

LABI Presidential Inauguration Speech, October 15, 2011

Dr. Tommy A. Casarez

I am truly thankful to the Lord for the opportunity to serve as President of LABI; thankful to the Lord, who rescued me, saved me, set me free and filled me with the Holy Spirit at the young age of 18; thankful to the Latino Pentecostal Church that disciplined me; and thankful to the many mentors that have poured into my life and for whom I am eternally grateful.

I am most thankful for my beautiful wife, Asenath, and our 3 children: Josiah, Isabella, and Tabitha. At this time I would like to ask my wife and kids to please stand.

I am thankful to the Lord for the opportunity to serve as the President of LABI: a small school with a big vision. I said, “a small school with a big vision.”

We are a small school but we have a big vision!

What we lack in size we make up for in influence. Why, because some of the greatest Latino leaders in ministry today were birthed out of this small school.

For example, I was pleasantly surprised to know that the only formal education that the Founder of Victory Outreach International, Pastor Sonny Argonzonni Senior, had was at LABI. Come on somebody! Out of a little educational community like LABI, God brought forth a huge vision for transforming drug addicts, gang bangers, down and outers and the marginalized from around the world.

In fact, many of the parents of some of our greatest leaders were birthed here at LABI. Take for example, the father of our very own LABI Board Chairman. Dr. Isaac Canales' father, Miguel Canales, also graduated from LABI.

Everywhere you look in the Latino church, you are able to see the impact of LABI graduates from the pastors who serve in the local church, to the leadership in the pews and in the Executive Offices of our District Superintendents of NPLAD, SPD and

Arizona. LABI has left an undeniable mark of Kingdom influence in the Latino church and community.

Even in the academy LABI has served as the grassroots movement for educating our Latino people. LABI has functioned as the launching pad for many of our graduates who continued to further their studies in higher education well beyond their Bible Institute Diploma. Many of our graduates have gone on to attend our very own sister school Vanguard University and others like Life Pacific College, APU, and the University of Phoenix. For many years our graduates have also proceeded from LABI to LATS and into programs at Fuller Theological Seminary to earn their masters degrees and even to earn doctorates in ministry.

LABI's past is bright, but her future is even brighter. LABI's inheritance is rich, but her contribution to the church, community and academy will be even richer. LABI's significance is great, but her significance in the world we inhabit today will be even greater.

You know we may be a small school, but we have a big vision.

I once heard a pastor in San Diego by the name of Sergio De La Mora say, “What you see with your eyes closed is more important than what you see with them open.” Sometimes we have to close our eyes and learn to see by dreaming.

How many know dreams are free and yet they are priceless!

I have learned however from my time here at LABI to dream with my eyes wide open! Even on my way to early morning prayer at 6:30 am – at the time when some of my students are dreaming with their eyes closed and asleep in bed – I am dreaming with my eyes wide open, because all around me I see opportunities and possibilities.

Everywhere I look I see seeds of greatness. I see young people with their hearts on fire for God, with their minds passionately seeking the truth of God’s

word, and with their hands ready to serve Christ and Christ's church.

I see the next generation of leaders for ministry in the church and community that God has called right here at LABI. And, I want you to know something LABI students, "The responsibility that I have been given today I do not take lightly."

I believe it is God's calling for my life to serve as your President. I also want you to know that I am not alone. The entire LABI Dream Team has been called by God to serve at this school. This LABI team is deeply committed to serving Christ and you with excellence. To that end we continue to strive.

When I look at LABI, I see a two-year Bible college fully accredited with the Association of Biblical Higher Education (ABHE).

I believe in my heart of hearts that one day we will be an accredited two-year junior college. As an accredited two-year junior college we will maintain our focus to equip next generation leaders for a new

generation of ministry in the Latino church and community.

When we become an accredited Bible college, we will be the only one of its kind. I'd like to think that we will be the Apple computer in a PC world full of four-year universities. So, what you are looking at today is the LABI 1.2 version. We are well beyond the beta phase and the 2.0 version is due to be released next September. Come on somebody! It will definitely be worth the wait!

We will be a Latino-led, Latino-driven, and largely Latino-constituted Bible school because of the aim to prepare men and women to minister in the Latino community. I believe that the problem with Latinos and higher education is not Latinos, because there are more than 40 million Hispanics in the nation. I believe the problem is more about opportunities and accessibility. I believe LABI, as has been the case historically, will help to provide an even better

solution to the challenge of educating Latino students.

We do not intend to become something that we are not. We are not going to try to become a four-year college. We are simply going to get even better at being what we have been all along as a two-year Bible Institute. The only difference is that we are going to take LABI to an HNL. We are going to take LABI to a “hol nutha level.”

I am talking about the college level. We may not be there today, but we will be there one day, and I will be there when we do. Still, at LABI we will always be about our mission to prepare men and women spiritually, intellectually, and professionally for bilingual ministry in a rapidly changing world.

Now when I talk about building, I am not just talking about building inwardly and building outwardly, but I am also talking about building up.

I see the day when we extend our cafeteria dining area into the lawn there next to the Miranda House with a giant wooden deck, patio furniture, and large umbrellas so people can enjoy meal with a little sunlight. We may even place a large outdoor grill in the area, so students can enjoy some grilled hamburgers for lunch or dinner from time to time.

I also see a modernized library with triple the number of volumes that we have today, whether in hard copy form or on digital formats. I especially see greater use of internet accessible resources, such as, Google Scholar, Logos theological libraries, online journals, and other scholarly access points. This would all be managed under the knowledgeable guidance of a librarian with a masters degree in library science. Come on somebody!

I see a day when the internet connection to the dorms will be up and running securely, as in October 19th, which will include an increase in internet bandwidth. This will essentially give us the ability to create a wireless campus.

I see the day when we turn our cafeteria into a two-story facility with a lecture hall that has theater style seating for at least 75 people and takes up half of the entire second floor, so that we place two smaller classrooms at the other end to be used for music lessons.

I also see the day when we remodel the chapel by removing the drop ceiling, spraying insulation on the ceiling instead, painting the ceiling black, modernizing interior color scheme, adding a new sound system, and moving the stage to the opposite side of the building. Resituating the stage will allow us to better manage the sound for classes that meet during the night in classroom # 5. And all the LABIers said Amen to that!

I see the day when we fill up the dorms with 124 on-campus full-time students, hopefully within the next 4-years. We would essentially double the number of on-campus residents that we currently have on campus.

I see the day when we impact and serve in more than 40-churches every week through ministry teams that consists of three or more LABI students. If theology is done in service to the church, then those who study theology must learn to serve Christ's church. Jesus loves the church so much that the Bible says that Jesus intends to come back for her. The students of LABI are passionate about Christ and about serving the bride of Christ, the local church.

I see a day when we minister through music and drama in more than 225 churches every year. This semester our music touring group will have visited 25 churches and next semester another twenty five with a summer tour of 25 more. But, one day, I am believing we will triple the number of churches to 225 because we will have three music teams not just one. That's why I am so thankful to the Lord for sending us a Worship Pastor, Enoc Villareal and a Director of Mobilization, Isai Hernandez. The two of them together are an amazing music ministry leadership team.

You may be wondering how on God's green earth do we plan to do all of this. We'll for one, the Bible says that, "With God all things are possible." Secondly, I believe the Lord has given us an amazing LABI Dream Team of next generation leaders who know no fear of failure, have nothing to lose, everything to gain. These leaders find it exciting to learn what they don't know and to try what others say "can't be done." Third, how do we plan to accomplish all of this, with your help. With your prayers, support, and financial assistance.

In a few moments you will be given an opportunity to sow a financial seed into this ministry training ground. What I don't want you to do is to underestimate the value of your seed or God's ability to meet the needs that I have identified through the seed that you sow.

I hope to have given you many reasons to give generously today and to commit to partnering with us even into the future.

Why, because the vision of LABI is not simply about Latin American Bible Institute, but about the Latino people, the Latino community, and the Latino church that is fully committed to reaching them. It's about Los Angeles; it's about Southern California; it's about the state of California and the barrios all across this nation; and it's about the entire Spanish-speaking world that LABI students will reach and transform with the message of Jesus Christ.

We may be a small school, but we have a big vision!