



Noe Bautista (left) and Manuel Urieta enjoy hot dogs on the front porch of the Baptist mission for Hispanics.

JOURNAL PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER QUINN

Baptist Mission Is Now Permanent

Hispanics Settling in Area Have Their Own Church and a New Pastor

By Christopher Quinn

JOURNAL SURRY COUNTY BUREAU

ARARAT

A permanent Baptist mission for Hispanics has been established in Surry County by a joint effort of the Surry County and Elkin Baptist associations.

The Rev. W.L. Pearson Jr., the director of missions for the Surry Baptist Association, said that the association sponsored summer church services for migrant workers for the past four years. However, local Baptists started noticing that many Hispanic people were staying in the area all year. The association sponsored a street survey last year to try and establish how many Hispanics had settled in the county.

Although an exact number of permanent residents could not be established, there was enough response to determine a need for a permanent church for the area's Hispanics, Pearson said.

The experiences of the past summers con-

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— **Noe J. Bautista**

A former migrant worker

vinced him that the pastor of the church should be a native speaker of Spanish. The linguistic and cultural barriers were frequently too wide for an American pastor to make the leap, he said. They needed someone who understood and sympathized with Hispanics and their journey and experiences here.

They turned to Noe J. Bautista, a 21-year-old former migrant worker who had settled

in High Point. Bautista, a member of a Hispanic congregation at Union Grove Baptist Church in Kernersville, had helped out during some of the summer work. He left his work in a furniture factory and came to Surry County on weekends.

Bautista said: "The pastor (in Kernersville) told me about this work. I told him I was interested in going over there to live with those people and share the gospel."

Bautista, whose name means baptist in Spanish, joked that he was born Baptist and has been a Baptist all of his life. He was actually born a Catholic and came to this country illegally to work when he was 15 years old. He said that his family was very poor and that he and several friends came north to find jobs.

He worked in Texas, then came to North Carolina to pick tobacco. He filed for his green card while here and got a job in a

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furniture factory. While at the factory, someone began talking to him about God and Protestant Christianity and Bautista converted. Bautista got involved in working in the Hispanic church in Kernersville, teaching Sunday school and helping with programs for young people. He said that he became a pastor because the Gospel is the most important thing in his life.

He moved to the large farmhouse that serves as the mission a little over three months ago. It is located on Old U.S. 52 near Ararat.

Bautista works at Wayne Poultry in Dobson during the week, is taking classes in Christian ministry from the state Baptist association, and preaches on weekends.

His flock usually numbers about 20 on most Sundays, he said. While the adults sing and listen to sermons in Spanish in one room of the house, the children attend children's church where the lessons are in English. Most of the children are fluent in English.

Ira and Carolyn Armstrong of Level Cross helped establish the mission, teaching the children and providing transportation for many.

MRS. ARMSTRONG SAID that the children have an easier time learning a new language and adapting to American culture.

After the service on a recent Sunday, the congregation mixed cultural traditions to help Bautista celebrate his 21st birthday.

They had a hot-dog supper, then the children gathered around an apple tree where a pinata had been tied. After a number of tries by blindfolded players, Maria Hernandez struck the pinata with a broomstick. The pinata, which was filled with candy, broke open and candy showered down.

A smiling Bautista was glad to be spending his birthday with his new congregation.

He said that he planned to remain as long as he felt that God had some work for him to do in this community.



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Maria Hernandez tries to hit a pinata during a birthday party for Noe Bautista.