**An Exciting 2018!**

Here are some of the highlights from 2018. If you are a numbers person, you will enjoy these figures. Numbers are not the whole story, but they can be instructive and encouraging. In 2018, most of our numbers are up across the board, some by amazing amounts.

* There were 452 baptisms this year at sites where TIBI helps train leaders, making a total of 3600+ since 2009.
* In 2018, TIBI had its largest graduating class again, with 15 students from 6 countries. Add to this 28 people in the first Cuban graduating class with their Bachelors degree, and we had a total of 43 graduates in 2018. We have **196** current full-time students or graduates working in **109** congregations in **71** cities in **17** countries.
* We also helped people in 4 places plant new churches, for a total of 63 churches planted since 2009.
* Our YouTube channel now has more than 682,000 views (up 200,000 views from 2017) and 6716 subscribers—a growth of 2377 subscribers over 2017—more than 50%!
* Our total number of students this year jumped by about 4500, to a little over 7000! This is a growth of almost 180% from the end of 2017. Most of this growth came from Cuba, where we learned we had not 1000 students, but more than 5000 students!

But perhaps you are more of a story person. There are two stories in particular that illustrate how God is working through TIBI. The first has to do with Cuba, of course. In October, part of TIBI’s board and all TIBI’s full-time staff went to Cuba to attend the first graduation of Cuban students with their Bachelor of Biblical Studies degree. Some of these students have been working for 6 years to finish this degree, on nights and weekends. They sacrificed time and money and effort and worked well together as a cohort. We are proud of them; they set a wonderful example, and now the next cohort of 29 has begun the bachelor program.

This was the first time since TIBI began in 2005 that all of the full-time staff has been together physically in the same place! Strange—but one of the realities of our particular educational environment. It was a blessing to just sit together and enjoy talking late at night with this wonderful group. And the board was able to visit and learn at many places and ministries of the Cuban church in Matanzas and participate in the graduation service. Tony and Liudmila and other Cubans were such gracious hosts, and everyone who went now wants to go back!

The second story from this year is that TIBI was one of three schools (with Quito and Sunset) to collaborate to offer a new Masters of Practical Theology degree, which includes 12 courses. In addition to excellent character and references, the applicants had to have completed their undergrad degree in Bible and have at least three years practical experience. Of 43 applicants, we accepted 17, from 8 countries, and began in August. The students are now in their second course, and it is a tight-knit group with a variety of talents. We believe the Lord will use this effort to help them learn, mature, and become even more effective in ministry wherever they are.

Finally, we are optimistic and excited about future projects. One of these is our biennial Israel trip, set for June 6-19, with about 45 people. A second project is an opportunity to help train new Christians among the many Muslim refugees in the Mediterranean Rim countries. The primary need with the thousands of Muslims converting to Christ is discipleship and leadership training. But so many are in transition between countries that it is difficult for mentors or teachers to stay in touch long enough to do this. TIBI’s video conference system is an ideal tool to connect new Christians with their teachers and mentors, no matter where they move—the virtual classroom is the stable meeting point. We want to help with the curriculum and organization of this project, working with church leaders and members all over Europe.

God is good! We covet God’s guidance and blessing, as well as your prayers and support as we move forward. If you’d like more information about TIBI, or if we can help you, please contact me at slaustin@cebridge.net, or (281) 787-3721.

Steve Austin