Building Tomorrow’s Mission

Seven years and growing

by Dave Hendrickx and Mitch Axsom

Building Tomorrow’s Mission (BTM) is the brainchild of Mitch Axsom (FBC, Clinton). In 2011 Mitch attended the Building Tomorrow’s Church (BTC) conference. Their website describes BTC as “a conference for Reformed Baptist Young Adults who desire to learn more about the importance of the local church and how to serve Christ through it.” Mitch was excited about the concept and left with the idea of doing something similar but focused on missions. Mitch has been driven for years by two concerns: (1) that the Great Commission must be the priority of the church, and (2) that the next generation of leaders in our churches tomorrow sit in our pews today as young adults.

What followed is history. Mitch contacted Dave Hendrickx (Santa Teresa Baptist Church) to float the idea of a BTM conference modeled after BTC. Santa Teresa Baptist Church was an ideal place for such a conference because of its proximity to the Mexican border. A key feature of the conference was to include hands-on ministry on foreign soil.

During the next six months Mitch and Dave brainstormed the first BTM conference introduced in the summer of 2012. Vacation Bible School would be the vehicle for training young adults in gospel proclamation. BTM begins each year with a combined worship service in at STBC. We also wanted BTM to be a teaching conference. So it was decided to offer nightly thematic preaching by respected Reformed Baptist pastors emphasizing missions and evangelism.
BTM is a family affair. We require all participants to be 18 years old or above unless accompanied by a parent. Over a third of those who register are parents or older adults with construction skill sets. We encourage families to attend. Some elect to serve on the US side of the border and some on the Mexican side. Some who attend choose to help in vacation Bible school while others prefer to help with one of the work projects and still others sign on to help in the kitchen. Work projects require carpentry, plumbing or electrical skills. Within a single family there may be individual family members spread out on both sides of the border supporting both VBS and the various work projects.

The cost for the most recent BTM was $175 per person but the family rate was $150 per person (children under 7 free). This money is used to pay for food, rental equipment and materials. FBC, Clinton and Santa Teresa Baptist Church also chip in a minimum of $1000 each to finance the work projects.

The STBC church facilities double as a dormitory and dining facility. We try to offer married couples a small classroom if available. Single women occupy one half of the building and the men bunk down in the sanctuary. STBC has a three stall shower facility which is used by men and women on an odd/even hour schedule. STBC also has a well appointed kitchen facility where three meals a day are prepared for every worker. BTM logistics has almost become institutionalized over the years. Almost one quarter of the space available in the STBC attic is used to house a permanent supply of small kitchen appliances, service items, ice chests, air mattresses and VBS supplies used exclusively during BTM.

In all our planning and execution we hold fast to our guiding purpose:

**The Purpose of BTM** is to cast a vision among the next generation of church members and leaders for the necessity and urgency for missions by facilitating low-cost, hands-on, in-the-field training and experience. We aim to accomplish this goal through intensive one-week short-term mission projects which incorporate pastoral leadership, nightly preaching and teaching, daily ministry projects such as neighborhood evangelism and Vacation Bible Schools, and work projects in foreign language situations.

**BTM 2012-2014:**

In February 2011, STBC began holding Spanish-language services Sunday afternoons at Templo Bautista El Maestro, a Mexican Missionary Baptist Church, in Juárez. The church had been without a pastor for several years. Within months an easy friendship was established between the members of EL Maestro and the new Reformed Baptist work. Often the members of the host church would attend our serves after attending their own. Frequently, the members of both church groups would enjoy a meal together at the church building. El Maestro would become the perfect place to launch our first cross-border BTM and international VBS.

In July 2012, nineteen people traveled from eight churches to attend the inaugural BTM. Included in that group was Kate Haines, the 19-year-old daughter of Paul and Emily Haines. Paul is an elder at Heritage Baptist Church, Shreveport. This past July (2018), Kate completed an unbroken record having attended all seven BTMs to date (we call her our BTM groupie). This year she came as Kate Duggins, having married the man she first met at BTM-2012. Philip Duggins interpreted for Pastor Dave during those early years at EL Maestro.
That first year was BTM on training wheels. We offered VBS only on the US sides of the border. We were assisted by Manuel Carbonell, a second year IRBS student from Córdoba, Argentina. After graduating, Manuel returned to Córdoba where he serves as a pastor at Centro Crecer. Dr. Fred Malone (FBC, Clinton) provided four excellent addresses on the subject of the Great Commission. Dr. Malone continued to be the BTM key-note speaker until replaced by Dr. Tom Hicks (also FBC, Clinton) in 2016. We were also assisted by Pastor Carlos Pino (Iglesia Bautista Emmanuel). STBC began sharing its facilities with Emmanuel Baptist on Sunday afternoons in May 2011. This Spanish-speaking congregation has faithfully participated in BTM every year since its inception. Pastor Carlos had a contact at Santa Teresa Elementary School that would be soon be very helpful for us when we needed a larger venue.

There was no construction project planned that first year. But one of the things we noticed during our time together at EL Maestro was the inadequacy of their kitchen (they had no hot water for washing dishes!) Their need became our opportunity. We planned our first construction project in BTM-2013. With the permission of the congregation at EL Maestro the BTM construction team completely remodeled the kitchen including the purchase of a new stove, refrigerator, hot water heater and stainless counter tops. Mitch brought from Louisiana custom made-to-fit cedar cabinets.

While BTM-2013 was more ambitious it was also perhaps our most difficult. Only our second BTM and still learning, in April 2013 Pastor Dave was diagnosed with stage-4 cancer. In May and June he underwent both chemotherapy and radiation. By the end of June he was so sick he could barely walk. By God’s grace, Mitch was permitted to come to El Paso in May and stay for two weeks to supply the pulpit and help drive Dave to his radiation treatments. It was during those difficult days with Dave in bed much of the time the remainder of the BTM-2013 was planned. This hard providence of God tested our resolve.

BTM-2013 saw a doubling of the number of participants to 38 – including Mia Ambrocio (Covenant Baptist Church, Toronto, Canada) who holds the North American record for traveling the furthest. That year also brought a large contingent from Heritage Church, Fayetteville, GA led by Pastor Hank Rast and Dave Randall. This was amazing to us. Their travel each way required 24 hours driving time over two days – a distance of over 1400 miles. Included in their 2013 contingent was Kim Pollard. The following year she would return with her whole family of nine. In 2014 we moved the VBS on the US side to Santa Teresa Elementary School to accommodate larger student enrollments and free up space to house up to 50 people at STBC. That year Kim became our US VBS director and she continued in that position through 2018. We cannot overstate the significance of the Pollard family to BTM. Their family near singlehandedly enabled us to offer a VBS on the US side. They essentially planned and coordinated a two week VBS: the first week in their home church in Georgia, and the second week—in El Paso. With other BTM volunteers, they were a VBS orchestra integrating the important ingredients of teaching, music, memorization, recreation, and arts and crafts.

During BTM-2014, El Maestro hosted our first Juárez VBS and a second large scale remodeling project. We were greatly assisted in Juárez that year by Dave’s close friend, Pastor Francisco Orozco (Iglesia Bautista Reformada, Cuauhtémoc, MX). However, the following winter, to our great surprise El Maestro asked us to leave. This was a mind-numbing experience. After four years of beautiful friendship and cooperation some women in the church (women in some Mexican churches wield enormous power) decided we were an existential threat to their existence. They got the idea that we were befriending them and making all these improvements to their church because we intended to take it over. They sent their husbands to break the news. We urgently needed a new Juárez venue.
Since 2005 Dave had maintained a close friendship with Juárez pastor, Jose Compean. Jose was undertaking an ambitious project developing a Christian community center in an impoverished colonia on the western edge of Juárez adjacent a city dump. The Mexicans call Juárez their ‘frontier’ for a reason. At that time the community had no running water or gas – only electricity. A palatable water truck delivered drinking water to the community once a week. The homes were principally made from pallet boards and cardboard. Many had dirt floors. The city offered Jose free land if he would build a community center to serve the colonia. He agreed with the caveat that he be permitted to build a church on the land. In turn, Jose contacted churches throughout the US to come for short term missions and help him build what has become known as ‘La Mision.’ This was an enormous undertaking involving a dozen or more churches over even more years.

Dave approached Pastor Jose with the proposal that we pivot the international portion of BTM-2015 to La Mision. We would help advance the construction project and conduct a VBS for his neighboring community. Mitch and Sheri Axsom rose to the occasion and became the Juárez VBS co-directors. That first year at La Mision we brought the gospel to over one hundred kids – some without shoes! The eight man construction team led by Scott Schober (HBC, Shreveport) and Mike Pollard (HC, Fayetteville) rebuilt a small dilapidated building for dual use as an apartment for a night watchman and a secure storage room for high value items.

We promote VBS as a ministry to children K-grade 6. But a growing number of young teenagers were coming with their younger siblings in Juárez. Yet the offering was not geared for their age group. We saw the need to provide young teens with Bible study more appropriate for their age. Additionally this ‘middle-school-aged’ group needed a firmer hand to keep them out of trouble. Enter Pastor Martin Nish and his family. Since 2014, several families from Reformed Baptist Church of Kansas City had joined with BTM. But BTM-2016 saw a significant increase to fifteen participants led by Pastor Nish and his family. For the next three years Pastor Nish, assisted in various years by Jesus Palafox (RBCKS), Frank Gonzales (STBC), and Lorena Alfaro Luna (IBPG), has led a profitable Bible study for the teenagers.

BTM-2017. We must digress. So whatever happened to the small group of believers after they were asked to leave El Maestro? By the grace of God, Silvia Gonzalez, a woman of very humble means offered to let us meet in her home. So in March, 2015 we moved into a small, dark, subterranean room that...
accommodated about ten people. Nonetheless we rejoiced that God helped find us a place. Sometime during our year at Silvia’s we were joined by Alfonso Armendariz, a Calvinistic man of means who offered to us the use of his house. We moved again in June 2016. His place was a palace in comparison but vacant and on the market. It was there that we adopted the name for the Juárez church plant – Iglesia Bautista Pacto de Gracia (IBPG). But within a year the house was sold. Again we had to move.

Frank Gonzales joined STBC in 2015. He is a gifted preacher and professional interpreter who took on the translation duties when Philip Duggins moved on to Shreveport to court Kate Haines. Frank’s grandmother had a two-story home on a gated lot in central Juárez. The upstairs is occupied by one of Frank’s aunts and her husband. But the downstairs was vacant and was made available to the church. The immediate problem was the need for extensive demolition, remodeling and reroofing. There were also no usable bathroom facilities. There was however a ‘his and hers’ two room outhouse that needed new plumbing, fixtures and electrical work.

Consequently, the BTM-2017 construction team was asked to undertake the most ambitious project to date. Their mission was to prepare Frank’s grandmother’s house as the new meeting place for Pacto de Gracia. The most costly and difficult work project yet yielded a new home for the Juárez church plant of STBC that grew out of every previous attempt to see a Reformed Baptist presence established in Juárez. Our master electrician was Roger Clark (FBC, Clinton). Roger had been coming since 2014 and has become a vital member of the BTM construction crew. But within the next year Pacto de Gracia would already outgrown their facility.

By every standard BTM-2018 was exceptional; by far the largest class came from 10 churches across the US. Included were seven pastors: FBC, Clinton (Tom Hicks and Mitch Axsom), Grace Reformed Baptist Church, Owensboro (Ben Carlson), Heritage Baptist Church, Owensboro (Keith Maddy), Heritage Church, Fayetteville (Hank Rast), Pioneer Valley Chapel, Chicopee (Steve Graham), and Reformed Baptist Church of Kansas City (Martin Nish). Large contingents from Owensboro, Kansas City and Fayetteville helped bring the BTM class of 2018 to 65 members.

In addition to filling the ranks for VBS on both sides of the border, each young person was trained to prepare and practice their personal testimonies after the manner of Paul in Acts 22. The goal was to learn how to use their testimony as a delivery vehicle for the gospel of God’s grace. The goal was to become comfortable in telling their stories to others and confident in Christ to apply the gospel to listeners as it pleases him. Caleb Nichols, a young man from Reformed Baptist Church, Kansas City summarized his testimony in his own words:

“As a child I trusted an assumed righteousness I thought I had received from my parents. As a teenager my truly depraved/sinful nature began to manifest itself but I no longer cared. The Lord began to show me the flaws of my worldview and how I could only look to Him for refuge. He brought me to the end of myself by an accident in which I almost died and was left unconscious for three and a half months. God used His Word and His Spirit to bring me to repentance of my sin and faith in Christ. Now I am growing in the grace and the knowledge of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and striving to put an end to the deeds of the flesh.”
The construction crew relocated the kitchen facility at Pacto de Gracia and further expanded the meeting room. Volunteers from Pacto de Gracia under the leadership of Frank Gonzales with the BTM helpers conducted their first ever Vacation Bible School for ninety-one children at a nearby Baptist Church. Pacto de Gracia provided all the teachers! But the highlight of BTM-2018 was the baptism of Andrea Mendez, the first homegrown convert of Pacto de Gracia. The baptism was performed under a big tent before a gathering of almost one hundred people including sixty from BTM. Pastor Martin Nish brought the message. Most often those who participate in short term mission projects rarely see the fruit of their labor. But they faithfully plant gospel seeds and contribute to work projects that help local churches enlarge their gospel influence in the community. This summer, those who had participated in BTM for years saw some early fruit of their labor. They have generously supported with their time and talents cross-border ministry that is making a Kingdom difference in Juárez.

On August 19, 2018, just three weeks after BTM-2018 went into the history books, Pacto de Gracia assembled to inaugurate its founding charter members. Pastor Jim Adams (Cornerstone Church, Mesa, AZ) preached a rousing sermon on the importance of the Word from Nehemiah. Following the message six men and ten women covenanted to form the first truly confessional Baptist Church in Juárez. While not yet a constituted church,
these faithful ones now have a reformed fellowship to belong to. They can proudly say they belong to Iglesia Bautista Pacto de Gracia. And BTM has been a part of its heritage.

The Spanish language has a word that I like that does not translate directly into English. It is the word *jovenes*. It is used to describe young adults between the ages of 18 to 30, male and female, married or single. It is the *jovenes* in our churches that BTM seeks to inspire. BTM is more than a ministry; it is a model for ministry. Its purpose has not changed in seven years. We seek to incubate a deep desire for missions both home and abroad in those who will soon become leaders in our families and churches. We want our young people to become gospel saturated men and women who burn with passion for the Great Commission mission of the church. We have found that whenever a pastor and his family come to BTM, church members follow. And not only a rich experience but a sound model for follow-on training is brought back to their churches. You can find more information on how to participate in future BTM conferences by contacting Mitch Axsom at buildingtomorrowsmissions@gmail.com or Dave Hendrickx at dave@stbcweb.org.

**Added Testimonials**

“Building Tomorrow’s Missions was a wonderful place where I gathered with people from all over North America, and together we worshipped, learned, and served. Ultimately, BTM brought me closer to my Savior and gave me a deeper love of Him. The teaching was convicting and impactful. I am excited to use what I learned to evangelize my fellow college classmates.”

*Alex Mindrup*

“Over the years BTM has impacted my life in so many ways. There is such sweet fellowship that exists between all the people who come on the trip. Every year is like one big family reunion. I have never met a group of such servant-hearted, hardworking people. No matter what task needs to be done, everyone jumps in with a willing heart and joyful attitude. The Lord has really used the trip to develop my heart for the people of Juarez, MX, and for the work He is doing there. Because of BTM, I have a deep love and appreciation for my Mexican brothers and sisters; I understand how the love of God crosses cultural and language barriers. I have experienced working, laughing, and fellowshipping at the end of a long VBS day or during a hot car ride across the border. I have fallen in love with a place that’s not my home.”

*Kate Duggins*

“BTM has become a yearly highlight for our church. It is an excellent opportunity for our young adults to get away from the distractions of life and be challenged by a far different environment, by the teaching of the Word, to know and share the Gospel of Christ, and to serve others. The strong bonds developed between our own participants, as well as with those from other churches, are beneficial and long-lasting. The experience in Mexico is in itself worth the trip, as it teaches of a way of life not otherwise known, while inflaming the heart both for the need of the Gospel to go abroad and with the joy of fellowship with Christians of another country and language. Each BTM stretches us out of our comfort zone for Christ, His people, and for His Gospel to go forth, causing us to trust God and His Word and deepen our love for the lost.

“The 2018 BTM was perhaps the most satisfying of the five in which our church has been involved. Tom Hicks' nightly teaching on Christ from John 3-4 wonderfully presented the beauty of Christ and the gospel—which was an answer to prayer for both those who knew Christ and those who do not in our group. And I have passed on Dave Hendrickx's nightly instruction on how the local church should develop a "culture of evangelism" to my own church this month in our midweek meetings—and it has had an encouraging response. Our personal interaction with brethren from the Juarez Reformed Baptist church plant—worshipping together and then working together in the Juarez VBS—was a delight, and we, as a church, hope to continue our relationship with them throughout the year. For me, personally, I consider the privilege I had of preaching a baptism service outside in Juarez as one of the great joys and highlights of my life. The ordinance of water baptism needs no translation!
“As usual, the moment we began the long drive home, 13 of us crammed into our 15-passenger van, there were already conversations looking ahead to BTM 2019. This is a highly-recommended, cost-effective, and beneficial mission trip for a church to consider.”

Pastor Martin Nish

Coming into BTM, I didn’t have assurance of my salvation. It wasn’t until then that God used Brother Mitch to draw clarity into my life. I was assisting him with teaching the VBS kids in Santa Teresa when the Lord took hold of my heart. Explaining who was a part of God’s family, Brother Mitch gave an example to the 5th graders. He pointed and looked at me with a smile. “I am a son of God, and Julia, here, is my sister.”

Since the time I was eleven years old, when I believe the Lord saved me, nobody had ever called me their sister in a spiritual sense. This had been the first time, and it made me realize that I truly was. For years, I had doubts as to whether I was saved and was positive that something was missing in my life. Believing that Jesus had died on the cross, I trusted his word. However, that still didn’t seem enough. For four years, I wasn’t ever quite sure if the Lord had saved me.

Not until this mission trip, did I find that nothing was truly missing. I will never forget that day of VBS in New Mexico, in July of 2013. There, I learned that I am a sister to the saved and a daughter to the King, and our relationship is too entwined to untangle.

Julia Pollard