

Understand Hispanic culture before evangelizing, pastor advises Anglos_12604

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RICHARDSON Texas Baptists must understand Hispanics before they effectively can reach them, according to Rolando Rodriguez, pastor of Hampton Place Baptist Church in Dallas.

Hispanics are flooding communities, but Anglo churches are not reaching them, Rodriguez noted.

This leaves Anglo congregations that do not match increasingly Hispanic neighborhoods. To prevent this from occurring, church leaders need to alter their ministries to meet Hispanic needs as quickly as possible.

Rolando
Rodriguez,
pastor of
Hampton
Place
Baptist
Church in
Dallas,
leads a
missions
and
evangelism
breakout
session.

“Somehow you have to make a transition when you can,” he said during the Texas Evangelism and Missions Conference at First Baptist Church in Richardson. “Otherwise it will be too late.”

But to know the needs, Texas Baptists need to know the culture, he continued. Evangelism methods that effectively reach Anglos will not necessarily convert Hispanics.

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Immigrants often do not speak English, and some do not want to learn,

Rodriguez noted. They will not come to English services because they do not understand the language. Churches need to create Spanish ministries to cater to these Hispanics' needs.

However, creating a Spanish entry point is not enough to bring them to church, Rodriguez said. Church leaders must visit them consistently, spending considerable time talking about the prospective member's extended family.

The extended family is important to Latinos, Rodriguez said. They want to keep uncles, siblings, parents and grandparents together as much as possible.

"I want my family together for worship, Bible study, college, career," he said.

Even visitation is different with Hispanics than Anglos, the Mexico native said. Latinos respect titles and formality, so pastors should introduce themselves as pastor. They also should wear suits and ties.

Do not expect Hispanics to address a church leader by his first name, Rodriguez said. They are accustomed to using titles as a form of respect.

Anglos should call adult Latinos hermano (brother) and hermana (sister) and children as mijo (boy) or hija (girl), Rodriguez suggested.

When an invitation to church or another activity is given, Anglos need to judge whether an answer is an individual's true desire, Rodriguez said. Hispanics are humble and will refuse an offer several times despite wanting to accept.

Once Hispanics are in the church, the same rules apply, Rodriguez said. Latinos will not approach a pastor because that is viewed as a powerful position. The pastor must come to them.

Church leaders also must remember to avoid publicly chiding Hispanics, Rodriguez added. The ethnic group tries hard to save face when possible. Anglos need to be sensitive to that need.

One of the more difficult aspects of Hispanic culture for many Anglos is the way Hispanics view time, Rodriguez said. While Anglos tend to be punctual, Hispanics value relationships more than time.

Latinos consider showing up at 3:30 for a 3 p.m. meeting as being on time. This will have to be an accepted part of church life with Hispanics in it.

"I've been at Hampton Place for 10 years. We still don't start on time," he joked.

If Anglos are willing to be flexible and committed in reaching Hispanics, they can be successful, Rodriguez encouraged the breakout session audience. Knowing about the culture helps others be sensitive in sharing the gospel.

"We want to learn this to reach people for Christ," he said.

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