

{PROFILE}

HISPANIC COMPASSION MINISTRIES

Job Training and Mentoring in Orlando

CENTRO CRISTIANO
MISIONERO INTERNACIONAL

By Edward R. Davis



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Church Name:

Centro Cristiano Misionero Internacional

Location:

Orlando, Florida

Size: 120

Compassion Ministry:

The Jobs Partnership of Florida, Inc.

Year Started: 1999

Estimated Yearly Budget: \$240,000

Paid Staff: 3

Volunteer Staff: 21

Brief Description

The Jobs Partnership of Florida works with churches like Centro Cristiano Misionero Internacional to minister to unemployed and underemployed individuals throughout the Orlando area. Through a combination of classes teaching Biblical work principles and employability skills, and mentors providing accountability and support, the program equips participants to succeed in today's workforce.

Felix and Irene Delmonte, pastors of Centro Cristiano Misionero Internacional in Orlando, Florida, sit with expectant smiles on their faces in the second pew of First Baptist Church's Henry Chapel. They are waiting for the graduates to arrive. They've been through numerous such graduations and it is clear that they, and the rest of the guests packing the chapel, are anticipating what is to come. Soon, the graduates enter the room to the cheers and shouts of family and friends. Faces beaming, they process down the aisle as cameras flash on either side of them.

A minute is all it takes for a bystander to recognize that this is no ordinary graduation ceremony. Instead of gowns and caps, the participants wear tailored business suits and long elegant dresses. And while most graduation ceremonies mix an equal portion of solemnity with their celebration, the celebration here is unadulterated. The atmosphere can only be likened to that of a pep rally.

A time of exuberant worship follows the procession, marked by shouts of praise and hand claps from the participants. Then, a short time later, round after round of standing ovations peal forth as several graduates stand to testify how their lives have been transformed. Some, openly weeping, have to stop several times. Shouted encouragements from the crowd— "Come on!" and "You're doing good!" —help them to continue.

Just when it seems that the celebration can't get any greater, three graduates are called forward, one by one, to receive keys to cars that sit waiting for them out front. They may have gotten rides to graduation with friends and family but they'll be driving home tonight in their own car.

No, this is definitely not your typical graduation ceremony. Instead it is part of an innovative ministry Felix and Irene have helped to lead over the past four years. Called Jobs Partnership, the program seeks to forge partnerships between churches, businesses, and local government to help unemployed and underemployed individuals obtain not just a new job, but a new outlook on life. It is a program that the Delmontes have seen transform the lives of many people in their congregation and one they are hoping more churches will imitate.



GENESIS

The Delmontes are church planters. In 1995, God called them away from a life of privilege in the Dominican Republic to be missionaries to the Puerto Rican community. They assumed this meant they were to move to Puerto Rico. Instead, God brought them to central Florida where in the past eight years they have seen the Puerto Rican community grow from 200,000 to 400,000. With their infectious laughs, kind eyes, and keen sense of humor, the Delmontes are the kind of people who instantly put others at ease. God's faithfulness and the Delmontes' winning ways have grown Centro Cristiano to over one hundred members in just a few years.

They first heard about the Jobs Partnership of Florida in 1999 from Marc Stanakis, the Orlando program's director. A businessman for 17 years, Marc had a passion to connect his faith with his work. He was also frustrated by the fact that he saw few churches actively addressing the community's needs. He had been serving on staff with a huge local church in Orlando for two years when a friend from the Chamber of Commerce told him of a new workforce development project funded by the state. Its goal was to bring together the business community and the faith community to address the problem of unemployment. Marc's friend also told him that the Chamber was looking for someone to spearhead this effort. Marc was immediately intrigued. After praying about it, he accepted a position as director of the Chamber's Workforce 2020 Project. Not long after, he attended a conference in Washington, D.C. where the Jobs Partnership model was showcased.

"When I heard the story (of Jobs Partnership)," Marc relates, "I thought, 'Wow, this is a perfect fit for what we're trying to do here in Orlando!'" Marc returned home and convinced his colleagues in the Workforce 2020 office to try to replicate the Jobs Partnership. As a result, the state agreed to pay the Chamber of Commerce to conduct four pilot Jobs Partnership classes through two English-speaking and two Spanish-speaking churches.

One component of Workforce 2020 was a day-long event for business leaders to hear about creative job training and retention strategies. By featuring the Jobs Partnership as part of this "Learning Academy," Marc was able to promote it to several thousand businessmen. "(This) gave us a great start and instant credibility with other institutions," Marc notes. "It really established us."

Marc then set about gathering a team of business leaders and local pastors who would support the new ministry initiative. He recruited businessmen looking for a source of reliable employees for their businesses who were willing to hire graduates from the program. He also obtained the curriculum and other material for the course from the National Jobs Partnership's office in Raleigh. Marc promoted the program among Hispanic pastors through the Hispanic Christian Church Association of Central Florida. It was at one such Association meeting that Irene and Felix met Marc and first heard about the Jobs Partnership model. She and Felix quickly became some of the earliest supporters of the program. They agreed to promote the program among their church members, sponsor participants from the congregation, recruit mentors to cheerlead program participants, and help teach some of the Jobs Partnership classes. As Felix recalls, "At the beginning, we were the first; nobody believed in the program. When I saw the vision of the program I said, 'Hmmm. This is interesting.' I encouraged five people from our congregation to go [attend the classes]." He smiles. "The results were so powerful for the first five that everybody said, 'Wow, (let's) go for it!'"

In the four years since their church has participated in the Jobs Partnership program, Felix and Irene have seen close to a third of their church members complete the program and many lives changed.



MISSION

Created in 1996, the Jobs Partnership model was birthed out of the relationship between a Christian business man, Chris Mangum, and an African-American inner-city pastor, Donald McCoy. It seeks “to bring churches and businesses together to mentor, train and employ our country’s neediest citizens, moving them from dependency to self-sufficiency as productive citizens of the community and to true wellness.” Enjoying wide success in the Raleigh, North Carolina area, the program was launched in Orlando in 1999. With its strong Christian community, one of the largest Chambers of Commerce in the nation, and a large influx of immigrants needing the skills and confidence to break into a foreign job market, Orlando has proven to be fertile ground for the Jobs Partnership.



PROGRAM

At the heart of the Jobs Partnership program are two separate classes that meet weekly for three months. The first, The KEYS to Personal and Professional Success, is usually taught by a pastor and focuses on Biblical principles that relate to employment. It meets every Tuesday night from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The second class, The STEPS to Personal and Professional Success, is usually taught by someone who has experience in the field of human resources. It focuses on employability skills and meets on Thursdays from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Class size is usually limited to twenty students.

Felix and Irene are quick to note that the Jobs Partnership ministry requires the involvement of more than just one church. Their congregation has been a pillar for the Spanish-speaking program, sponsoring students and recruiting mentors. But it takes many partners to fulfill the ministry’s mission of helping the unemployed and underemployed.



Pastors Felix and Irene Delmonte pose with program graduates David and Suzette Torres.

Pastors from partner churches promote the Jobs Partnership in their congregations and neighborhoods, and help to identify potential candidates. Candidates for the program are people who are either currently out of work or those who are employed but are seeking a more meaningful job opportunity. Pastors meet individually with candidates to determine their willingness to attend classes throughout the twelve-week program. Candidates agree to fulfill all of their homework assignments, and complete an application and Covenant Agreement. Once individuals commit to the program, the pastor assigns each a mentor.

Mentors are church members who agree to “walk with” the Jobs Partnership student for 18 months, providing support and encouragement on a regular basis. This includes: offering counsel and correction to the student in the daily challenges of life; modeling character and integrity at home and at work; giving feedback to the sponsoring pastor on the student’s progress; and striving for personal development through on-going servant leadership training. Mentors usually attend the KEYS class each week with their assigned participants and contact them by phone at least once a week to stay updated on how their graduate is faring. After graduation, mentors continue to keep in contact with their students, but on a less frequent basis.

Businesses play a key role in helping the Jobs Partnership students to achieve success by: offering to showcase career opportunities at the STEPS class; registering their current job

T E S T I M O N Y

John Thurman, president of Westbrook Service Corporation, was faced with “the age-old issue of finding good employees and keeping them.” Specifically, he needed to identify someone to work in his warehouse. He had tried many times to find the right person for the position, but had failed. With the help of the Jobs Partnership ministry, Thurmond’s answer finally arrived in the form of Luis Rivera.

Luis came to Westbrook Corporation straight from the Jobs Partnership program, where he was a student in Felix Delmonte’s KEYS class. In the five months since working at Westbrook, Luis has proven to be, in Thurmond’s words, “an incredible blessing.”

Luis’ supervisor is Westbrook’s warehouse manager, Don La Coursiere. Don admits that he was skeptical of the Jobs Partnership program at first. His experience with Luis, though, has turned him into a true believer. According to Don, Luis displays many characteristics of an excellent employee. He is humble, able to admit when he makes a mistake, and able to take constructive criticism. Don uses phrases like “servant leader” and “a man of character” to describe Luis. He says that Luis is a “man with a passion and a desire to learn” and “a man you can count on.” Luis always has a smile on his face, Don reports, and the other warehouse employees are more enthusiastic because of Luis’ “infectious spirit.”

For Thurman and La Coursiere, Luis

Rivera represents the type of employee they most want to hire; someone who, because of a “base understanding of Biblical principles of work, manifests an enthusiasm and desire to work.” As Thurmond puts it, “I’ll take anyone with enthusiasm all day long over someone with skills but a bad attitude—because we can teach them skills.”

Thurmond says that Luis Rivera’s enthusiasm and desire to learn are indicative of graduates from the Jobs Partnership. When asked why he wants to hire more graduates of the program, he responds: “You’re getting someone who has a desire to work and that desire is framed against the backdrop of their previous experience where they’ve struggled. Like a guy who’s been a weakling his whole life who has just gone through a twelve-week strengthening course, who now has muscles and is ready to go out there and work.”

Luis’ future at Westbrook looks bright. John and Don are committed to helping him succeed and have just offered him the chance to enroll in a three-year apprenticeship program.

openings with a Clearinghouse maintained by the Jobs Partnership; seeking to employ qualified referrals from the program; providing employee benefits; and offering feedback to the church sponsor when their graduate is hired. They also agree to provide the student with a “coach” on the job. Coaches are co-workers assigned by employers to help the graduate to acclimate to his/her new job and to answer any work-related questions he/she might have.

Currently, businesses that partner with the Jobs Partnership in Orlando include Sprint, Florida Hospital, the Orange County Sheriff’s Department, Westbrook Service Corporation, and Wycliffe Bible Translators.

Community partners are another important link in the process. Community partners are key non-profit and community organizations that work with the Jobs Partnership students, removing barriers to their employment. One of the most important such organizations is Frontline Ministries. It offers a variety of services such as childcare and GED classes that many Jobs Partnership participants utilize. Both the KEYS and STEPS classes are currently held at Frontline’s spacious facility. Staff from Goodwill Industries of Florida, a second

PROGRAM continued

community partner, teach the STEPS class. Another community partner, Dress for Success, invites women in the program to choose two work outfits that have been donated by business women. Outfits are complete—right down to handbags and pantyhose. Another organization, Charity Cars, has given away 70 cars to Jobs Partnership graduates since it began collaborating with the ministry in 2001. And yet a fifth community partner, Consumer Credit Counseling Service, helps students to develop a plan for addressing any current debt they may have. It also helps students to acquire budgeting skills that will help them to avoid incurring future debt.

Much of the Jobs Partnership’s success in Orlando is due to the fact that it has formed relationships with several other organizations that can help address the various needs of participants that affect their ability to secure and retain good jobs.

All of these various organizations bring their unique strengths and services to bear on the problem of unemployment and underemployment in Orlando. Working with the Jobs Partnership over the past four years, these community partners have been able to give 300 graduates the boost they need to succeed within the workplace.

While many people believe that the language barrier is the greatest obstacle to success that Hispanic immigrants face, Eddie Moratin, the Orlando Jobs Partnership’s Business Manager, disagrees. He believes it is more often lack of confidence that hinders immigrants. He explains, “In the Hispanic community we see individuals who have had successful careers in their own countries. They have difficulty getting a job [in the United States] because of the language barrier and not knowing the local business network.” Moratin continues, “Struggling to get a job beats up your ego and [so over time] they develop a lack of courage to get out there and market themselves even if their English is pretty good. They often wind up caving in and taking a job landscaping just so they can eat.”

Rosa Garay is an example of what Moratin describes. An immigrant from Puerto Rico, Rosa has lived in the United States for 21 years. For eleven of those years she worked as a file clerk for an insurance company. Although she wasn’t happy with her job, she was afraid to apply for another one because she felt her English wasn’t good enough. Three years ago, at the encouragement of her pastors Felix and Irene Delmonte, she enrolled in the Jobs Partnership program.

Rosa describes how the class encouraged her to look for a better job. “I feel more confidence,” she says. “It doesn’t matter if there’s a language barrier. God is for me and He will open the doors.” Through the class she learned not to be afraid of her English-speaking ability but rather to see it as an asset. She revised her resume so that it listed her ability to speak English at the top. Then, after graduating, she began to look for another job. It didn’t take long for her to obtain employment at a better company for higher pay. She credits the Jobs Partnership for giving her the confidence she needed to leave her former job and look for another position.

Having received much from the Jobs Partnership ministry, Rosa now gives back. Over the last several years, she has served as a mentor for four participants. She has worked to instill in them the same type of confidence, or as she puts it, to help them “believe in God and in themselves.”



Felix and Irene congratulate a graduate of the program.



KEY RESOURCES

What has it taken to get the Jobs Partnership of Florida “up and running”? Church and ministry leaders identify several important elements:

<1> A Key Leader. It’s important to have someone who has a passion to see churches and businesses mobilized to serve the needy, someone who will devote 100 percent of his or her time to developing the program. It is helpful if this person has a background in business. With 17 years of business experience, and two years working on staff at a large church in the area, current JP director Marc Stanakis was ideally suited to bring together both the business and church communities.

<2> The National Jobs Partnership. The National Jobs Partnership, located in Raleigh, North Carolina, has been an essential resource in the success of the Orlando program. The National Office provides the curriculum for the KEYS and STEPS classes, as well as a host of other resources that help a local team get started. Most importantly, as the National Office’s David Spickard points out, they have a team of people willing to take from six to twenty-four months to walk local leaders step-by-step through the process of beginning a Jobs Partnership in their city.

<3> Prayer. Marc attributes much of the Orlando Jobs Partnership’s success to prayer. Personal prayer was an important part of the process for him because he needed guidance from God on whom he should speak with and how he should approach them. The fact that much of the work for him would be cross-cultural made this all the more necessary. The Delmontes share this commitment to prayer. Their congregation prays for both the Jobs Partnership students and the mentors who come from the church. Marc also met regularly with several other Christians at the Chamber of Commerce to pray about how “to successfully introduce the faith community into the public square of workforce development.”

<4> A Team of Pastors and Businessmen Who Have Caught the Vision. The Orlando Jobs Partnership has also been a success because of the committed people in both the church and business communities that God has raised up in response to prayer and networking. As Marc puts it, “You need some champions (for the program)...like-minded pastors and businessmen who want to see this happen.” Felix and Irene have been such champions. Their enthusiasm has contributed to the vital role the local Hispanic Christian Church Association of Central Florida has played in identifying key leaders and promoting the program in the Hispanic community.

<5> Collaboration. Partnering with other faith-based and community organizations is crucial. Students in the program often face numerous challenges. Any one of these, if left unaddressed, can derail their chance for employment. As longtime Jobs Partnership team member Angie Jimenez explains, “What good is it if a participant is helped to get a job if she has no daycare for her children, or she is unable to get to work because she has no reliable transportation?” Jimenez now serves as the Family Education Director for Frontline Ministries, where she can assist individuals with these needs. Much of the Orlando Jobs Partnership’s success is due to the fact that it has formed relationships with ministries like Frontline and others that can help address the various needs of participants. “We’ve never looked at this as though we’re going to do it on our own,” notes Marc Stanakis. “We’ve seen collaboration as the key to doing the ministry.” By partnering with such organizations as Frontline Ministries, Goodwill Industries, and Charity Cars, JP is able to minister to the participants in a holistic way and so increase their chance of success.



LESSONS LEARNED

The Delmontes and the rest of the Orlando Jobs Partnership team highlight several lessons they have learned in operating the ministry over the last several years:

► **Identify the needs of your participants and adjust the program accordingly.** As part of the program, participants are required to take a skills assessment test and to develop an individual employment plan. In this way, JP staff have identified several challenges facing participants from the Hispanic community. They have then adjusted the program to better meet these specific challenges.

One significant hurdle many Hispanics must clear when seeking employment is the language barrier. Thus, Marc quickly realized that the Jobs Partnership course needed to be made accessible to Spanish-speakers. This obviously required the recruitment of Hispanic faith leaders like Felix and Irene. It also meant translating the program materials into Spanish. Staff have learned, though, that the best approach is to translate the Biblical KEYS class into Spanish while leaving the STEPS human resources class in English. Angie Jimenez explains that they did this because they knew that the Spanish-speaking Jobs Partnership students would “most likely have to fill out applications that are in English.” Jimenez adds that the ministry also encouraged participants to stop watching Spanish TV and to enlarge their English vocabulary—especially their business vocabulary. She tells the story of one graduate who spoke everyday English very well but who was unable to fill out an employment application successfully because he was unaccustomed to the business terms it contained.

Lack of education is a second serious obstacle facing some Hispanic participants in the program. As Marc points out, “You can’t get a good job if you don’t have a GED or a high school diploma.” To address this particular need, the Orlando ministry leaders are currently considering offering a GED curriculum in Spanish.

Another challenge facing Hispanics, Angie points out, is the cultural habits they take into the American workplace that can be misconstrued. She cites several examples. “Culturally Hispanic women don’t look men in the eye, they talk softly and when they shake hands, do so in a light, feminine way,” she says. “Because of this, they may be seen by a U.S. employer as timid and unfit for a supervisory role.” Another cultural characteristic that may hinder Hispanics in the work place, Angie reports, is their tendency to express their affection through kissing and hugging. Some employers in the U.S. may consider this as disrespectful in a business setting or misinterpret it as “a come on.” So, ministry leaders have adapted their teaching of employability skills in light of these and other cultural distinctives, in order to better equip Hispanics to succeed in the U.S. work place.

► **Building relationships in the community happens one person at a time.** It is absolutely crucial to build relationships with businesses and pastors. While large events can be important for promoting the program in the business and church community, building a team of committed leaders doesn’t happen overnight. It means taking the time to build relationships with one person at a time. John Thurman, president of Westbrook Service Corporation, agrees: “While the Chamber of Commerce did a good job of exposing the Jobs Partnership, you usually have to promote it one person at a time.” As Marc puts it, “Large cattle-calls don’t work.”

► **Don’t neglect the mentoring component.** While the ministry initially included a mentoring component, Jobs Partnership leaders admit that not much effort was invested in developing it. After several years’ experience operating the program, they now have a high appreciation for the mentoring component and see it as vital. Wally Meyer is the Director of Community Relations for Wycliffe Bible Translators, an agency that has hired five Jobs Partnership graduates. He emphasizes that mentors are the key to the success of the ministry.

“Many folks who are coming into this program don’t have real life experience handling the basics of life in terms of checking accounts, rents, contracts, credit, handling finances,” Meyer explains. “Having a mentor that they can talk to, that they can call, is critical to their success.” Another employer, John Thurman, says that knowing that a graduate is in regular contact with his/her mentor gives him an extra level of confidence in the Jobs Partnership program. He appreciates, as an employer, having access to the mentor. “It’s like having a mediator,” he says.

► **For the KEYS class, select pastors with teaching ability.** The Jobs Partnership team used to have multiple pastors teach the KEYS class. But they soon realized that just because a pastor was a good preacher didn’t mean he was also a good teacher. Marc notes, “We’ve had to find people who understand how to connect the Biblical principles with workplace issues.” They have since pared their teaching team down considerably.



CHALLENGES

While upwards of 20 Hispanic churches in the Orlando area are involved in the Jobs Partnership, others have opted not to participate. The Delmontes believe this reluctance is due in part to the fact that some pastors want to know “what they going to get out of it” before they get involved with the Jobs Partnership ministry. Marc Stanakis elaborates: “There’s a sense that [the Jobs Partnership] has been effective at raising money, yet we’re asking the pastors to teach a class for free. Some of them have been reluctant to serve because...they think they should get paid.”

Another significant challenge is helping pastors to understand their obligation to minister to the physical needs of their people, not just to their spiritual needs. “If you’ve got 50 percent of your people unemployed or making \$5 an hour, you’ve got some issues,” Marc says. “They need Jesus. But they [also] need a job! How are they going to take care of themselves and their family? And the pastors who really get that, they’re the ones who are engaged with the Jobs Partnership.”

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-Marc Stanakis, Jobs Partnership Director



CHURCH CONNECTION

Pastors Felix and Irene were both early supporters of the program because they saw the direct benefits it offered their congregation. Felix explains, “Our community is in really big need. Most of our members are immigrants so they come without skills. Sometimes they don’t know too much English. Sometimes they (have) a warped view of the job market here in central Florida. If you don’t grow up here you don’t have connections (into the job market).” He smiles. “Jobs Partnership is the bridge. It has been a blessing.”

The Delmontes say that their involvement in the Jobs Partnership ministry has made their work as pastors even more satisfying. In addition to the joy of watching people secure better jobs, they have also seen new people join the church as a result of the program. Joe and Sobeida Tejada are recent examples. Although she already completed the program, Sobeida says that she wants to

repeat it, to hear again the rich Biblical content. As she puts it, “(Now) I have a new vision in Christ, I am a new person.”

One indirect benefit of the Jobs Partnership ministry has been increased giving on the part of church members. They have become more faithful to tithe as a result of taking the KEYS class, and they have seen their incomes rise as they’ve obtained higher paying jobs. All this means greater income for the church—equipping it for further ministry.

With 31 percent of their congregation having participated in the program and seven members currently volunteering as mentors, Felix and Irene can personally testify to the benefits the Jobs Partnership offers the local church. They also understand the degree to which the support of local pastors is crucial to the Job Partnership’s success. As a member of the Job Partnership’s board of directors, Irene actively promotes the program among other pastors and helps to provide oversight for it. Felix supports the program by regularly teaching the Spanish-language KEYS class.



ADVICE *For Other Pastors/Church Leaders*

Marc Stanakis encourages those leaders considering the Jobs Partnership model to step out in faith: “Just get started, then figure it out as you go along. Just do a class...if you wait until you have everything in place, you’ll never get started.” John Thurman suggests that when seeking to raise interest for the partnership among church members, a good place for pastors to start is by educating the businessmen in their congregation that business is their ministry.

Though the Jobs Partnership’s budget in Orlando is significant, the costs to an individual church to be engaged in the ministry is minimal. Primarily, churches need to provide the manpower that makes the ministry work—volunteers to do such tasks as student recruitment, mentoring, assisting with the weekly classes, or encouraging business leaders to join the Partnership. Most churches, like Centro Cristiano, also choose to provide modest financial support to the Jobs Partnership organization.

In Orlando, the Jobs Partnership ministry has helped hundreds of graduates to obtain employment. According to ministry statistics from 2002, Hispanic graduates are making an average of \$9.23 per hour—much higher pay than they obtained in the minimum wage jobs many held before enrolling in the program. Even more exciting, Jobs Partnership students are exposed to Christian truths and develop a network of personal support through their sponsoring churches. Some have become new followers of Christ.

For those church leaders not yet convinced that the Jobs Partnership has much to offer their church and community, Felix Delmonte has only three words to say: “Come and see.” He’s convinced that the results speak for themselves.

One of the key areas for success is...mentors. Because many folks who are coming into this program don’t have real life experience handling the basics of life in terms of checking accounts, rents, contracts, credit, handling finances...having a mentor that they can talk to, that they can call, is critical to their success.

— *Wally Meyer, employer who has hired 5 Jobs Partnership graduates*