

Mike Fernandez
Kingdom Seekers
Topic: Diversity "Including Those Who Are Alone"

Necesita ayuda? Vamos a llamar a esto numero.
Gustaria ir a con nosotros? Siguieme. Vamos.
Esto es paralos ninos.
Esta es mi pastor.
El bano este a la deracha.
Aqui es una Biblia en espanol para usted.
Es graits.
Vuelve pronto.

Are we really ready and willing to reach everyone in the North Georgia Conference with the Gospel? Are we prepared to include those who feel alone or isolated, those who are aliens or strangers in a strange land? If we are unwilling to learn at least some of these phrases, or at the very least, post them in and around our churches, we are neither willing nor ready to communicate with the fastest growing segment of our population in Georgia - Hispanics. We are unwilling or unprepared to ask if they need help, ask them to allow us to call a number for help, ask if they would like to join us for a meal, introduce them to a pastor, direct them to a restroom, offer them a free Spanish Bible, or invite them to return again soon.

To refuse to learn any Spanish is to refuse to serve our God as ministers in this diverse mission field. To refuse to speak to them, to refuse to minister to their needs, is not unlike Jonah's refusal of Nineveh. Jonah (Jonah 3) hated these people for their wickedness (Nahum 3). This is not unlike asking a Jew to share God's Word with a Nazi. Clearly, Jonah had his reasons for running from God, and we have ours. But Jonah was accountable to God, and so are we.

In our LUMC sessions I have not met any pastor or lay person from any church who said they have an organized approach to reaching Hispanics. Some pointed to Hispanic churches, implying that it was up to them. Others were comfortable leaving them to Roman Catholic Churches in the area. And one minister shrugged it off, pointing out that most of them are here illegally anyway. Even among the largest, fastest growing churches represented at LUMC I did not hear any mention of the fastest growing segment of our population. Instead, I heard enthusiasm over two or more worship services, youth, contemporary services, and new buildings - which is good. And I am not saying there aren't efforts in the North Georgia Conference to reach people who are different from us. But in all of our

hours together I haven't heard any reference to it. We are simply ignoring people who are alone and seeking ways to bring their families to our area.

In small groups and in our large meetings together I have heard talk of many helpful, essential programs for reaching disaster victims, pregnant teens, those who are recovering from drug and alcohol abuse, people who like contemporary music, people who want to worship at 9:00, people who want to worship at 11:00, people who want Wi-Fi, people who want a playground or a gym. And we have crossed the barriers of gender and race, and are openly talking about sexual orientation. Yet, we are not talking about the fastest growing segment in our Conference's population.

I challenge the North Georgia Conference to organize the laity to address this need. Pastors do not need to become fluent in Spanish. Plenty of people already are. They simply need to be organized and used on a Conference level. Not just in one meeting or at one church in a remote corner of Northeast Georgia.

I don't speak much Spanish, but I feel now that I must learn if I am to minister to my community. My grandfather migrated from Spain, and punished my father and his siblings when he caught them speaking their native Spanish in their home. Such was his desire for them to learn English. We can't control anyone's desire or ability to learn English. But we can resolve to reach out to them anyway - with the most essential, basic, elementary Spanish we can muster. But I assure you, this little bit of awkward Spanish will be the sweetest sound to their ears.

More than 100 Hispanic people move into Georgia every day. By 2045 Georgia's population is projected to be 44% Hispanic. Nearly one million Hispanics, that's nearly 10% of Georgia's population, has doubled in the last 10 years - a growth of 96%. It is no longer enough to raise a few dollars, pack our bags, travel to other lands, and bring back some photos and testimonies to our friends. The mission field has come to the North Georgia Conference.

I challenge the North Georgia Conference and the Board of Laity to assist in equipping each church (pastors and laity working together) to reach people who are different from us. I challenge you to recognize diversity, embrace diversity, and minister in the foreign mission field that has come to our back door. In 2045 let us not look back and say that the Methodist Church missed its calling to reach nearly half of the souls in our Conference with the Gospel.