

MANO DE AMISTAD/HAND OF FRIENDSHIP



MISSIONARIES TO

US HISPANICS

PO Box 501020
Indianapolis, IN 46250

E-MAIL:
pkbanta@sbcglobal.net
ramirez-ray@usa.net

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Phil & Kathy Banta



Humberto & Becky Ramirez

DEAR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS,

There's been a lot of talk about "change" in the last year, and if you have followed the ministry of our Mano de Amistad team, you know we definitely experienced some changes. Here's a summary of the major changes:

- February, Wheeler Mission decided to close their Community Center. We hosted numerous Hispanic programs out of the Community Center that had provided the contacts for the planting of the Englewood Hispanic congregation.
- Archie and Pam Gilmer, the couple we had been mentoring in Hispanic ministry, decided to leave Hispanic ministry and take a position as youth minister at an Indianapolis church.
- August, the Rich family concluded their service with CMF due to family concerns.

Any change can be unsettling, and for a time we were wondering what God was trying to communicate. To give us time to understand, and because we had not had a furlough for years, we opted to take short sabbaticals as provided by CMF for their missionaries who reside Stateside. The Ramirezes were first to take a sabbatical while the Bantas assumed many of their roles at the Englewood Hispanic church. Then, over the summer, the Bantas took a sabbatical.

When all the dust of the changes settled, we realized God has richly blessed our team with two strong ministries that needed increased focus. In light of that, we came up with a new strategy in which the Ramirezes would focus on the ministry with the Hispanic congregation we had started at Englewood Christian Church on the near east side of Indianapolis. The Bantas will focus on the Hispanic ministry on the north side of Indianapolis.

The following is a summary of what God is doing with each of our families in our areas of ministry.

RAMIREZ FAMILY: NEWS FROM INDY'S NEAR EAST SIDE

Our sabbatical – April 15 to June 30 – was a refreshing break and a time of learning for us and our ministry. Humberto spent seven weeks in Mexico (I joined him for two weeks) during which he connected with family, fellow ministers, friends, and churches with whom we have

worked in the past. With the purpose of discovering how US churches might better help their sister churches in Mexico, he also conducted a forty-question survey with nineteen ministers and churches in six different Mexican states.

One of the highlights of Humberto's time in Mexico was the opportunity to visit four families who had been members of our church in Indianapolis

before they returned to Mexico to live. Being able to see where they live, meet their friends, and visit the churches they attend was very helpful.

He encouraged the families to continue to be positive Christian influences in their communities. We firmly believe we'll see future fruit due to their lives. Our Mano de Amistad Hispanic congregation plans to partner with these churches in the future, and has already helped one area with flood relief supplies this past fall.



Baptism in Mexico during sabbatical: Humberto first presented the Gospel to Lupita when she was living in Indianapolis.

In July, we had a wonderful time serving as VBS missionaries for Cumberland Christian Church, Indianapolis. A few weeks later, our Hispanic church kids participated in a bilingual VBS with the English-speaking kids at Englewood Christian Church. Friendships were formed, and that turned out to be a wonderful learning experience for both groups.



Breaking a piñata at Cumberland Christian Church VBS.

The Hispanic church at Englewood continues to make an impact on the near east side of Indianapolis. Humberto is learning how community development literally allows the church to be the church in its surrounding neighborhood. Since last spring, two more Hispanic families have been blessed with affordable housing through the community development program which is run out of Englewood Christian Church.

In the fall, I worked part-time in the Englewood Church's preschool program. I also helped with Hispanic kids one day a week in Shepherd Community Center's after-school tutoring program.

In October, I re-initiated the weekly Hispanic Ladies Club. The ladies have been delighted to be meeting together again.

Humberto & Becky

Humberto & Becky Ramirez



Sabbatical: Humberto preaches to new friends in Tamaulipas, Mexico.

BANTA FAMILY: NEWS FROM INDY'S NORTH SIDE

Our ministry in 2008 became increasingly focused on outreach to Hispanics on the north side of Indianapolis. Key to this growing ministry has been our partnership with the North Central Church of Christ, which is reaching out to Hispanics in their area of the city.

Through the church's assistance to families from schools in the area, many contacts with Hispanics have been made. That assistance includes reaching out to 300 children with school supplies in August and Christmas presents in December. Thanks to the cooperation we have experienced with those schools, attendance at our English as a Second Language (ESL) classes has grown steadily. When the classes ended last spring, the relationships established had developed to the point where we were having Bible studies after the ESL classes.

The interest in the Bible had grown so much we continued to host Bible studies during the summer even though there were no English classes. One lady expressed it well when she said she continued to attend because what she was learning was changing her life. While the parents were involved in Bible study, their children were participating in the one-day-a-week VBS with the children of the church.

Over the fall months, the average number of students involved in ESL classes nearly doubled. Bible studies held on Saturday after the ESL classes continue to grow. And during the ESL classes the children love to learn Bible stories. The trust and confidence of the families has grown to the point where we are beginning home evangelistic studies. A group of over 20 volunteers from the church who help in the ESL classes and childcare make it possible for us to continue reaching out in Christ's name.



ESL classes in northern Indianapolis.

MINISTRY BEYOND INDIANAPOLIS

In October, Phil and Humberto traveled to Los Angeles, CA, as a part of a continuing education program for clergy. The major focus of their trip was to observe how US Hispanic congregations use small groups in ministry to Hispanics.

One piece of information from their time in Los Angeles encouraged them to continue faithfully in ministry to Hispanics. A church leader stated that in Southern California they are seeing their most significant church growth among Hispanic and Asian congregations. What happens in California is frequently a precursor of what will happen throughout the US. Though the growth of ministry among Hispanics in Indiana is slower than we would like, we receive encouragement in the awareness that God is undoubtedly using us to prepare for a great future harvest among Hispanics in the Midwest.

In November, our ministry team once again led a workshop at the National Missionary Convention in Tulsa, OK. We are always amazed at the interest in knowing how to effectively reach out to this mission field in our back yard.

PRAISE GOD FOR

- *The partnership with Englewood Christian Church in expanding our Hispanic ministry.*
- *Relationships established with ESL students in northern Indianapolis that are creating bridges for studying God's Word together.*
- *The excitement of the children of the ESL students in studying the Bible and participating with the Anglo children of the North Central church.*
- *Many volunteers who assist our ministry both on the near east side and north of Indianapolis.*
- *The involvement of the English and Hispanic church people in being living testimonies to non-Christians.*
- *Many financial supporters who continue to give faithfully.*

PRAY FOR

- *Open hearts for those currently studying the Bible to make decisions for Christ.*
- *The continued participation between Hispanic and American Christians.*
- *Increased opportunities to protect and care for Hispanic brethren who find themselves in difficult or abusive situations.*
- *God to provide adequate financial support for our ministry despite the current financial uncertainty in the US. We struggled to meet all of our expenses in 2008.*

Hispanic and Anglo youth in the Christmas program at North Central.

One of the goals of the ministry in the north has been to encourage Hispanics to interact with the English-speaking congregation. It was exciting to see over 30 attend the all-church Christmas Eve service. Several of the kids even participated in the program, as they had been active in the Wednesday evening classes for kids during the ESL.

We praise God that He is using our efforts to build bridges for the Gospel to Hispanics in the northern part of Indianapolis.

Phil & Kathy

Phil & Kathy Banta



Hispanic group at Christmas Eve service.

Mano de Amistad

CMF INTERNATIONAL
PO BOX 501020
INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46250-6020
317-578-2700

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