

# 'Pastor Choco' Lands on 'TIME's' 100 List

Fresh from being featured on the cover of *TIME magazine* in April, Chicago pastor Wilfredo De Jesús, known as "Pastor Choco," has been selected for the 2013 TIME 100.

The TIME 100 list, now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year, recognizes the activism, innovation and achievement of the world's most influential individuals. The issue hits Friday, April 19. De Jesús was featured on the cover and in the accompanying story of TIME's April 15 edition, "The Latino Reformation," which explored the growth of Latinos among Protestant churches across the U.S.

"It brings you into a perspective of humility and honor to be in a magazine such as *TIME* – known around the world – twice in one month," De Jesús said. "It's a great honor to be included with other people who have accomplished so many things and to be able to represent the kingdom of God and the Assemblies of God."

De Jesús is Senior Pastor of New Life Covenant Ministries, one of the fastest growing churches in Chicago and the largest Assemblies of God church in the nation. When De Jesús became pastor of the church in July 2000, it averaged 120 attendees per weekend. Today, New Life has 17,000 through four church campuses and church plants and boasts more than 130 ministries reaching those in need within the community.

With the new media exposure comes added responsibility, De Jesús said. "I don't let myself focus on the media, per se, because that comes and goes," he said. "But it's shifted my perspective – I understand that I bear upon my life the responsibility to represent the interests of the people, the Hispanic community, the **Assemblies of God** and my family."

De Jesús, who lives in Chicago with his wife Elizabeth and their three children, Alexandria, Yesenia and Wilfredo, Jr., said he plans to leverage the spotlight to “expose things that are dear to my heart, which are the poor and the widows and the orphans around the world.” He explores this life message in his first book, *Amazing Faith*.

The same week De Jesús appeared on the cover of *TIME* magazine, he traveled to a small gathering at a church in the Midwest. “I really enjoyed being in Nebraska with 44 people and five pastors somewhere by the corn fields,” he said. “I was really humbled and honored to be with them. It’s not about numbers, it’s about people.”

De Jesús is quick to point out that while he’s been pastor of New Life for 13 years, it’s only been in the last three that word has begun to get out about what’s happening there. “For many years I was in Chicago and no one knew about me, and yet we were the largest church in the Assemblies,” he said. “And I was fine with that.”

**Tommy Barnett**, senior pastor of Phoenix First Assembly of God in Phoenix, Ariz., one of the fastest growing churches in America, encouraged De Jesús to invite **George O. Wood**, the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God, to visit his church. “He was the one who told me, ‘You need to call Dr. Wood. He needs to see this.’ That’s when people started to take notice.”

Dr. Wood became a mentor and “spiritual father” to De Jesús. “I love him and respect him dearly,” De Jesús said. “He’s been very instrumental in shaping me, and also helping me to be a better pastor. Seeing how he loves the Assemblies helps me love my city and care for the poor.”

When De Jesús became aware of the potential *TIME* magazine coverage, Wood was the first phone call he made. “I wanted him to hear it from me,” he said. “My relationship with Dr. Wood

only continues to enhance my relationship with the Assemblies of God. It's through him that I'm able to expand and grow. I appreciate the movement and what we're trying to do around here, around the country and really around the world."

While De Jesús has advocated for social issues in his community, served in civic roles and even run for mayor of Chicago, his focus remains on the ministry. "I have no aspirations to go into politics," he said. "The platform I have is probably higher than one of a politician because a lot of people are skeptical of political people. I don't want to lose the trust. I've engaged those powers. I even ran for office, not to be in politics, but to open doors for the next generation of young people who feel called to that."

Being politically neutral allows him to speak into both parties without taking sides, he said. "People ask me, 'Are you Republican or Democrat? I say, "I'm neither the elephant nor the donkey. I represent the lion. That's who I represent."