WEEK OF PRAYER: Sharing a “Jesus dream” in Salt Lake City

*By Brandon Elrod*

(SALT LAKE CITY)—Luis Soto traveled across South America with Wycliffe Global Alliance, teaching and mobilizing in eight nations during a seven-year span. His missionary journey eventually led him and his family to Salt Lake City where he launched a new church.

“We arrived here to preach at a conference for a week,” Soto said. While there, he observed the need in Utah, a state with a majority population of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) or Mormons. The need for Bible-believing and teaching churches overwhelmed Soto and his family.

“In Salt Lake City, ninety-seven percent of people are lost,” Soto said. “In this state, just two percent is Evangelical Christian.”

Soto has lived in Salt Lake City since 2013 with his wife, Beatriz, and daughter, Eliana. He and Beatriz are 2019 Week of Prayer missionaries for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® for North American missions.

“In a place where it seems like everyone is Mormon, it’s easy to feel alone,” and the city has been labeled a graveyard for missionary work, Soto said.

“When you come here to become a church planter,” Soto explained, “you need the call of God because it’s not easy. It’s a hard place.”

When he arrived in Salt Lake City, Soto became the pastor of an established church, Iglesia Bautista de Roca de los Siglos—Rock of the Centuries Baptist Church. He launched Iglesia Bautista Gracia Eterna—Eternal Grace Baptist Church—a few years later. In both congregations, he has engrained a vision of training disciples who engage in the mission of reaching Salt Lake City.

Rather than seeking to grow a large church, Soto aspires to see a church planting movement that spans across the metro area to reach the lost. As a Puerto Rican whose native tongue is Spanish, Soto focuses primarily on the Hispanic population in and around Salt Lake City.

“Hispanic people come from California and Mexico for the American dream,” said Soto. One of his goals is to show them their need for “the Jesus dream” and the need for salvation.

The difficulties facing the Hispanic community, however, can make evangelism and discipleship difficult. Many must work two or three jobs in order to make ends meet, leaving little time for other activity. So, Soto invests in their lives through one-on-one discipleship by meeting in coffee shops, at the park and in homes.

“I see the fruit for the Hispanics in this community,” Soto said. “There’s new leadership, new church planters and new teachers, but it is a sacrifice. This is a sacrificial work day after day after day.”

Soto has seen several families being changed by the power of the gospel. Entire families start to embrace the work of the church: children, youth and parents. People are developing a passion for disciple-making.

“People have the enthusiasm for going and making other disciples,” said Soto. “I see our church making more and more disciples.” That discipleship leads to starting new churches in a city that desperately needs more gospel-proclaiming, gospel-teaching congregations.

Despite his church members’ hectic schedules, Soto has managed to arrange an in-depth discipleship group that he operates like a college class. In that class, he trains church leaders and future church planting missionaries. They study the Bible and read books on theology and ministry together.

Now, men like Jose Castillo are prepared to be sent out as missionaries themselves. While it can be difficult to send out his co-laborers in the gospel, Soto knows that it is necessary.

“The sensation is joy, and you cry,” he said. “But you have a joy because this is the purpose for a church. This is the Great Commission, ‘Go and make disciples.’”

Soto is on his way to seeing several new churches planted in Salt Lake City. Gifts to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering help to make that possible by providing resources to North American missionaries. Every penny given to the offering goes directly to support those in the field. Learn more at [anniearmstrong.com](http://www.anniearmstrong.com/).

*Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.*