



## From Crisis to Crisis with God in Control

By Chalo and Beth Sandoval

*ELA provides doctrinally sound, God-honoring and Scripturally based literature for a growing church wherever Spanish is spoken.*

Some organizations are birthed from a business venture. (ELA) [Ediciones Las Americas](#), now a legally operated business in Mexico, was first conceived in the minds of God's servants as a way to provide solid, Bible-honoring Sunday School literature for a growing church in Central America.

A full 50 years later, ELA continues to stay true to its original vision. Each season of ELA's history has produced some interesting crisis, anywhere from a major printing press breaking to an unexpected drop in the value of the Mexican peso and to changes in the laws impacting the publishing house's finances and governance. But through it all, God has been faithful.

### **A rough beginning**

It was 1958. Lessons and visuals rolled off a small press in a loaned room at the Central American Bible Institute, now the [Central American Theological Society](#)/ in Guatemala City.

Missionaries affiliated with the Central American Mission, now known as [CAM International](#), saw an almost total void of good Christian education material in the churches where they served. ELA was founded to supply this need.

The publishing house had a rough beginning, plagued by health issues and even death among those with its vision. CAM missionaries working in this new venture often had to promote and deliver the lessons themselves, traveling many miles in a tiny VW bug. Most of these faithful men and women are now with the Lord.

### **Political instability**

In light of political and economic pressures, ELA moved to Puebla, Mexico in 1965. The move allowed ELA to be comfortably situated in a building constructed for the publishing house.

Several decades ago, when major publishing houses moved their facilities out of Latin America due to the unstable economy, ELA made the decision to remain inside Mexico.

This is one of our distinctives. Because we live here, we understand the Hispanic mindset and the local church, and are able to meet its need head-on.

### **Staffing crises**

The crises we have survived include a longtime worker being fired, requiring huge severance payments, and the public relations person and editor both retiring in the same year. But the work goes on.

As recently as five years ago, ELA's staff consisted of 25 people, all believers. Today, due to a severe economic crisis, ELA has cut back to 15 workers who continue to produce the same amount of work. The government

has quite a few requirements for companies in defense of the worker. Apart from paper and salaries, this is one of the major monthly expenses ELA sustains. Having fewer workers not only saves ELA on salaries, but also on the payments the government requires.

ELA's interesting mix of business and ministry is quite self-contained. The editorial department receives an original manuscript or a book in English needing translation. The edited manuscript is then sent to our pre-press department, who get it ready for our in-house print shop where the book is printed, formatted and trimmed. The finished books are stacked in two storerooms where our customers' orders are filled and readied for shipping. The administrative department then has the thankless task of seeking payment from customers around the world.

When a book is first printed, the usual print run is 3,000 copies. Depending on market response and sales, the subsequent runs will be closer to 1,000. The manager of the storerooms has a rotating 2-year inventory. ELA will sometimes replace the cover on a given book and that will spark sales again. We no longer have an in-house artist, but have contacts to whom we can turn. Every step in the process (except for varnishing the covers) is done inside our own building, by people who know what they are doing. Several of our workers have been at their particular job for more than 30 years.

### **A changing market**

For 15 years we offered Christian Education seminars taught by our staff and even some of our authors in almost all the countries where we sell our materials. God allowed us to train and invest in the ministry of more than 10,000 teachers, superintendents and pastors. But as more Sunday school curricula have become

available, ELA has broadened the scope and reach of its ministry. Our current catalog contains more than 300 products, including Sunday school curriculum, but also tracts, visual aids, Bible study and discipleship courses, drama scripts, puppets, VBS, camps, books and more. Though we still print Sunday school materials due to continued demand, our major emphasis has shifted to books.

These include ten volumes of the [Bible Knowledge Commentary](#), nine books from the Swindoll Leadership Library, and 49 original mini Bible commentaries that cover all 66 books of the Bible. We have a brand-new, fun Bible story series for 5-8 year olds, written originally in Spanish. We want to introduce the habit or encourage parents to invest time reading these wonderful stories to their kids. Almost ready for market is Ken Sande's *The Peacemaker*, which has already touched many lives. The variety of materials we offer our customers has become another one of our distinctives.

ELA sells to distributors and bookstores in Central America, South America, Puerto Rico, the United States, Europe, and even customers in places like Australia and the Sahara Desert. Our largest market is Mexico itself.

ELA was the moving factor in starting and organizing what has now become [Expocristiana](#) in Mexico City, an annual event which is our version of CBA's International Christian Retail Show [International Christian Retail Show](#). That small beginning 14 years ago has grown to a major exposition of Christian literature and related products with over 30,000 visitors at each convention.

Our projected sales target is the lay leader and the Christian public in general. The process of educating believers to see their need for personal spiritual growth and so justify the expense of a book is often slow, though we have had some success in this

task. In developing countries, books are often considered a luxury item. Therefore, bookstores or distributors cannot sell enough product to acquire the funds needed to pay us for the books they have in inventory, which we sold them at a 60 percent discount. We will let you do the math on that one!

### **Distribution setbacks**

Because our name, Ediciones Las Américas, is rather generic, working with a distributor we were able to put basic Christian literature on the shelves of restaurant chains, bus stations, stores and popular coffee shops. Even though we thank God for this opportunity and continue to have contacts because of it, the venture was financially counterproductive. The distributor still owes us more than US\$75,000. This has made our current economic situation very precarious. We have no doubt that God led to undertake this effort, and we know He has kept the business alive in spite of the outcome. We face another crisis right now.

Postage and shipping (air freight, bus, boat, anything) has gone up so abominably that sending our materials to our customers costs *more* than the actual value of the material they are ordering! We have not been able to sell to customers in Spain, because they cannot afford to pay the postage no matter how we send it. For this and other reasons, ELA has associated itself with [Letra Viva](#), a network of evangelical book publishers in Latin America. Each member sends materials to a warehouse in Miami (which is financed by everyone in the organization). From there, orders are jointly shipped to South America, for example, reducing the costs for each small company. ELA is the oldest and one of the larger publishers in the organization, and this arrangement has been a big help to us.

### **New opportunities**

With the explosion of the technological age, which allows every socio-economic level to acquire some form of digital machine, [ELA](#) is venturing into the digital market. While most of our books are still hard copies, many of our titles are also available and being distributed in digital format through our interactive website. In a world where the bottom line seems to dominate ministry opportunities, ELA stands firm in its conservative doctrinal position. We will not publish books that teach something contrary to what we stand for, even if it means a financial loss. Ediciones Las Americas has come to symbolize trust. Anything we produce can be trusted to provide Biblically sound content. That is our commitment to God's work and the authors we choose reflect this commitment.

We choose authors who speak to believers' needs and guide them to a life of steady Christian growth, which in turn positively affects the local church. We are blessed to have such authors as Charles Ryrie, Gene Getz, Howard Hendricks, Erwin Lutzer and more. Sylvia DeYong writes for widows; Arlina Cantu is the author of our Bible story series for children; Hans Finzel writes on leadership; CAM missionaries have written many of our commentaries. It is always exciting to find a new author with a title that will greatly enhance God's work in Latin America.

### **Investing in lives**

We are excited about the books we publish and are convinced that believers who read books are those who grow spiritually. We receive emails from Hispanics in New York, saying they stumbled onto one of our books and want to know how to order more for their local church.

We hear from others who led a person to Christ through an ELA tract and want more copies of that same tract.

Believers in Colombia or Guatemala contact us, remembering the CAM missionary who first introduced them to ELA material.

Adult education programs, factories and schools have called requesting copies of *Change Your Attitude, Change Your Life*, by Robert Jeffress. Someone saw the book in a restaurant or store and realized that its principles are beneficial.

People write to thank us for investing in their lives through literature.

We will probably never know the full impact ELA has had over the years, but we do know that the only venture, be it a business or ministry, that can stand the test of time is one that is totally committed to

and dependent on God. We look to Him for our purpose, sustenance and impact.

The work can often feel tedious, heavy and even frustrating, but we keep our eyes focused on God. From crisis to crisis, we can rest in His control. He gives us reason to hope.

*Gonzalo (Chalo) and Beth Sandoval direct Ediciones Las Américas in Puebla, Mexico. They welcome your comments [ela@edicioneslasamericas.com](mailto:ela@edicioneslasamericas.com).*

*[Ediciones Las Américas](#) in Puebla, México, provides doctrinally sound, God-honoring and Scripturally based literature for a growing church wherever Spanish is spoken.*

© 2008 [David C. Cook Global Mission](#). First printed in *Cook Partners*, May, 2008.

**ChristianTrade Association International**

PO Box 62187 • Colorado Springs, CO 80962-2187 USA

TEL +1 719 432 8428 • FAX +1 719 325 7001 • [info@ChristianTrade.com](mailto:info@ChristianTrade.com) • [www.ChristianTrade.com](http://www.ChristianTrade.com)