

October 31, 2006

Electronic
Newsletter



Charlotte District

E-Connections



In this edition of the *Charlotte District E-Connections*, we shall focus upon the status of our Latino/Hispanic ministry. I have stated consistently that every healthy congregation in our district should be engaged in this expression of outreach through some facet of ministry. The massive growth in population in our region is driven by the migration of persons across the southern borders of our nation. How we respond to the reality of their presence in the Charlotte region may well define our faithfulness to the biblical concept of hospitality and the mandate of Christ.

The Charlotte District Committee on Latino Ministries has consistently guided our district into creative ways of bringing the compassion of Christ into the lives of new citizens from Central and South America who have come to this land of economic opportunity. Many of them have experienced alienation and flagrant hostility. The United Methodist churches of this region are called to be faithful to the spiritual discipline of hospitality. Alex and Ann Smythers give the full measure of their devotion to the leadership of this committee. They especially need our cooperation, prayers, spiritual encouragement, and assistance. They became seriously interested in Latino missions when they took a Heifer International trip to Honduras in 2000. Subsequently, they have taken several trips to Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala. Ann and Alex recently retired from their jobs and feel God's call to engage in this ministry of compassion. In recent years, they have given their discretionary time toward the task of studying Latino culture and language. They remain active at Blair Road UMC and teach as well as coordinate the English as Second Language program there. They also host various activities for internationals. These graduates of Duke University have been co-chairs of the Charlotte District Latino Ministries Committee since 2004.

During this summer the Smythers were deeply upset by the way in which immigration became a political weapon, bringing unnecessary hardship to a vast number of law-abiding, documented Latinos. When elected officials in the town of Mint Hill inappropriately fostered resolutions that are not the jurisdiction of municipalities, Alex spoke out as a concerned Christian. He had my endorsement. After sharing his thoughts with the District Committee on Latino Ministries in September, he wrote his theological reflections in a document entitled, "United Methodist Values and Latino Immigrants." The district committee has voted to give its enthusiastic support to this document printed below. I urge each pastor to read this prayerfully and share it in printed form with leaders of your church. You may want to discuss its content openly; so, you are cordially invited to attend the next session of our District Latino Missions Committee, November 15th, 3:30 p.m., Memorial UMC, 4012 Central Avenue, Charlotte, NC 28205.

Grace and peace,

George

Charlotte District Superintendent

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Charlotte District Latino Ministries



Alex and Ann Smythers

Your Charlotte District Latino Missions Committee believes this is a period of opportunity and crisis in Charlotte, NC and around the US. We want to invite you to help us return to the values of John Wesley in serving the poor and the needy by helping to educate our own members.

Our culture is blaming illegal immigrants for many of the problems facing us all. Fears of terrorism and frustration with inaction by the federal government are making people angry. Hard working Americans see the purchasing power of their paychecks decline every week. Many citizens can no longer afford medical care, college or gasoline. Concerns for personal safety have become irrational.

The causes of crime, unemployment, low wages, high prices, high taxes and terrorism are not the Latino immigrants streaming across our unprotected southern borders. Our family values, schools, community values and economy are not being destroyed by Latino immigrants.

We have met many of the immigrants here and in several of their own countries. Most of these people are hard working, family oriented, hospitable people who have been forced to leave their native countries by politics, discrimination, poverty, and hopelessness. Many have been enticed here by US employers to work hard at jobs that US citizens cannot or will not do ourselves. They pay taxes (which are deducted from their low wage paychecks), lower the cost of goods and services, and build Charlotte brick by brick. They love their children, hate crime, and yearn to live in "the most Christian country in the world." They are, however, in no position to defend themselves.

These people are like our grandparents and great-grandparents who came from Europe, Africa or Asia to build a better life and enjoy the benefits of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." They want to learn English. They want criminals to be jailed or deported. They want to help build an educated, upwardly-mobile community. They want to join scouts and churches. In short they are very much like you and me and our grandparents' parents.

Latinos are victims of exorbitant interest rates, unfair labor practices, restrictions on drivers' licenses, crime in the streets, discrimination and injustices of all sorts. Immigrants are afraid of the police, landlords and employers. They are prevented from traveling, and they are treated as undesirables.

God has sent these people to us. We have an important message for them, that God loves each one of us, and that Christians need to help each other. Are we giving them this message? Who will give the message to them if we don't? How will our immigrant's descriptions of US Christianity sound to their families and friends in their home countries? What will our own children think about Christian love?

We do not believe it is necessary to surrender control of our borders or who should be invited or permitted to reside in our country in order to honor our responsibilities as Christians. We can be evangelistic, kind, hospitable and helpful to the poor among us at the same time that we support the need for order and control. Methodists need your leadership and training to learn to do this. Feelings of fear and hostility should not keep us from simple acts of kindness and hospitality, nor should they keep us from seeking justice for the poor.

Mint Hill is not the only local government that may be proposing to take on the responsibility of the federal government by making and enforcing its own immigration laws. According to the *Charlotte Observer* (August 23, 2006), their proposals "would punish businesses that employ, rent to or provide goods and social services to those who are undocumented. They would lose their permit for five years for a first violation; 10 years for subsequent violations. Under the proposal, those who rent to undocumented immigrants would also face a \$1,000 fine." We interpret this to mean that simple acts of Christian charity would be illegal. Our members need to understand how this undermines our Methodist beliefs and traditions.

Because of ignorance, fear and misunderstanding, many of our own members are part of the problem. It is our prayerful belief that we as leaders must speak out against this threat to our spiritual values and moral codes. If you are a pastor, please speak your mind and convictions from the pulpit. If you are a teacher, please pass on our Methodist perspective. The rest of us need to pray and study. The timing and proximity of this problem makes it urgent.

How can we help you?

Charlotte District Latino Ministries
Alex and Ann Smythers, Co-chairs
asmithers@carolina.rr.com
Tel: 704-545-3144

Charlotte District Latino Ministries (continued)

We believe the message of the Bible is clear and without loopholes:

LEV 19:33 When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him.

LEV 19:34 The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

MT 25:35 For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited me in,

MT 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.

LK 6:31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

LK 6:32 If you love those that love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.

ACTS 17:26 From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places they should live.

Official United Methodist positions on the web: [Immigrants Year 2000 Resolutions](#), [UMC Study Guides](#), [political](#)



Posada at Blair Road UMC.



Providing homework help to an ESL student.



Posada at Oak Grove UMC.

Role of Latino Missioner: A Clarifying Message from Alex and Ann



ESL Class

Charlotte remains one of the fastest growing cities in the U.S. in numbers of Spanish-speaking people. These people have been sent to us by God, and we have a unique opportunity to teach them about Jesus and how Christianity works in our country.

All of our large churches, many of our middle-size churches, and a few of our small churches are currently capable of sponsoring a missioner who will coordinate a ministry among Latino/Hispanic people. **All of our healthy churches can participate in this ministry in some fashion.**

What does this actually mean to YOUR congregation? How can the District help you?

The job of a missioner is easy to envision but difficult to do. Yet, it is a job that anyone with a heart for helping others can realistically accept.

The District Committee on Latino Ministry feels that anyone who provides services to Latinos in a leading role can be considered a “Latino Missioner.” This can include (but is not limited to) ESL teachers, soccer coaches, health workers, door-to-door evangelists, part-time local pastors with a heart for this ministry, student pastors, Latino festival organizers, child care workers, translation helpers, celebration and worship organizers, Bible study teachers, Sunday School teachers, vacation Bible school leaders, Boy and Girl Scout leaders, legal or community service clinic organizers, driving or ride coordinators, nurses, or Spanish teachers.

The United Methodist church has a detailed “National Plan” calling for a lay missioner to take part in multiple training sessions (which have generally involved weekends in Greensboro) taught in English and in Spanish, self study guided by a Pastor-Mentor, and an active outreach into the Spanish/Portuguese speaking community. These lay missioners are expected to provide services, build trust, explain the United Methodist Church, teach Bible Study, and establish “lay missions” (house churches). The implementation of this plan anticipates a **maximum financial support of \$26,000 per year** – including expenses, benefits and a small pay incentive. A candidate for this position must be a self-motivated missioner. A missioner is a part-time employee of the church and will likely be bi-vocational or retired.

The Charlotte District Committee on Latino Ministry has found it very difficult to recruit a missioner of this description. Pfeiffer University, under the leadership of Professor Philip Wingeier-Rayo, is training persons in Christian Missions. But, as we initiate these ministries, we cannot hire persons who require full-time employment in this field of expertise. Exceptions include Augusto Caldera, a full-time local pastor who does an extraordinary ministry in the Latino corridor near Memorial UMC. He and his wife Rosa (a volunteer) labor among at least five house churches. Tim Webster is a full-time associate pastor at Harrison UMC. Carolina Walton is a missioner who works out of the Fair View congregation with the temporary financial help of Duke Endowment funds along with assistance from our district committee.

Methodists who are actually working in our district with Latino people include volunteers in our churches who feel a special calling from God to help in this highly rewarding work. These receive little or no pay. The “National Plan” has been difficult for us to execute. No one in our district is actually receiving the proposed \$26,000 salary.

Successful Latino ministries require persistence and creativity. In the Charlotte District we have started English classes (ESL), soccer clinics, Bible studies, women’s workgroups, child care, Spanish language services, Posada (Christmas) celebrations, Spanish congregations, and lay missions. We have helped other churches with their Latino programs. The Latino Committee of your district can help your church with training, setup and seed money.

Role of Latino Missioner: A Clarifying Message from Alex and Ann

We desperately need more people and more churches to expand this work in our community. There are two things we would like YOU to do to help us:

First, communicate the descriptions of what a Lay Missioner really is and does in Charlotte to everyone in your church who you think MIGHT be interested. No one will meet all of the following varied “ideals,” but it will help to keep them in mind. An “Ideal Lay Missioner” will fit the following description:

- a. A legally documented immigrant from a Latin country, OR a U.S. citizen with a Latino heritage, OR any person with a great heart for the Latino people.
- b. A person who is currently retired or employed, but able to work 10-20 hours per week for this job within a maximum budget including expenses and compensation pay of (up to) \$26,000 per year (but probably much lower).
- c. A person familiar with United Methodist theology and willing to learn more.
- d. A person who is bi-lingual in English and Spanish – or well on the way.
- e. A person with teaching skills or experience (especially Sunday School), evangelism or social work skills, sports experience, musical skills or Latino community contacts.
- f. Someone who has been to (or is willing to attend) Frank Ramos' training modules for Lay Missioners.
- g. A person who is sensitive to the two-way nature of the mission in terms of its importance to both Latinos and Anglos.

Second, discuss the need for Latino Missions with your church council and ask them to consider prayerfully sponsoring (and financing) someone from your own congregation or community who feels called to accept this kind of mission. A sponsoring congregation should do the following things:

- a. Be a "willing and able" congregation. The church does not have to be 100% ready to provide all their services and activities in English and Spanish, but they need to be willing to move in the direction of being friendly and hospitable to a new group of God's children.
- b. Have a core group of members enthusiastic about the new ministry, at least one strong leader (a "hero") and a supportive pastor.
- c. Be willing to assume a steadily growing financial commitment. It will probably take many years before the possible increase in Latino membership is able to “pay their own way” through their donations. The Latinos will likely remain a “mission group” within the sponsoring congregation or enter the mainstream membership of that congregation.
- d. Be patient. Latinos are not used to acceptance or help from Anglos. It will take time to build trust and to learn how to relate to people with different backgrounds and expectations.

Working directly with the poor and with immigrants is very Wesleyan. It is indeed spiritually rewarding. We want eventually to involve all church members in some aspect of this ministry. This is our corporate mission because these are God's people in our midst.

The measure of our success will not be how many new members we get, but simply whether or not a new Latino person or family will be able to come into our churches and feel the presence of Christ, knowing that they are welcomed and loved.

This is YOUR mission. The Charlotte District Committee on Latino Ministries is able to help with training, advice and funding as you start; but the long term responsibility for the mission and the financial support of the missioner is the role of the sponsoring congregation. Most important: the joy of this service belongs also to the sponsoring church.

Vaya con Dios (Go with God),

Alex and Ann Smythers

Co-chairs
Charlotte District Committee on Latino Ministries

Upcoming Events/Activities

Wednesday, November 1, 2006, 7:00 p.m.

District All Saints Day Celebration

First United Methodist Church, 501 N. Tryon Street, Charlotte, NC

Thursday, November 2, 2006, 9:30 a.m.

District Clergy Fellowship at Dilworth UMC

This worship experience will be a special "Bluegrass Communion" service. This time we shall not have a special guest but will focus upon meeting with our friends, engaging in a meaningful act of worship, and celebrating the Eucharist. There will be a sermon/meditation based upon I Peter 5:1-11 which shall reflect upon what God is doing through us in the Charlotte District. A worship planning team will lead some creative expressions of music during this service. The hymns and service music (doxology, call to prayer, Great Thanksgiving responses) are all set to familiar folk tunes like "I'll Fly Away" and "Will the Circle Be Unbroken." Guitar, banjo, mandolin, dobro, fiddle, dulcimer, and bass players are welcome (everything in the key of 'G'.)

District Monthly Communion Services will be held at various locations throughout our district:

Tuesday, November 7 at 8:00 a.m. — Salem UMC, Denver, NC

Tuesday, December 5 at 8:00 a.m. — First UMC, Charlotte, NC

Tuesday, January 2 at 8:00 a.m.— St. Mark's UMC, Charlotte, NC

Contact the district office for additional details (704-525-3395).

Men's Retreat, November 17-19, 2006

Rich Campe, president of the Light of Christ UMC Men's group and Leonard Wheeler, former Panthers player, extend an invitation to a Men's Retreat, *Ignite the Fire Within*, the weekend of November 17-19 at Camp Thunderbird. Topics will include *Leverage Momentum Strategy*-Philippians 4:13, *Self Awareness and Outcome Clarity*-2 Corinthians 3:18, *Perpetual Success Conditioning*-Philippians 3:14. Visit www.ignitethefirewithin.org/index.html for more information and registration.

Learn to Fund Your Vision through Grants

If you are looking for new ways to fund your vision for ministry, come to the grant writing workshop sponsored by WNCC Ethnic and Justice Ministries. You may choose to attend one of two identical one-day sessions at WNCC Memorial Center, Charlotte on **Nov. 16 and 17**. The focus is providing technical assistance for capacity building, funding development and building relationships with funders following the biblical model. Register by Nov. 6. Details and applications are available at <http://www.wnccumc.org/eth/grantwriting.pdf>

Dates Announced for Christian Education Seminars

Dates for the second series of Christian education seminars sponsored by the WNCC Offices of Nurture/Christian Education and Ethnic/Justice Ministries are set for **Nov. 9-11, Jan. 25-27 and Mar. 29-31**. CEUs are available for participants who attend all of the sessions. For details and the application, see <http://www.wnccumc.org/eth/christianevent.htm>

Advent Wreath Meditations Now Available

It is not too early to plan for Advent. The General Board of Discipleship has prepared Advent wreath meditations based on this year's lectionary. For more information, go to http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item_id=19161.

Youth Worker Summit to Draw Big Crowd – Nov. 12-15

Nearly 600 adult workers in youth ministry are expected at the Youth Worker Summit, Nov. 12-15 at Walt Disney World's Coronado Springs Resort near Orlando. "We Do Not Lose Heart" is the theme of the event planned by the Ecumenical Youth Ministries Staff Team of the National Council of Churches of Christ. Three days will include dialogue/networking with other youth ministry professionals, worship, leadership development, and resource sharing. Details: <http://www.youthworkersummit.org>.

Exploration 2006 – November 17-18

This is an event for high school seniors through age 24 considering ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church, held in Jacksonville, Florida. For more information, go to www.jbhem.org/exploration. A few scholarships to the upcoming Exploration event, sponsored by the general church are available for persons who may be feeling a leaning toward ordained ministry. Your contact person at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry is Meg Lassiat (mlassiat@gbhem.org).

Upcoming Events/Activities

Accountable Discipleship Workshop Generates Excitement

Dr. Steven Manskar inspired both clergy and laity at the first of three Accountable Discipleship workshops sponsored by the WNCC Council on Laity. Manskar, director of the accountable discipleship for the General Board of Discipleship, focuses on the concept of covenant discipleship groups, a legacy of John Wesley. It is this dynamic that provides growth from church membership to Christian discipleship. If you missed the recent workshop at Providence UMC, Charlotte, you may want to register for a presentation at another site. Read the story and sign up for a workshop at <http://www.wnccumc.org/vsn/discipleship.htm>

Giving, Pledges for Africa University Approaches \$600,000

WNCC United Methodists have passed the 25 percent mark of the \$2 million goal for the conference-wide mission initiative. As of August, we have raised or pledged \$579,437.24 to build a dormitory and endow scholarships at Africa University in Zimbabwe. Learn more about Africa University and read the giving totals by district at <http://www.wnccumc.org/vsn/au5.htm>
The latest issue of *AU Today* provides the broad view of the support of The United Methodist Church to Africa University and some results! See <http://www.wnccumc.org/vsn/au2.htm>

Grants Encourage Building Team Participation

Want to go on a building team project, but think you can't afford it? Grants and scholarships are available to qualifying ethnic minorities and those from rural churches that qualify for Duke Endowment funds. They are awarded for first-time building team participation in 2007. Another grant, by the Fellows Committee, is based on need. Learn about these funds at http://www.wnccumc.org/bgt/additional_support.htm.

Missionaries Visit Conference

Anne Kolbe, missionary to Cambodia, will be available for church visits Oct. 15 through the end of November. Also, Susan Henry, missionary to Bolivia will itinerate in our conference during January. If you would like either missionary to visit your church, please contact Mike Collins at mcollins@wnccumc.org with three possible dates/times. Priority will be given to churches with covenant relationships with Kolbe and Henry along with those sponsoring ministries in Cambodia and Bolivia. Read about these and other missionaries at <http://www.wnccumc.org/mis/missionaries.htm>. Do you want to sponsor a missionary? See the Mission Guidebook at <http://www.wnccumc.org/pub/missionguidebook.htm>.

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