

A Tribute

to Jim Billings

By Mike Shields



On January 16, 2017, our valued friend and mentor, Jim Billings, stepped into eternity. His death came unexpectedly of a fatal heart attack at age 70. It was a devastating blow to those who loved him and had the privilege of working with him down through the years.

Jim, along with his wife Thelma, will forever be identified as one of the great Christian Educators in Latin America for the Assemblies of God. He carved a place in history as a mentor to scores of pastors, as a professor to thousands, and the International Director of ISUM (The Instituto de Superacion Ministerial) for eight years from 2003 to 2011.

The Billings began their career as fully appointed missionaries to Bolivia in the early 1970's. They distinguished themselves as willing to get close to the people. They made frequent trips to the Altiplano. They met with pastors, mentored and counseled scores of leaders, and participated in ministerial training events to strengthen the churches. And they did it well in one of the

world's most difficult mission environments.

By the 1980's Jim Billings became the Director of the Bible School in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. He sharpened his skills as a professor of Homiletics. He acquired a clear grasp of Hermeneutics, Bibliogia, and Theology. He improved the buildings, recruited new students, and launched the finest period in the history of the school.

"For several years, it was my privilege to work together with Jim & Thelma in Santa Cruz, Bolivia." said Jack Bellin, former missionary to Bolivia. "I got to know this couple on a personal, behind the scenes level. Jim was an extraordinary statesman – a branch cast into bitter waters to make them sweet. Rarely willing to take a bow, Jim preferred to spotlight our students and national leaders. Adjectives to describe him: LOVING, MEEK, PATIENT, WISE."

Rev. Joel Morales, National Secretary of the Assemblies of God of Bolivia recalls *"They deeply impacted my life. Growing up I had conflicts as a pastor's kid. They understood me with such love. They helped heal my broken heart. When our family would go to their house, Hermano Jim would pray for every one of us." The Billings hosted hundreds of students and faculty in their home over their years as Directors of the Bible School in Santa Cruz.*

By the 1990's Jim had been called upon to join the ambulant faculty of ISUM. He quickly proved his value as an educator and administrator within the institution. He was invited to join the International ISUM Committee as a representative from South America. Yet his warmth and impeccable character continued to highlight what most impressed people throughout Latin America.

Jim and Thelma were invited to join the ISUM Missionary Team in 1997 to work and travel out of the headquarters in Miami, Florida. His gifts as an administrator and organizer were applied to many facets of the institution. Those qualities proved an invaluable asset to ISUM.

During Jim's very illustrious career, he taught in 15 countries, some of them many times. His evaluations as a visiting professor reflected not only his personal character qualities, but also his strong capability as a teacher and mentor to men and women in advanced ministerial studies. He was inspirational, encouraging, kind, along with strong expectations for good work. And in the background, he always made time to connect personally and spiritually with his students.

In a Facebook post, **Roció Montes de Oca** added this beautiful tribute: *A great servant of God has left this world to be united with our Lord. Brother Jim Billings was one of my teachers in ISUM. He taught me Advanced Homiletics and*

Hermeneutics. I will never forget that from him I learned that a Biblical text cannot mean something today that it never meant before. And I had the privilege of him being at my ISUM graduation. It was the last time I saw him. How I will always remember his profound kindness and appreciativeness. And now, his blue eyes will no longer look at us, but will be contemplating the beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Rest in peace, Brother Billings.

In April 2011, Jim stepped down as International Director of ISUM. Yet his value to our beloved institution made it imperative to urge him to continue on at the Executive Level. He assumed responsibilities as our International Administrator. And for the past five years, I have worked closely with Jim Billings. We had a constant flow of communication through e-mail, texts, and phone calls. He and Thelma have been the most supportive, cheerful, insightful and valuable friends to me and Monita in these years of growth and expansion of ISUM.

We always have looked forward to having Jim and Thelma make their way from their home in Roseville, California to the yearly International ISUM Executive Committee meetings. Jim was loved and appreciated as a man of impeccable integrity, unflappable in times of tense exchanges, and profoundly knowledgeable in all areas of ISUM. And for those who knew him, he was gifted with a quick, dry wit that could make the entire room break out in unexpected laughter at the little things most would miss.

On Monday night, January 17, we received the call at our home in Pembroke Pines, Florida. The voice of a stranger, a pastor at Jim and Thelma's church in California, delivered the devastating news. "Brother Jim passed away today and is with the Lord." Filled with disbelief and shock, we crumpled into an ocean of tears with broken hearts. We are still learning to deal with this inexplicable loss.

Silber Salgado, a graduate of ISUM and a national missionary to tribal people in the jungles of Honduras, wrote these comforting words.

"Humanly speaking, we are heavy to think we no longer have our beautiful teacher. I was one of his students. We know the Lord now has Him in Glory. And with excellence he completed his mission, teaching and preaching the Word. We pray for strength and peace for his family."

And so, to Jim Billings, my missionary colleague, a humble and caring man who became my mentor, to my beloved friend who today we so deeply and desperately miss; how deservedly you heard the words of Jesus. "Well done, my good and

faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your Master.”

Gracias, Hermano Jim.

Mike Shields

Director

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