



HISPANIC CHURCH PLANTER RESIDENCY

By **Ben Hale**
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Because of Dawson's experience in supporting several church plants, it is time for us to take the next step as a sending church.

In 2015, Dawson undertook a bold, five-year missions emphasis called **Go Love Tell**, and by God's grace, it exceeded our expectations! Generous giving and careful stewardship provided Dawson's 2021 Mission Team with the opportunity to expand the impact of this successful program even further by intentionally directing remaining funds to three specific areas of ministry: revitalizing struggling churches, reaching unreached people groups, and planting second generation and ethnic churches. While ministry has already taken place in each of these areas, the largest ministry in terms of money and lasting impact will begin in early 2022 when Dawson will establish a Church Planting Residency Program. This program will train Hispanic church planters who will start eight new congregations in Alabama over the next four years.

Why is a church planting effort Dawson's next big missions endeavor? As with so many other things, the planning for our "next big thing" was delayed by the pandemic. During the months of waiting, one question was the primary motivation that eventually led us to church planting. We asked the question, "What can we do now, that will still be making a positive Kingdom impact on people in twenty-five years?" There were many good ways to use the resources with which God had blessed us, but the thought of new congregations, led by trained pastors, serving Alabama's growing Hispanic population seemed like something that Dawson was called and qualified to do. Although Dawson has supported several church plants in recent years, we have not been the sending church.

What exactly does a church planting residency entail? A church planting residency is an intensive 12 to 18 month period in which a potential church planter serves with a successful church plant and is mentored by an experienced planter to prepare for planting. It could be less than 12 months if the resident has previous planting experience, but the ideal length is 12 months. The goal of the residency is to equip the planter for greater success in planting his church by providing practical training and tools. Since this is our first experience with hosting a residency program and of being a sending church, the plans are to carefully evaluate the program as it progresses and make decisions about details of future residencies based on our experiences.

Because of our success of **Dawson's Hispanic Congregation** in planting a new Hispanic church in Fultondale, Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva, we are particularly equipped to provide residency for Hispanic planters. Joshua del Risco, pastor at

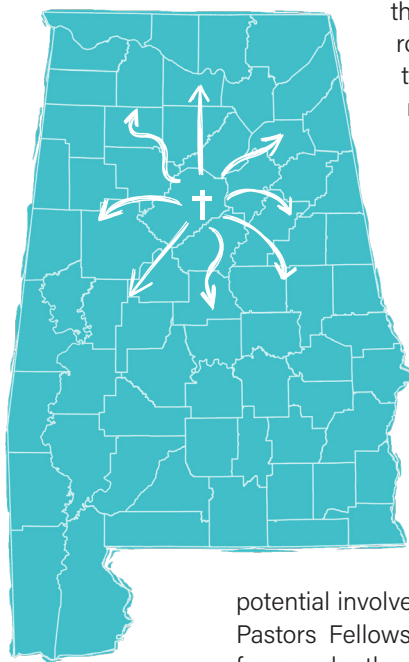
Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva, will be the primary mentor and trainer while continuing his pastoring responsibilities.

Brian Harper, the church planting catalyst at Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (ALSBOM), will help Dawson identify potential residents and conduct the NAMB assessment of them. Residents must pass that assessment before they start the residency. The planter's wife is included in that assessment to ensure her calling and commitment to planting. Each planter will be an independent contractor during their one year residency and for one year after that. At the end of that two-year period, the church plant will be incorporated and have their own 501(c)(3).

SPRING 2022

The first resident will begin in the Spring of 2022. Mid-year, we will make detailed plans for the second resident, expecting their residency to begin in January 2023. After that time, we hope to have a new resident roughly every six months. We expect that the planter will launch the plant about 3 to 6 months after the end of his residency. During the residency, the resident will be regularly coached and evaluated to determine that he is a good candidate to plant a new church. We will also use available materials from NAMB, ALSBOM, and other successful sending churches as the basis for the content of our residency program.

The "Church Planting Primer" that was developed by Pillar Church in Dumbvries, VA, will be studied in both Dawson's Hispanic Congregation and at Iglesia Vida Nueva in Fultondale to help their members understand church planting and consideration of their potential involvement. Additionally, we will create a Hispanic Pastors Fellowship to allow planters and pastors to learn from each other and support each other.



HISPANIC CHURCH FOCUS

Why will Dawson's church planting effort be primarily focused on new Hispanic churches? There is no doubt that all types of churches need to be planted to reach all types of people and Dawson will continue to be diverse in our approach. However, we have concluded that our congregation is uniquely situated to plant Hispanic churches. In Henry Blackaby's book, *Experiencing God*, he encourages people seeking to determine God's will to simply look around and observe where God is already at work and then join Him.

This was the approach we used to explore various ways to plant churches. Dawson has a very long and positive 28-year relationship with our Hispanic congregation. The members



of this congregation represent more than 14 different nations of origin. Dawson's ministerial staff is blessed to include three ministers with a total of 77 years of Hispanic ministry experience. In addition, we also have four part-time interns working with our two Hispanic congregations. Our Hispanic congregation's success with the planting of Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva in Fultondale has provided us with a model to use in future church plants. Joshua del Risco came to us with church planting experience with the North American Mission Board and two Baptist State Conventions. We see what God has been doing among us as an invitation to join Him.

OUR PARTNERS

Who will partner with Dawson to establish and operate the residency program? Dawson's residency program will include partnerships with The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and eventually other Alabama Baptist churches located in the communities where the new Hispanic congregations will be planted. Each church plant will be unique, resulting in funding coming from multiple partners. Dawson will be the primary "sending" sponsor of each church plant, which includes a five-year financial commitment. Other churches in each community will provide a local support team for each new plant.

PRAY FOR OUR PLANTERS

What can every Dawson member do to support our effort to start eight new Hispanic congregations in Alabama over the next four years? The answer is profound. We need you to intentionally pray for the following:

- Pray for the Hispanic church planters and their families that will be called and trained to plant new churches in Alabama.
- Pray for the pastors and church leaders of existing churches in the eight communities where these new congregations will be planted. Dawson will provide a trained church planter and financial resources, but these existing churches will need to be loving and supportive neighbors for their Hispanic brothers and sisters.
- Pray for the development of a Hispanic church planting network among Hispanic congregations that can provide culturally relevant support to each congregation.
- Pray for Dawson as we continue to seek to be found faithful in joining God in what He is already doing among us and around us.



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