

EDITORIAL: Demographic data point to needs_90604

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Texas' demographic trends have been both fascinating and disturbing lately.

Most fascinating: Our Lone Star State no longer claims a majority population. A U.S. Census Bureau survey revealed Anglos ceased being the majority ethnic group in Texas sometime last year—for the first time since at least 1845, when Texas became a state.

Texas is about 49.5 percent Anglo, 35.3 percent Hispanic, 10.8 percent African-American, 3 percent Asian-American and 1.4 percent others.

Two trendlines caused the Anglo population to slip below 50 percent of the total faster than predicted, state demographer Steve Murdoch explained to the Associated Press. Primarily, Hispanics are increasing much faster than the rest of the population, due to international immigration and the state's highest birth rates. Secondarily, Anglo growth has slowed, due to the slumping economy and a subsequent downturn of business-related migration to Texas.

Most disturbing: Texas leads the nation in the percentage of uninsured residents. Almost one in four Texans—24.6 percent of the population—does not have health insurance. That's more than 3 percent higher than the next-

to-worst state, New Mexico. This represents a personal and family crisis for the state's uninsured. It also reflects a financial crisis for all of us, since we indirectly pick up the tab for indigent healthcare. But what did we expect in the wake of state cutbacks in the Children's Health Insurance Program and other safety nets for the most vulnerable people in our state?

Texas also lags behind the nation in median annual household income. The national figure was \$43,381 last year; Texas' was \$40,934. And we're one of the poorest states, with 15.8 percent of Texas residents living below the poverty line.

For generations, Texans have been justifiably proud of our state. The land and the people are vast, expansive, resourceful and productive. We're entrepreneurial and industrious and possess an often-imitated, seldom-duplicated can-do spirit. Unfortunately, we also possess a reputation as one of the meanest states. The indicators of heartlessness seem to grow, particularly with the passing of each legislative session, as we seek to balance our budget on the backs of people already on their knees at the bottom of the socio-economic pile.

These new demographic studies connect. The economic status of the growing Hispanic population contributes to the state's dismal showing in the national standard-of-living rankings. As Murdoch notes, multiple "historical and discriminatory factors" cause Texas Hispanics to make low wages. And because poor Hispanics comprise a bigger percentage of the population, the statewide statistics decline.

On one level, immigration makes this challenge seem almost intractable. Although immigrants' cheap labor benefits some sectors of the economy, the flood of undocumented and illegal immigrants raises poverty levels and strains schools, hospitals and service agencies.

On another level, that doesn't make a difference. Texans are who they are.

God doesn't care where they were born and whether they are illegal aliens or fifth-generation landowners. Christian people should care for their needs, and Baptists should lead the way.

We already do much. Our Baptist General Convention of Texas childcare and healthcare agencies provide extensive help for “the least of these” across Texas. Numerous other endeavors, from the BGCT's River Ministry, to associational missions, to county and community benevolence ministries provide a safety net for at-risk families. Christian Women's Job Corps and English-as-a-Second-Language programs prepare unskilled and sometimes untrained people to enter the job market. Countless missional churches reach out to countless people in countless ways.

But the needs are great, and we need to do more. We must increase our churches' benevolence and ministry budgets, give more to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions and to local missions, and volunteer more time to hands-on ministries.

Jesus loves all Texans. He measures our love for him by how we show our love to others.

We must advocate in the public square. We must make sure every school system in Texas has the resources to provide a good education for every child. This investment will produce dividends-not only for the children, but for their families, communities and the state-for generations. We also must make sure each child in our state has access to decent healthcare.

Jesus doesn't care if they're “immigrant” or “native Texan.” And neither should we.

-Marv Knox

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in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.