

# At Lunch With Javier Hernandez: Hispanic lay pastor

By Bob Thomas

Javier Hernandez and I met to have lunch at his favorite restaurant, the only Mexican spot in his adopted hometown of Pulaski, Va. But we were too early, and it was closed.

True to his open-minded view of the world and broad tastes, he suggested the Chinese buffet just down the street. It seemed a bit strange, but our conversation was both revealing and somehow natural, despite the surroundings.

Javier came to America, and to this little Southwest Virginia town, four years ago because he "felt a call of the Lord. I did not understand it very well, but this is where I am supposed to be."

Why Pulaski? He had a sister living here, and the potential for a job at one of the factories meant a better life for his wife, Elizabeth, and sons Javier Miguel ("Miky"), 8, and David Abraham, 16 months. He believes the Lord used his sister to bring him to this area of some 330 Hispanics in the town of 9,463.

Someone picked him up one Sunday and brought him to First Pulaski United Methodist Church where the service was, of course, all in English. Though he did not understand a word, "I felt God say 'you need to stay here.'"

With the help of Pastor Randy Frye, and a Spanish-speaking United Methodist minister, Arturo Reyna in the nearby town of Galax, Hispanic services began about a year later. It is the only local service of its kind, sometimes bringing visitors from nearby towns and counties.

Today, Javier goes for training each summer at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill., near Chicago. He preaches at First Pulaski's Sunday afternoon services for local



Photo by Bob Thomas

Javier Hernandez poses in front of the China Wall restaurant following his lunch on a Saturday.

Hispanics from Mexico, Guatemala, Puerto Rico and Honduras. He is currently listed as Hispanic lay pastor, but he hopes to soon be licensed by the Wytheville District office as a local pastor.

His family did not like Pulaski very much at first, he said. But now they like it a lot. They came as visitors, but he now has a green card through the help of local attorney Randy Eley, a lay leader at the church. Javier wants to study and become an American citizen.

Though he earns his living as a custodian at the local middle school, he sees himself as a minister, with a duty to help other Hispanics in the area. The eight or so Spanish-speaking kids at the school are a special group to him. His wife said that if there is a leader in the Hispanic community, Javier is that person.

Though he admits there is some discrimination toward all non-whites, especially in the factories, he believes it is mostly due to language barriers. He helped initiate English classes at the church, and now those classes are held regularly by a local charitable organization, Beans & Rice. The organization also teaches other skills, like using computers.

"This discrimination is not just here," he said. "It's in the whole world. But here we need to have English to find good jobs. And not just Hispanics, but all races."

He reaches out constantly to find other Hispanics in the community, those who have been here a while, and new arrivals. "I visit their homes. I write letters," he said.

"I have traveled a lot in my life, but when I heard the Lord, I heard him very well," Javier said. And he believes Pulaski is his calling. ■

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## College News

### Hunt receives honorary degree

EMORY, Va. – Former Emory & Henry College president Bishop Earl Hunt Jr. recently received an honorary doctor of divinity degree from the college at a ceremony in Asheville, N.C. The degree, presented by current college president Thomas Morris, recognized and honored Hunt's accomplishments.

Bishop Ray Chamberlain attended the June 7 ceremony.

A native of Johnson City, Tenn., Hunt served as Holston minister in Kingsport, Chattanooga, and Morristown, Tenn., churches. He was elevated to president of Emory & Henry in 1956 for an eight-year tenure, presiding over a dramatic increase in enrollment as well as racial integration of the college. In 1964, Hunt was elected by the Methodist Church to the episcopacy. He served as bishop for the next 24 years in three different conferences. He currently resides at Givens Estates, a United Methodist retirement home in Asheville.

### President has royal connections

MADISONVILLE, Tenn.– This fall, Hiwassee College will be graced by a special performance by Miss Nebraska. To what does Hiwassee owe this honor?

Maybe it's the college's tranquil setting that attracted her. Or maybe it's because her last name happens to be Noseworthy.

"It is a joy to watch your child accomplish something she desired to achieve," said Hiwassee College President James Noseworthy of his daughter, Jane.



Photo by Kathleen Mulcahy, The North Platte Telegraph

Jane Noseworthy

Jane Noseworthy was crowned Miss Nebraska 2003 in early June. After she competes in the Miss America Scholarship Pageant in Atlantic City, N.J., on Sept. 20, Noseworthy will sing for her father's inauguration. The inauguration for Hiwassee's new president takes place Oct. 22 at Buckner Memorial Chapel on the Hiwassee College campus. For an invitation to the event, call (423) 420-1225.

### Professor accepts Steadman Award

ATHENS, Tenn. – James Thompson recently received the Harry Steadman Award, presented by President Thomas Armstrong, at the May 10 Tennessee Wesleyan College Commencement Services. The award, presented to a TWC friend who has made an outstanding contribution to Holston Conference, is named for the late Kingsport, Tenn., businessman and United Methodist layman.

Thompson, associate professor of sociology, has been a TWC faculty member since 1971. He is a Holston Conference deacon in full connection. ■