

# Renewing

Understanding the context of mission today

**REACH**  
Renewing, Engaging  
and Advocating Churches

Session 1

## To Suffer and to Love: A Story from Central America

*Carmelo Alvarez*

The first shock we experienced in Central America was the crude reality of oppression and suffering. The years 1975-1978 were crucial in this learning process. Central America was experiencing a deep political and military process. The war was escalating in Nicaragua and El Salvador, with another civil war in the making in Guatemala. Costa Rica, Honduras and Panama were involved in the conflict. Nobody was neutral in Central America during these years.

The immersion process was painful and joyful simultaneously. How people that suffer so much can have lots of hope and joy, in the midst of war, poverty, racism, marginalization, torture, displacement, and exile is a question that haunted me always. In suffering and hope I rediscover the deepest meaning of the Cross and Resurrection. I came to Central America with deep frustration and pain, almost bitterness, with the Church. And a profound transformation occurred. I call it my second conversion. Some of my colleagues at the Seminary and friends from Puerto Rico noticed that my preaching was more contextual, more pastoral and concrete. I regained a sense of confidence and trust in God and the Gospel. I used to work many hours in solidarity with refugees and human rights commissions in Central America, and often did not feel the heavy load of work. It was a time of blessing and rejoices! I realize today that a "faith seeking understanding" process was coming to a mature stage. "To suffer and to love."



*Carmelo Alvarez has served in many ministries throughout his experience as a Global Ministries missionary. Some of them are the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), the Ecumenical Research Department, the Latin American Evangelical Pentecostal Commission (CEPLA) and the Evangelical Pentecostal Union of Venezuela (UEPV) based in Chicago, Illinois. He works as program consultant and visiting professor for the CEPLA and the UEPV.*