

## **Professor/Author Previews Insights on *Hispanic Realities***

*By M.I. Torres*

Issues facing the American Hispanic population have recently garnered much attention. This community's growth and culture, along with its trials and triumphs, is a phenomenon that can no longer be ignored:

- The media, social services, municipal leaders and contenders in upcoming elections add to the thriving immigration debate.
- Congress has announced several deadlines for such varied issues as amnesty and fees for green cards.
- In the state of Texas, civil suits are being reviewed regarding the right to speak Spanish in business, schools and the general public – regardless of legal status.
- The largest minority in the United States has a collective voice that is being heard by its neighbors, supporters, adversaries, and now its leaders.

The church has also heard the call.

Commissioned by the North American Mission Board, a national Hispanic task force studied the issues concerning Hispanics and the church. The concluding report discusses how Southern Baptists could assist such a growing population of people.



Daniel Sanchez, the task force chairman and Associate Dean of Masters Degrees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, included a report entitled "21st Century Hispanic Realities." The Hispanic Realities are listed as ten circumstances already in effect within North American Hispanic communities -- not projected trends.

Sanchez, author of several books, has published the Hispanic Realities in a book of the same name and will be discussing the topic at the upcoming UBA conference in August. Taking time from another seminar, Sanchez agreed to a question and answer session regarding the topic and what audiences gain from hearing him address these realities.

**Q:** *First of all, for your audience who has not yet read your writings regarding Hispanic Realities, how can they prepare? Is there any information or any thoughts you would like to offer beforehand?*

**A:** The information that we will share in our Hispanic Realities Conference can be instrumental in helping people to have a clear picture of the Hispanic harvest field here in Texas and throughout the country. Jesus said, "Look unto the fields, for they are white unto the harvest." The clearer the picture we have of the Hispanic harvest field, the better the job we are going to do in reaching them with the Gospel.

**Q:** *Given the ten Hispanic Realities, what are some actions Hispanic (and non-Hispanic) congregations can do to reach Hispanics evangelistically and missionally?*

**A:** As we study the Hispanic Realities, several things are going to catch our attention. Among them is the fact that Hispanics are more receptive to the evangelical message than ever before in the history of this country. Hispanic congregations should greatly increase their efforts to share the Gospel with unreached Hispanics.

**Q:** *What are the top three concerns you have about Hispanics in Texas?*

**A:** 1. That we fail to see the mission field that the Lord has brought to our doorsteps.

2. That we not be so committed to traditional evangelism and church planting approaches that we fail to utilize methods that the Lord is using to reach large numbers of people in other parts of the world.

3. That our churches fail to make room spiritually, culturally and linguistically for the new Hispanic immigrants who are coming to our communities.

**Q:** *What are the top three things Texans can celebrate regarding the Hispanic population?*

**A:** 1. The Hispanic population is growing very rapidly which means that there are many people who can come to the Lord.

2. That many Hispanics who are coming already have an evangelical background and will either join existing churches or will start new ones.

3. That Hispanics generally are very conservative socially. If we win them to Christ, they can actually help strengthen the moral fiber of our country.

**Q:** *In light of recent congressional hearings and the upcoming election, the immigration debate continues to strengthen. Do you feel there is a biblical response to the issue? If so, what should it be?*

**A:** There are numerous passages in the Bible that speak about the treatment of the "stranger within your gates." The major thing we learn from these passages is that first and foremost we need to share the Gospel with them.

**Q:** *Do you have any particular view about churches having both an English-speaking pastor (and service) as well as a Spanish-speaking pastor (and service) in order to meet their congregation's needs? Is there something that can be taught to bridge the language barrier some churches therefore experience - sometimes having two separate congregations under one roof and teaching?*

**A:** If the community is bilingual, it is very helpful for the church to be bilingual. At times, a bilingual pastor can preach in two services – one in English, the other in Spanish. Many churches have an Associate Pastor who speaks the language that the Senior Pastor does not speak. There can be two or more congregations under one roof. This could be a multi-congregational church. At the conference, we will share information on how this can be done.

Other questions presented required more in-depth consideration. These dealt with the issues of what churches need to know concerning how the Hispanic Realities affect their congregations and communities, whether or not the church should offer more assistance to its immigrant populations or leave it to social service agencies,

and illegal immigration and the Southern church and whether or not this population should be treated any differently than first generations arriving legally by their clergy. Sanchez stated that he would be delighted to deal with these issues more extensively during the conference.

***More on these issues and others concerning Hispanic Realities will be covered during Daniel Sanchez's seminar "Hispanic Realities – Implications for Evangelism and Missions" August 24, 10 a.m.-noon (English presentation) and August 25, 8:30 a.m.- noon (Spanish presentation) in the UBA Large Conference Room, 2916 W TC Jester, Houston, TX 77018.***