

308

DECISIONS FOR CHRIST
IN 2017

405

**CHURCHES PLANTED
THROUGH ARC & CMN**
arcchurches.com / churchmultiplication.net

\$32,813

**INVESTED IN CHURCH
PLANTING, DISASTER RELIEF,
MISSIONS, & NON PROFITS**
IN 2017

**TOUCHING THE
WORLD**

**22 MISSIONARIES SENT TO
NICARAGUA.**



100+ SIGNED UP FOR TRIPS TO:
HONDURAS
INDIA
MEXICO
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Journey
C H U R C H
journeyorl.com

**YEAR IN
REVIEW**

**20
17**

UNFINISHED

Journey
C H U R C H

A Letter From Our LEAD PASTORS

This year has been nothing short of miraculous and we want to thank you for your part in making all of this possible. We celebrated some great milestones in 2017. Milestones you'll read about in the next few pages. As you see these numbers, please know that they represent way more than just a dollar amount, or a crowd of people.

What you won't be able to see in such a summary is that they actually represent hundreds and hundreds of lives changed, churches planted (which means communities transformed), and family histories rewritten. You also won't be able to see the sacrifice behind it, the many people at Journey Church who have given their lives like wood to the fire so that someone else can experience the light and warmth of a relationship with Jesus Christ. People who have given faithfully of their talents, time, and treasure. This is the fruit of your labor. We love you and we thank you for being a part of the Journey family.



JJ & LIZ VASQUEZ

**HELPING PEOPLE KNOW GOD, FIND
FREEDOM, DISCOVER PURPOSE, AND
MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**

57%
Year over Year
Growth in
Attendance

27,000
Podcast
Downloads

34
Water
Baptisms

SO MANY STORIES



We launched on September 24th, 2017 with 300 people in attendance. 6 people gave their lives to Christ! Thank you so much. We learned so much from Journey Church. We couldn't have done it without you.

Elijah Hollis, Lead Pastor, Change Church, West Philadelphia PA



I've always believed in God, but it wasn't until about a year ago that I began a relationship with God. I'm now part of a church family that I can't picture my life without! It feels so good to be able to walk with people that love you, worship with you, and live life with you!

Tatiana Pinto, Baptized on Nov. 26, 2017



Many people have lost their savings, businesses, and were laid off here in Puerto Rico due to the damage of Hurricane Maria. Thank you Journey Church for sponsoring families. Covering their rent, car payments, food, and other living expenses throughout their recovery.

Bert Pizarro, Lead Pastor, Connected Life Church, San Juan PR

HOW ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CHURCH PLANTERS ARE FULFILLING THE VISION FOR A HEALTHY, SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH IN EVERY COMMUNITY IN AMERICA.



The focus of our cover story in this issue of *Influence* is church planting. "The Influence 10" is a representative cross-section of the many outstanding men and women church planters in the Assemblies of God who are expanding the Kingdom of God through church multiplication. Church planting is part of the DNA of our Fellowship.

Indeed, church planting is part of my family's spiritual DNA. In 1964, the same year the Assemblies of God began, a 24-year-old, Spirit-filled preacher felt called to start a Pentecostal church in Hazleton, Pennsylvania. His name was Ben Mahan. Without any funds or location, he started the church by preaching on a street corner on the main street of town, Clay Avenue, on Saturday nights from 10:00pm to midnight, with a small congregation gathered around him. They moved to rented quarters above a hardware shop on Clay Avenue. A few years after that, they bought the former Presbyterian church a few blocks away. By 2016, the Assembly of God was one of the larger congregations in the Fellowship, with about 500 people, and a church that had both a lead and gifted vision.

Why is that church important to my family? Because my grandmother, Clara, came to faith there, with her three daughters, and finally her 16-year-old son. That son grew up in a very dysfunctional home. His biological father died when the son was 2 years old. My grandmother subsequently remarried a widower with six children, bringing the number of children in the home to 10. The step-father drank and was abusive — especially toward the only son of the wife. The step-father put the boy to work in a glass factory when he was in the fifth grade, and pulled him out of school permanently when he was in the eighth grade.

By the time he was 18 years old, that boy was rebellious and running with the wrong crowd. But one Sunday morning his mother asked him to walk her to church. When they got there, he agreed to her request to come inside. That day the boy responded to an invitation to accept Christ, and within two weeks he received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and a call to be a missionary to China.

That boy would later be my dad. I never met Pastor Ben Mahan, but my family — now into the fifth generation — owes him an immense debt of gratitude. He planted a church that ultimately brought the gospel to my dad. I've often wondered, *Would we even exist as a family were it not for Ben Mahan sharing the Spirit? Would the four churches my dad planted exist today were it not for Ben Mahan?*

Ultimately, that's what church planting is all about. It's reaching people like my grandmother's my uncle, my dad — and the generations that follow.

I wish I knew the story of every Assemblies of God church planter who, like Pastor Mahan, listened to the Holy Spirit and brought the good news of salvation to lost people. Heavens alone will tell all the stories.

We may plant churches differently today than standing on a street corner, but plant churches we must! These kinds of communities in the U.S. do not have the witness of a Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered church. Therefore, we must be more aggressive than ever in our church-planting efforts.

It is my prayer that the stories of church planters in the following pages inspire your faith and help you discern if God is calling you to plant a church in a community that desperately needs a healthy, Spirit-filled congregation.

George D. Wood
General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Springfield, Missouri



JOURNEY CHURCH / WINTER PARK, FLORIDA

RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF THE TOP 10 MOST INFLUENTIAL CHURCH PLANTS OF 2017

When J.J. Vasquez and his wife, Liz, sensed God calling them to leave their church staff positions and plant a church in Winter Park, Florida, they obeyed, even registering right away for a church planting conference.

The week of the conference, they discovered more life changes were on the way. Liz was pregnant with their third child. However, their elation turned to sorrow when they later learned during a doctor's visit that their unborn child's kidneys were not forming.

"You guys are in for a journey," the nurse told them sadly.

The couple prayed for God to heal their son, but the infant died a few hours after delivery in August 2015.

As they worked through their grief, they blogged about trusting God in difficult times. They realized God was using their loss for His glory when a woman who read the posts wrote to tell them she had decided not to abort her baby.

"We selected the name Journey Church from that experience — out of recognizing the ability of our journey to impact someone else's life in a positive way," J.J. Vasquez says. "God can turn a dark, pain-filled place into someone else's hope and miracle. That has been at the center of every sermon I preach."

The church planting of Winter Park, the couple trusted God with their ministry as well.

"Our skin color didn't match, and our age demographic didn't match," Vasquez says. "We don't blend in, but we've learned that loving people is the universal language and culture."

Vasquez says the differences have proven beneficial, both for stretching him and for attracting interest. In fact, when he tried toning back his exuberant preaching style to fit in with the region's more subdued church culture, he noticed a decline in attendance.

"I felt God was telling me to be myself," Vasquez says. "I went back to who I was as a communicator and began to see attendance climb. At the end of the day, I've got to be me."

Vasquez says successful church planting doesn't depend on a program, presentation or personality anyway. And it certainly doesn't depend on perfect circumstances. It's about remaining faithful, genuine and focused on Jesus — and trusting God for every step of the journey.

J.J. VASQUEZ

Trusting God for the Journey



J.J. Vasquez is lead pastor of Journey Church in Winter Park, Florida.