

# Brownsville church nears goal of seeing 20,000 come to Christ

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BROWNSVILLE—Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville dreams big—so big that the members set a goal to see 20,000 people place their faith in Christ this year. And they expect to surpass that goal within the next few weeks.

The 2,000-member congregation isn't set on winning souls for the sake of numbers but to make disciples who will reproduce themselves wherever they are, Pastor Carlos Navarro said.

Members from Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville serve Mexican food to guests at a fiesta-themed block party held at the church recently.

(PHOTOS/Courtesy of Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville)

To accomplish that objective, church members share the gospel by hosting block parties, providing free breakfast to people crossing the border each morning, sending missionaries and mission teams to Latin American countries, ministering to the sick through a weekly health clinic and living out the Great Commission in all they do.

“Since I came here in 1993, I set goals every year in the soul-winning effort,” Navarro said. “We started with a goal of 1,000. Then we went to 2,000. We were increasing it by 1,000 each year.”

To reach 20,000 in one year may seem unattainable and unrealistic to some, but the church said it is possible—and likely.

In tallying results of their witnessing efforts, the church includes people

who come to faith in Christ through direct interaction with West Brownsville members, whether in a worship service at the church or through international missions where they serve alongside local churches in Latin America or through personal evangelism done in day-to-day life.

Many of these believers have been baptized into the West Brownsville church, but many have joined churches in their hometowns or back in their home countries.



Pastor Carlos Navarro shares about Christ during a worship service held at a block party. Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville uses block parties, personal evangelism, border outreaches, home Bible studies and medical clinics to share the hope of Christ with people in Brownsville, the surrounding area and Latin America.  
(PHOTOS/Courtesy of Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville)

Much of this growth came as every member in the church took seriously the task of sharing the gospel, Navarro said. The church stresses that it is each Christian's responsibility to witness, not just the responsibility of the church staff or leadership.

"I don't just tell them how to do it, but I show them how to do it," Navarro said. "I created that environment before I came. I did it with my wife and two kids first. And as soon as I accepted the invitation as the pastor, I went out by myself because the church wasn't use to doing this. Since I went ahead of them, they now do it gladly when they see it."

On average, the church sees 1,200 people a month accept Christ through ministries at the church and along the Rio Grande, as well as through mission partnerships in South America. By late September, the church had seen 18,300 come to Christ this year, with about 70 percent of those decisions happening in Texas.

The evangelistic spirit of the church is an example of the Texas Hope 2010 to give every Texan an opportunity to respond to the gospel by Easter 2010.

"Our church has an emphasis on evangelism and missions and reaching people," said Mary Perez, a member of the church. "From the beginning of coming here, we were taught that as Christians, we need to reproduce ourselves. On an everyday basis, we are taught about winning souls. It is a way of life. We do this locally and in Mexico. Then we started mission trips to South America about five or six years ago."

Perez and her husband Rogelio took the evangelistic spirit of the church to heart as they went with their children to Argentina to serve as missionaries for a year. They were the first missionaries to be fully supported by the church. Now, the church supports missionaries in eight Latin American countries, Spain and Morocco.

To keep international ministry before the congregation, Navarro highlights a different country each Sunday. Members originally from that country will share and offer prayer requests for the country before the church joins them in praying for evangelistic efforts there.

The church has started four churches in Mexico and five in Texas and uses 18 cell groups to disciple believers within the mother church. Perez credits the congregation's ministry vision and family atmosphere to training new Christians how they can become involved in the work.

"We have a program set up where we give new Christians 13 lessons on basic theology," Perez said. "After that, they go to the second level, and we teach them a little more in-depth about the church and opportunities for ministry."

Roland Lopez, Hispanic church planting consultant with the San Antonio Baptist Association, said that the church's vision and strategy is what has been used for ages. And members are passionate about sharing the gospel as a lifestyle.

"The strategy is that it's just the old-time stuff that he uses," Lopez said about Navarro's evangelism and outreach efforts. "You have to present the gospel to people. The more people you present the gospel, there is more of a chance that someone will respond."

"If we can define revival, which is the rekindling or reactivating of people to spiritual things and to spiritual commitment, I think that Carlos has done that and is doing that with the city of Brownsville. He has really impacted the community by gospel presentation, but also in modeling Christianity."