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## Coming Around Full Circle



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I will never forget my first day. As I was driving very early on that Monday morning in the fog and mist of the West Virginia hills, I was excited and terrified at the same time. I had just finished college, started my first full-time student pastor job, got married, went on our honeymoon, moved to a new city and had officially begun “adulting”. When I arrived, I didn’t know what to expect. It was my first day at Eastern Baptist (now Palmer) Theological Seminary’s West Virginia Extension campus. I sat down at the table and put my name on the paper triangle in front of me and began the journey of a lifetime.

Fast forward twenty-one years later. With a stunning sense of Deja-vu, I walked into the room. The tables were set up the same way as all those years before. The coffee was on in the back and as people began to file into the room, I saw the same look on their faces. This time I was on the other side of the table on the other side of the world. I realized that I had come full-circle.

It happened last week in Campinas, Brazil, just a few hours drive north of São Paulo, which is the largest city in the Americas. We’re talking a number with 8 digits here (north of 12 million) in the city alone. I was there to join in on the orientation of Palmer Seminary’s Masters of Theological Studies group in Brazil. Ever since the then EBTS took a chance and began an M. Div. program in WV, the seminary has stayed on the innovative side of getting theological education to pastors and leaders. When the program began just over 25 years ago, it was the first of its kind. It was so new that they had to prove the program would work. Many of us took a gamble on the seminary and prayed that it would. In time, the program was accredited and now almost every seminary has a program like it.

The Masters of Theological Studies in Latina/o\* Ministries has given Palmer yet another innovative opportunity by offering an MTS degree that is almost fully online and 100% in Spanish, which will serve pastors all throughout Iberoamerica (Latin America, Spain and Portugal) and the United States. In partnership with International Ministries and the American Baptist Home Mission Society, we are training pastors and leaders to make a bigger impact on their communities of faith and their cities for the Kingdom of God. For me, it is a joy to be a part of this program, first as a professor and now as the International Ministries administrator of the program for Latin America.

One of my dreams, from that first week when I sat at those tables as a student starting in 1996, was to move to the front of the room and become one of the professors. Now I have the opportunity of walking alongside Latin American pastors and leaders as they journey down this very familiar road. From Mexico City and Mexicali in Mexico; Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Florida in the US, and this year in Brazil and Bolivia, we will be training around 70 men and women to lead the church for years to come.

This program gives me a new sense of hope. It is a hope for the future that is rooted in seeing how God is using this program to change lives of pastors and leaders in the short-

run, but in the long-run I see the hope of a glorious future for the Kingdom of God, His church in Latin America and around the world.

May it be so and may God get all the glory and praise and may this world be changed by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

\*Latina/o represents the how the word is expressed up for both women (Latina) and men (Latino) in Spanish and our desire to include them in this program.