

Huge 'March of Glory' Rally Reflects Pentecostal Revival in Mexico

A jubilant 17-hour celebration drew a million people to the nation's capital over Easter weekend

In what Christian leaders hailed as a historic event, a million believers from various denominations in Mexico united over the Easter weekend to proclaim Christ in the country's capital.

Observers say the Mexico City gathering—which evangelicals deemed inconceivable just 12 years ago because of anti-Protestant laws

in the predominantly Roman Catholic nation—reflects the growing revival that is sweeping through Latin America, where the great majority of believers are Pentecostals.

On April 19, pastors, ministry leaders and lay people representing more than 20,000 churches converged in the world's largest city—population more than 23 million—for Marcha de Gloria, or March of Glory.

"This is a historic day in Mexico," said Carlos Quiroa, 42, who helped start the march in the early 1990s. The pastor of Strong Tower Church, a 1,000-member charismatic congregation in Mexico City, added: "This meeting is the largest meeting ever of Christians [in Mexico]."

Celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, the March for Jesus-type event featured a 10-mile procession on Reform Avenue, one of the city's main thoroughfares, which saw four of its eight

lanes closed to traffic for the march. Costing \$300,000 and financed by numerous churches and ministries, the massive 17-hour event required hundreds of police and security personnel.

"I've never seen anything like this," said Maricela Ramírez, whose husband, Jaime, pastors 350-member Nueva Vida Foursquare Church in Santa Barbara, Calif. The couple had traveled to Mexico City along with California-based Argentinean evangelist Alberto Mottes, who was the main speaker.

"It's impressive that all of these people are here to lift up the name of Jesus," Ramírez told Charisma as she surveyed the huge procession. "Mexico City will not be the same after this."

The march—which took three hours to complete—featured a praise band and 400 dancers in white and green uniforms. Young and old alike carried Christian signs, banners and balloons with Scripture verses.

Broadcast live on 130 Christian radio stations throughout Mexico, the march culminated at the Zócalo. The city's main square, it features the National Cathedral—headquarters of the country's Catholic Church—and the National Palace, the office of the president and Mexico's lawmakers.

"The march ends here because it's the historical, political and religious heart of all of Mexico," said Cecelia Pezet, 49, pastor of a 500-member full gospel church in Mexico City who, with her sister, Mercedes, launched the march with Quiroa.

The rally—which began at 6 p.m. April 19 and ran through 7 a.m. the following day—featured continuous praise and worship,

prayer and preaching. The all-night vigil rivaled the excitement and atmosphere of a Latin American championship soccer game, as the majority of the participants stood, danced, raised their hands and shouted "Christ is alive" and "Make way for Jesus Christ"—the theme of the seventh annual event.

"Christ who walked in Israel 2,000 years ago is here today," Mottesi told the massive crowd during a steady drizzle. "I've come here to tell you that there is a great revival happening in all of Latin America, including the Mexican republic," he said.

Mottesi, 61, is among Latin America's leading evangelists, and his influence is often compared to Billy Graham's. "Mexico is about to have one of the biggest revivals in the history of Christianity," he told the crowd.

Quiroa said Mexican Christians look forward to the gathering every year. "This time of year is for vacations, but the Christians stay here, and they prefer to go to the march," said Quiroa, who estimated that about 50,000 people have accepted Christ through the marches. "They expect miracles and healings. There are many people who bring their unsaved family members to the march in order to bring them to God."

The thousands gathered at the Zócalo erupted in a loud roar, even as the rain came down harder. "Nobody is leaving, despite the rain," said Antonio Reza, 40, pastor of a Hispanic Southern Baptist Church in Moreno Valley, Calif., who attended the event as part of Mottesi's team. "They're so hungry for the power and presence of God. It's amazing."

Eric Tiansay in Mexico City