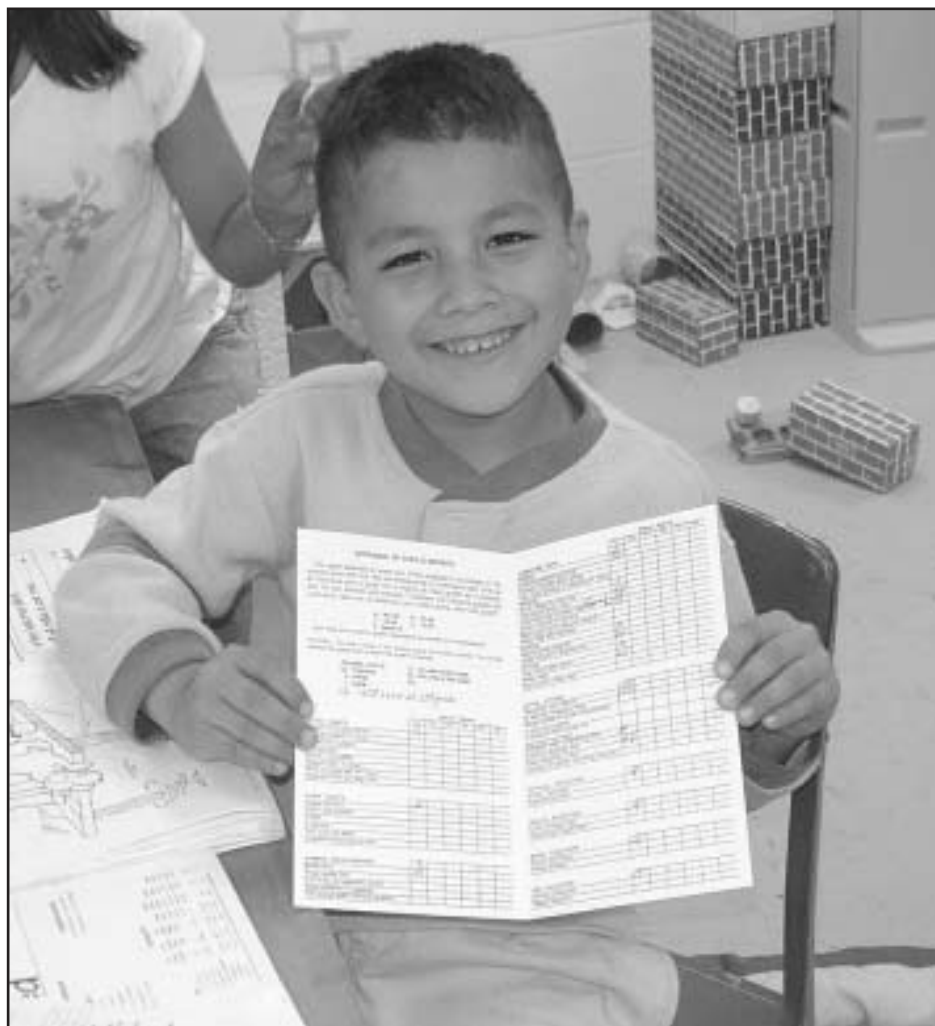


# Nation & World



News throughout our nation and world relating to United Methodists of the Holston Conference

## Hispanic ministry plan should be extended, coordinator says



*A Hispanic child in Unicoi United Methodist Church's after-school ministry shows off his appraisal report. Holston Conference has received a Hispanic Plan grant and uses it to support ministries in several districts.*

**NEW YORK (UMNS)** – As the U.S. Hispanic population continues to grow, the United Methodist Church must increase its mission efforts in that area.

That's why the National Plan for Hispanic Ministries should be extended for the denomination's 2004-2008 quadrennium, according to the Rev. Eli Rivera, the plan's new staff coordinator. Rivera most recently served as secretary for church development with the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, where the plan's office is based.

"If our church is to grow, it has to grow in those communities," he said in a Dec. 16 interview.

Created by the 1992 United Methodist General Conference, the denomination's top legislative body, the Hispanic Plan has resulted in the establishment of hundreds of new faith communities and the placement of 32 missionaries within annual (regional) conferences. Full-time coordinators of Hispanic ministry now work in 25 conferences.

Rivera particularly singled out conferences in the Southeast for their successful involvement in the plan, noting that the Hispanic and Latino population has risen 100 percent in that area. But more work needs to be done throughout the United States on a local and regional basis, he said.

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Part of the problem is that some conferences still rely on old strategies of church development. Those strategies, such as sending in a pastor or simply buying a plot of land and putting up a building, do not work well with Hispanics and Latinos, according to Rivera. Nor is it advisable to try to "outdo" the Roman Catholic parishes or Pentecostal churches already found in Hispanic neighborhoods.

"Most of them (Hispanics) are unchurched," he explained. "We believe that if we address people at their need level ... these people will respond. We need to offer an alternative."

That means having lay people meet with Hispanics in their homes and neighborhoods and using that contact to develop small faith communities. The plan trains lay missionaries, along with pastor mentor teams, for that work.

Financial assistance has come in the form of 32 grants, usually \$50,000 each, to annual conferences. The grant process itself helps the conferences develop a ministry plan, Rivera said.

A new focus for the plan is the concept of congregational mobilization, which means revitalizing an existing congregation. A step-by-step manual has been developed and tested in several conferences, he said.

Other future priorities include more training opportunities for laity in local congregations and more focus on engaging non-Hispanic congregations in the plan's work.

Rivera said discussions have taken place with representatives of the growing Brazilian population in the United States about its own ministry needs. That is one reason why the name of the plan will include both Hispanics and Latinos when presented to the 2004 General Conference for renewal.

More information on the National Plan for Hispanic Ministries is available by sending an e-mail to Rivera at [erivera@gbgm-umc.org](mailto:erivera@gbgm-umc.org) or by calling (212) 870-3693. ■