

Too few churches for New Mexico's Hispanic mission field

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (BP)—Nearly half of New Mexico's population is Hispanic—the highest share in the United States. Yet only 57 Hispanic Baptist churches minister to fewer than 3,000 Hispanics on any given Sunday across the state. One Southern Baptist is set on changing that.

“New Mexico is a mission field,” said Ricardo Rivera, Hispanic strategist for the Baptist Convention of New Mexico. “Our biggest challenge is finding church planters to reach this people group.”

The Hispanic population of New Mexico is as diverse as it is large. In the northern part of the state, most Hispanics are of Spanish descent, have been in the area many generations and speak English primarily.

In the southern part of the state, most of the Hispanic population is made up of immigrants from Mexico, Central and South America who speak mostly Spanish.

To the east, many Hispanics work in the dairy farms that line that part of the state. First Baptist Church in Portales is the only church in New Mexico working to reach the dairy farm workers.

“The ministry to the dairy farm workers started through a deacon (at First Baptist in Portales) ... who owns one of the farms and wanted to reach the Hispanics working there. Forty people have been saved as a result of that ministry,” Rivera noted.

Another strategy churches are using to reach Hispanics is evangelistic events, which Rivera says are essentially revival-style services. The

Hispanic churches are encouraged to host one of these events annually. The events include block parties and door-to-door evangelism.

Thirty churches welcomed about 900 unchurched people to their Easter revivals, Rivera said. More than 100 made professions of faith in Christ, and 12 have been baptized. Next year, churches will work on hosting two revivals—one in the spring and another in the fall.

Much of the outreach so far has focused on first-generation Hispanics.

“We have many second- and third-generation Latinos who communicate in English but are culturally Hispanic,” Rivera said. “We are not currently serving that group effectively.”

“We need young, bilingual church planters who are culturally Hispanic to come and work with this people group in New Mexico.”

While ministry to a group with a strong Roman Catholic background can be challenging, “people are open to hearing the gospel,” he added.