

Without Borders

Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on the [article](#) of the same title by Beth and Ricardo Gómez in Light + Life Magazine, May 2021



Begin your group gathering in prayer.

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

What does this verse mean to you and why?

Without Borders

One Sunday morning, I (Ricardo) noticed my wife, Beth, crying in the midst of an upbeat praise song. Beth is from a small town in Kentucky and since we'd just recently moved to Santiago, Chile, on our first missionary assignment, I thought she might be homesick.

"Is everything OK?" I whispered.

"Yes. I'm great," she replied. "I just got a beautiful glimpse of heaven when we sang 'one day every tongue will confess you are Lord' in Spanish. I've sung it for years in English, but hearing it in Spanish makes it come alive!"

As Christians, that is what we are living for, and that is what we are looking forward to — a great big cross-cultural celebration in heaven. In fact, that is why cross-cultural collaboration here on earth is so important; it prepares us for our eternal future. I am thankful for the ways God has used it and is using it in my life and ministry. Every now and then, it does seem that God takes those moments to pull back the curtains and give me a fresh new glimpse of the future.

Twenty-two years ago, when I moved from my home in Colombia to the state of Washington, I didn't speak a word of English. Despite that, a small Free Methodist

church opened its doors and its arms to me. As I learned English, I was also loved, challenged, inspired by their faithfulness, prayed for, and introduced to Wesleyan theology as well as the authentic, self-giving [Free Methodist Way](#) of the members of Hillcrest Christian Community. As I served the church and even taught a few Spanish classes, I hope that they also benefited from me being there for two years. Staying within the comfort of that warm community was tempting, but it would have been disobedient to God's call on my life. He called me to the USA to get the tools to return and better serve my people in Latin America, and so I had to move on. However, without a doubt, He used those precious people in that little FM church to shape my life, my ministry and my future.

Today, thanks in large part to their initial welcome and their ongoing partnership, I am the [Latin American Area](#) director for the Free Methodist Church. As I write this article, we are preparing for our second annual *Semana Santa sin fronteras* (Holy Week without borders). Children, youth and adults ... bishops, pastors, lay leaders and new believers ... people

from 17 different countries have all come together to prepare for the eight-day celebration that will be broadcast across the continent and beyond. Our goal is to unite the 12,000 FM members from Mexico to Chile and Argentina in one voice of worship to our King.

This new "tradition" was born out of necessity when the majority of us were thrust into government-enforced quarantines at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. Our leadership team suggested we do something to give our overworked and overstressed pastors a bit of a break and yet offer a meaningful celebration of our Lord Jesus Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. *Semana Santa sin fronteras* energized and united the region as never before and, for the past year, we've been reaping the rewards of cross-cultural collaboration. New friendships have been forged, pulpits are shared across borders, and most importantly, as people's horizons are widened beyond their own little realm of influence, they more heartily pray for other people and nations.

It is in the midst of worshipping in Chile that Beth is brought to tears and says, "I just got a beautiful glimpse of heaven."

1. What might have been happening in Beth's heart and soul that caused a glimpse of heaven to emerge?
2. How often are you exposed to varying ways to worship God? Do you visit other churches or attend their events? Why or why not?
3. Have you had any international travel experiences that involved worship? If so, how were you affected by those experiences?

Ricardo tells of coming to the United States and the warm welcome he received by the Free Methodist Church. Thinking about your own church for a moment, reflect on these statements, and discuss them as a group. Do they apply to your church or not?

1. Our church has regular visitors.
2. We've engaged with people of other languages in our church.
3. We consider other cultural experiences as we plan our worship services.
4. Our church collaborates with other ministries in our town/city?

5. Our church collaborates with other ministries around the world (other than contributions to world missions)?

As you read about the Latin American *Holy Week Without Borders* that emerged during the pandemic, consider your own church — did you mostly “shut down” or “ramp up” during the pandemic? Why?

However, this spirit of camaraderie and collaboration has a longer history than simply one pandemic year and extends well beyond Latin America’s borders. The first Free Methodist missionaries to Latin America began serving the Dominican Republic in 1889. While I don’t pretend to know the whole story from then until now, I do know that Samuel and Abbie Mills’ obedience to God’s missionary call started a cross-cultural collaboration that continues to this day. We now have seven North American missionary families serving throughout the region, and four more are in the partnership-building phase as they prepare for ministry here.

We also have FM missionaries, both official and unofficial, from different Latin American countries serving in other parts of Latin America, Europe and

North America. Some have been called to serve cross-culturally and some have been sent to serve cross-culturally due to their fruitfulness in one particular place, but a great majority have been forced beyond their comfort zones due to political, social and economic instability. No matter the circumstance, time and time again, we see new fruit for the kingdom of God as people take Jesus’ command seriously to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20a). In fact, within six months, despite ongoing quarantines and pandemic effects, more than 1,000 people professed faith in Christ and nearly 250 people were baptized throughout the region.

Beth and Ricardo describe a *spirit of camaraderie and collaboration* in Latin America. Do you see that to be true here in the U.S.? In your particular town or city? Why or why not?

What are the characteristics of collaboration? Perhaps a member of your group could google the definition and then discuss what it truly means to collaborate. List those attributes here:

Now consider *Cross-Cultural Collaboration*. Using the attributes of collaboration above, create a definition of your own for cross-cultural collaboration and write it here:

Consider the degree to which your church engages in cross-cultural collaboration based on your definition above. How truly collaborative are you across cultures? Do you think our Lord wants this for us, or do we get a pass? Why or why not?

Cross-Pollination

Yet this cross-cultural collaboration goes well beyond “traditional” missionary service. In fact, we often refer to it as cross-pollination, as different methods or tools are spread from country to country and continent to continent and then bear fruit. One perfect example of this can be seen within the Community Church Planting (CCP) movement. Pastor Bruce Bennett, a former Coca-Cola executive from South Africa, developed CCP in his home country where it was highly effective in multiplying disciples, leaders and churches in rural Africa. This method also took hold among FM ministry in the Middle East. In 2015, Bennett led the first CCP workshop in Latin America. By 2018, we had his approval to translate and adapt the materials to the Latin American context. Today the CCP movement plays a key role in fulfilling our God-given vision to participate with God in the restoration of Latin America by developing healthy leaders, multiplying committed disciples, and empowering transformational churches.

Pastor David López, a Venezuelan currently living in Peru, serves as the Latin American CCP coordinator for the Free Methodist Church. His colleague and mentor, Pastor John Jairo Leal from Colombia, is the CCP coordinator for [Impact Latin America](#). This new nonprofit organization based in Seattle, Washington, was born out of our desire to share the tools God has given us throughout Latin America and to extend them beyond the Free Methodist Church. The effort, in its very early stages, currently involves three denominations in another form of cross-cultural collaboration for the benefit of the whole kingdom of God. Together, Pastors John Jairo and David train people all over the region and mentor 42 facilitators in at least 16 countries. Each of those leaders are reading the book [“Movements That Change the World”](#) by Steve Addison from Australia. Last week, they had their first meeting with Addison, who is providing further training to help advance this movement of God. Likewise, I have been working with [Middle East Area Director](#) Dale to develop opportunities where the church planters in Latin America can meet with the church planters in the Middle East to encourage and learn from one another and share best-practices and new techniques.

We are also excited about the opportunities for cross-pollination that are becoming available between the Latin America Area and the [Free Methodist Church – USA](#) as we further develop and improve the pastoral formation program for Spanish-speaking leaders and pastors. [Glenn Lorenz](#), our coordinator for pastoral

formation, and I have met with leaders from several different conferences to put these materials into the service of their Latin American conference ministerial candidates.

Collaborative Leadership

Finally, life experience has taught me that collaborative leadership is a much healthier style of leadership than the “lone ranger” style that is common in Latin America. As a result, we have developed a whole coaching system through which we are developing a team approach between the superintendents/mission district leaders and their boards. This is a process that involves learning to listen to one another, learning to respect each other, and appreciating the fact that everybody has something to offer. Effective collaborative leadership involves humility, a balanced self-identity as well as a willingness to work together. The transition hasn’t been easy, but watching ministries break out of customary and often unhealthy habits is refreshing. Helping one person’s weakness be counterbalanced by another person’s strength and watching people of different ages, genders, ethnicities, and educational and economic backgrounds work together to find creative solutions to decade-long problems and/or stagnation is life-giving. Likewise, the area directors from all five regions of the world and [Director of Global Church Advocacy](#) Gerald Coates recently began meeting together on a monthly basis. As we share, work, learn, plan and pray together, we are convinced that we truly are better together.

The very nature of the phrase *cross-cultural collaboration* indicates the symbiotic relationship of both parties. Our differentness, as in the case of cross-pollination, is actually our strength because we each provide a skill set or worldview that benefits the other, if only given the chance. *The Free Methodist Way*, therefore, is a two-way street in which we learn from one another, help one another, pray for one another, and grow together out of obedience to His calling. And, in so doing, we are preparing ourselves for that day when every tongue, tribe, people and language will gather around the throne of God (Revelation 7:9). Sometimes, we are especially blessed when He gives us a small glimpse of our heavenly future, here on earth.

Take a moment as a group to review the segment of the above article and list all of the ways you see cross-cultural collaboration taking place.

Beth and Ricardo talk about engaging in collaborative leadership even though the way leadership is typically engaged in Latin America is a “lone ranger” style. How would you describe the primary way of leadership in the United States?

In Latin America, they “went against the grain” to engage collaboratively. How might we in the U.S. have to go against the grain to see fruitfulness emerge?

How does cross-cultural collaboration “prepare us for heaven”?

Close in prayer, allowing the things that most touched your heart throughout the article and discussion to be the theme of your prayers.