

The Charlotte District E-Pistle

October 6, 2004

Topic: Hispanic Ministry

What do you know about Hispanic Ministry in the Charlotte District? If your answer is something vague like, “That is something that happens at Agua De Vida somewhere over on Central Avenue,” it is time for you to have a crash course on the subject.

Let me begin by stating something that I firmly believe: **every healthy congregation in the Charlotte District should become involved now in some facet of Hispanic ministry!**

If you doubt the veracity of this assertion, I urge you to check out a brand new resource through the Charlotte District Superintendent’s Office. Just before leaving for an exploratory mission to Nicaragua, Jacob Golden produced a thirty minute CD entitled: *A Ministry of Hospitality: Hispanic Ministries in the Charlotte District of the United Methodist Church, 2004*. Even though this film has not yet been selected for an Emmy Award, or even an Oscar for a short documentary, it is well produced and touches the heart and soul of our district’s expanding ministry. Schedule showing it at a meeting of your Administrative/Church Council or you mission/outreach work area.

On my desk is a map of Mecklenburg County that was authorized by the Charlotte/Mecklenburg School System that shows in color the zip code communities where Hispanics are most populous. The percentage of Hispanics in CMS rose this year to 10.4%, from 9% last year. At the elementary level, the 20 school attendance areas shaded on my map have student bodies that are 20% or more Hispanic! Six of these are colored in dark blue, indicating that they have increased five or more percentage points in this one year.

Yes, Hispanic Ministry is alive and well at Agua De Dida, “Water of Life,” under the direction of Local Pastor Augusto Caldera. But this mission congregation is now an integral part of Memorial UMC. Many Hispanics of the mission have been received into the full membership of this sponsoring congregation. This is in accordance with the United Methodist Church’s National Plan. Our vision in the Charlotte District is not to create one central Hispanic congregation to which all Latinos from Mecklenburg County attend. This would be very limiting, unnecessarily expensive, and counter-productive. The table of our Lord is inclusive, and all of God’s children are invited to sit at the same table. All our churches can foster an Hispanic mission community within the active membership of our existing churches. We can sponsor health clinics, English-as-second-language classes, legal counsel sessions, links to social services, Bible studies in Spanish, and spirited worship services that preserve essential Hispanic Christian traditions.

Alex and Ann Smythers co-chair one of the most active committees in our district structure, and they would like to hear from you. You may contact them at 704-545-3144

or write them at asmythers@carolina.rr.com They will assemble a team of persons to come to your church and instruct you in how to get engaged in a ministry that will transform the lives of all participants. Start by viewing the CD produced by Jacob. Then recruit a team of three to five who are called to this ministry. Contact the Smythers and arrange for receiving instruction in the National Plan for Hispanic Ministry through the inspiration of our district team.

Your church's Hispanic missionary may not be someone like Augusto or Rosa Caldera who have Local Pastor certification. A missionary is a committed layperson who responds to the call of God to engage in a ministry of compassion to aliens in our midst. That person may simply be a bi-lingual member who has a passion for reaching out to the Hispanics within his or her neighborhood. Hispanic ministry begins when a congregation cultivates an atmosphere of trust and compassion within a nearby community of Latinos.

Read the Charlotte District Hispanic Mission and Outreach newsletter that is posted on our district website. There you can learn about the ESL classes at Blair Road, the *Mi Casa, Su Casa* social outreach ministry sponsored by Central UMC, or the initiatives taken by local pastor Rosa Caldera at Cokesbury UMC.

Within the next few weeks the District Hispanic Committee, through the encouragement and guidance of Frank Ramos, will conduct a survey of potential ministry initiatives in **rural areas** of the Charlotte District. If your church is rural (according to Duke Endowment standards) and you wish to have your parish area to be included in this study, contact the Smythers immediately.

Now that I have begun the long fall process of conducting charge conferences, I sense a desire among most of our congregations to maintain a focus upon the transcendent task of **following Jesus, making disciples, and transforming the world**. Many pastors and leaders among the laity are taking seriously the challenge of Claude Payne in his *Reclaiming the Great Commission* to transform our maintenance churches into **mission outposts**. Hispanic ministry initiatives are an application of that focus to the changing environment in which we seek to remain faithful.

Grace and peace,

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