

Hispanic and Anglo churches trading places_20904

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Hispanic and Anglo congregations are trading places as Anglo churches become worship-driven and their Hispanic counterparts move toward a Bible study-driven model, according to some Texas Baptist leaders.

Anglo churches increasingly emphasize worship services as the entry point for newcomers and the catalyst for ministry while de-emphasizing the Bible study model that powered the church growth boom of the 20th century, said Dennis Parrott, director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Bible Study/Discipleship Center.

Tim Studstill, director of the BGCT music and worship office, views large sales numbers of praise music directed toward Anglo churches and increase in worship model packages for sale as signs of a surging emphasis on worship in Anglo churches.

Church leaders are coming to realize worship represents a congregation's identity and its values, Studstill added.

"What I'm seeing is more and more churches realize worship is integral in

who they are,” he said.

On the other hand, Hispanic churches are moving away from the worship-driven model they historically have used and toward Bible study groups as vehicles for church growth, Parrott said.

This is visible along the Texas-Mexico border, where churches expand along large stretches of land through small Bible studies, but it also can be seen across the state.

According to statistics from the BGCT research information service, 65 percent of Hispanics enrolled in Bible studies attend the classes, well above the 46 percent average of the entire convention.

In contrast, 44 percent of people enrolled in Anglo Bible studies actually attend them.

Jim Garcia, director of the BGCT office of Hispanic work, and Jorge Diaz, general director of the Baptist Spanish Publishing House in El Paso, noted a continuing strong emphasis on worship in Hispanic churches. But their growth is occurring through small groups.

Groups typically meet in houses on any day of the week. Members often dress casually, and activities may include a meal and singing, along with the Bible study.

“There is a hunger for Bible study,” Garcia said. “There is not a hunger for the structure we call Sunday school.”

Small groups urge fellowship and community, important aspects in Hispanic culture, Garcia and Diaz said.

For this reason, the small-group approach will gain strength, Diaz added.

The shift to a small-group-driven church has pushed Hispanics to look for

resources to make their effort on par with those in Anglo churches, Parrot noted.

Hispanics are coming to BGCT-sponsored Bible study and leadership training events in stronger numbers than Anglos. Hispanics are open to ideas from Hispanics and non-Hispanics, Spanish speakers and non-Spanish speakers, he added.

About one-fourth of BGCT-affiliated Hispanic churches are using the BaptistWay Press curriculum, including the publisher's Spanish materials that parallel the English studies. Many use the free online materials.

They also have taken particular advantage in seeking the BGCT Bible Study/Discipleship Center's help with the Add LIFE program, certification efforts and ministry development, Parrott noted.

Many Hispanic church workers are laypeople who were placed in leadership positions without having any formal training, Parrot said. The BGCT events provide an opportunity to gain more knowledge.

“I think that a lot of the Hispanic churches are just coming of age in the sense they are realizing their need for training,” he said.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.