

# Fiesta unites churches to meet community needs

September 4, 2008

SOUTH HOUSTON—In spite of threatening thunderstorms, more than 100 volunteers from Templo Bautista of South Houston, First Baptist Church of South Houston, Fellowship Church of Houston and Buckner Children & Family Services of Houston sponsored a back-to-school fiesta for elementary age students in South Houston.

The event—which attracted 218 people from the community—represented the first cooperative venture in many years by two congregations with a shared history. First Baptist Church of South Houston launched Templo Bautista as a Hispanic mission about 60 years ago.

South Houston residents learn about community services during a back-to-school fiesta sponsored by Templo Bautista of South Houston, First Baptist Church of South Houston, Fellowship Church of Houston and Buckner Children & Family Services of Houston. PHOTO/Mary Ann Somma-García

“This began when our missions committee met earlier this year and invited Buckner and leaders from Templo Bautista to come meet with us,” said

Pastor Manuel Longoria Jr. of First Baptist Church of South Houston.

“Felipe Garza, Jon Hogg and Marilyn Garcia from Buckner and some leaders from Templo Bautista also joined us that night. I shared the need for us to be more effective in reaching and ministering to our community. Demographics show we have over 395,000 people living within a five-mile radius of us. No single church is going to reach such a vast and diverse community alone. We must cooperate and be more effective for the sake of God’s kingdom.

“After that initial meeting, I was called by Templo Bautista’s Miguel Angel Cruz and Mary Ann Somma-García about meeting to pray and plan an event to bless our community. They came up with the idea for the fiesta, and it grew from there. It was Templo Bautista’s initiative. First Baptist and Buckner were delighted to come alongside and partner with Templo Bautista in it. Later, Fellowship Church also joined in to help make the event a success.”

Marilyn Garcia, church mobilization coordinator for Buckner Children & Family Services in Houston and a member of Fellowship Church of Houston said: “I really feel like we are here as the body of Christ to minister to those we do not know. By having three churches come together, we are able to see the community’s needs and then try to meet those needs more effectively.”

Mary Ann Somma-García of Templo Bautista led in organizing and directing the Fiesta.

“I felt that everyone working together was great. As we came together, the three churches were supporting and uplifting each other as we ministered to the community,” she said. “I feel it is the beginning of something special that God is doing in our community, in South Houston. I feel like God has more for us to do together in South Houston cooperatively.”

“Even the rain was sent by God. The rain provided a captive audience as people sought shelter in the chapel. They heard the music and the gospel being presented. God did that, because we had not planned it that way.”

The fiesta offered a number of activities and services, including live music, games, balloon art, two moonwalks and face painting, as well as free haircuts and free hot dogs, popcorn and snow cones. Children were also able to tour a police patrol car and a fire truck and visit with police officers and firefighters from South Houston.

Adults were able to participate in a community-needs survey; blood pressure, vision and glucose screenings; and receive a free health gift bag. Volunteers distributed 114 backpacks filled with school supplies to children. Another 28 backpacks with school supplies were sent to the two elementary schools in the neighborhood, where nurses or counselors can give them to needy students.

Representatives from Buckner’s Children and Family Services, The Bridge Shelter and a nutrition specialist also had booths with information for the families.