. This commission is the heartbeat, the means, and the goal of the local church. It is the standard against which we measure every other endeavor.

Following the New Testament pattern, a missionary evangelizes and disciples with the goal of identifying national men for church leadership. Indeed, the future of gospel ministry depends upon the cultivation of leaders who can expand gospel influence into other regions and continue the church's witness into the future.

How can we best accomplish that which we must do: train men to lead the local church and expand its influence? One of the most effective ways is concentrated theological training in a Bible school. Several aspects of this training prove the importance of this endeavor.

The Need for Biblical Teaching:

Paul sets forth the pattern for biblical training in 2 Timothy 2:2. Timothy was to instruct other faithful men with the comprehensive biblical teaching that he himself had received from Paul, i.e., the body of Paul's preaching and teaching. Paul's use of the demonstrative pronoun here leaves no room for ambiguity regarding the content of this instruction. As William Mounce writes, "Paul is thinking of the gospel in its totality, not just a summary of

it" (Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles, Word Biblical Commentary*, 506). This is in fashion with Christ's command to teach all that He had taught to His disciples (Matt. 28:20).

We believe that God's Word is supreme in all matters of faith and practice, a belief that is challenged by every secular educational model. Thus, we must focus on biblical exposition and exegesis, not human speculation and schema. The goal is to produce preachers and teachers who love God and His Word and can correctly capture biblical truth and apply it to individual situations.

The Need for Broader Training:

The text also calls us to train capable men. This implies a broad curriculum. While Timothy and those he would train already spoke Greek fluently, naturally understood the culture, were participants in first century history, and as faithful men had served in some local church capacity, most of the students we teach today lack these necessary interpretive and ministerial skills. For this reason, theological education encompasses a wide variety of disciplines and ministry training. It is a labor-intensive course, but God demands this type of excellence of his servants (Phil. 1:9-10).

The Need for Deeper Training:

This training of others in a missionary context promotes the idea of indigenous ministries. Missionaries enter a foreign context to train national leaders, who then in turn train other national leaders within their own context. Indigenous ministries are often described by the common three-self formula: self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing. Missiologist Paul Hiebert in his book, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, suggests a fourth self, self-theologizing, where national churches are trained to do theology on their own.

This infers the presence of national theologians who can deeply interact with the biblical text exegetically, theologically, and ministerially. The component of self-theologizing has become increasingly important as the national Church matures.

Andrew Walls writes, “the faith of the twenty-first century will require devout, vigorous scholarship rooted in the soil of Africa, Asia, and Latin America” (Walls, “Old Athens and New Jerusalem,” *IBMR*, 1997, 153). These men, who understand the cultural intricacies and needs well, will be prepared to lead the church into the future and accomplish God’s work for generations to come.

The Need for Continued Training:

No human teacher is eternal, so we must always be training others to replace us and expand God’s church. Second Timothy 2:2 suggests a clear paradigm for future ministry. These others to be taught are distinct from the previous faithful men. They are another generation of men who would follow in the

footsteps of the faithful ones who preceded them. As some have suggested, this is the “earliest traces of a theological school” (Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC, 2013, 392). But doesn’t greater knowledge diminish passion and breed false doctrines? The focus of theological education must be spiritual growth, not simply academic advancement (Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 1:28). There is danger if academic advancement becomes the goal. Nonetheless, it is naïve and even anti-biblical to insist that spiritual growth is possible in the absence of biblical knowledge (Matt. 28:19; Phil. 3:8-10; 2 Pet. 1:5-9; 3:18). True biblical knowledge leads to heart change and spiritual growth, and the lack of biblical knowledge is always the nursery of false doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:1-5; 1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 6-7).

The Great Commission is our heartbeat, and it reaches its fullest expression in qualified national believers who keep watch over themselves and the church of God (Acts 20:28). May God give us wisdom and strengthen us for this all-important task.

bmmstep.org

We are delighted to announce the launch of the STEP website (bmmstep.org). The goal is to provide an online meeting place where BMM theological students can virtually come together, learn of other BMM affiliated academic institutions around the world, share resources, request help, and discuss relevant issues. Please join us there. We look forward to interacting with you.

