



McAllen, TX

As one of the fastest growing metro areas in the United States, McAllen, TX, and its surrounding communities, Mission and Edinburg and others, present a great opportunity for a multi-cultural ministry of the Gospel. The city is situated in a large agricultural area on the US/Mexico border that is called the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. Because of its rapid growth and strong economic development, McAllen boasts of the title “Jewel in the Valley Crown.” But to speak of McAllen one really has to talk of the larger metro area, or MSA, of cities in its county, Hidalgo. The area is a part of the South Texas Presbytery of the PCA, which has three congregations in it, Grace in McAllen, Dios Con Nosotros in Edinburg, and Covenant in Harlingen.

Characteristics:

<u>Population</u>	City of McAllen, 2007 estimate	121,171
	McAllen MSA, 2006	700,634
	Rio Grande Valley, 2006	1,400,000
	Hispanics represent up to 87% of the pop. of the RGV.	
	Over 50% are under the age of 35.	
<u>Language</u>	Over 70% speak a language at home other than English.	
<u>Economy</u>	Regionally, agriculture has dominated in the past. McAllen has become a strong retail center for South Texas and Northern Mexico, up 138% in 10 years to \$3.58 billion in 2007. International trade has increased over 300% in about 18 years. Median income is about \$40,000.	
<u>Education</u>	There are several large, successful school districts. South Texas College has over 24,000 students. UT Pan Am, 17,000 students; more than 85% Mexican American.	
<u>Arts</u>	The area has a growing visual and musical arts culture. McAllen has a new convention center.	
<u>Religion</u>	Roman Catholic worship predominates. USACHurches.org lists over 80 churches in the area; the McAllen city website mentions “hundreds.”	

Forbes.com on November 30th reported in “America’s Best Bang for the Buck Cities” that the McAllen MSA was listed 7th for “Solid housing markets, relatively stable employment, enviable cost of living and quick commutes” and therefore “among the country's most affordable to live.”

Need: The strong growth areas are in north McAllen, in the Edinburg area, and in Mission along Shary Road, in the Sharyland ISD. According to the Senior Planner of the McAllen City offices, the Ware Rd. and Hwy. 83 area, Palms Crossing, represents their newest most important growth area. The downtown area of McAllen is experiencing a new emphasis in re-development, though that is coming along slowly. Even with many churches in the area, spiritual needs abound. And there is a need for the Reformed world and life view of the Gospel to continue to grow in this city.

Project: The Southwest Church Planting Network, in partnership with South Texas Presbytery (PCA) and Border Evangelism and Mercy Ministries, BEAMM, of Mission to the World and Mission to North America, has identified McAllen as a target for church planting in 2010. There is flexibility regarding the most strategic area of McAllen in which to focus.

We are looking for a church planter to work in a multicultural and bi-lingual setting. A thriving, Christ-centered and Gospel-driven new church will encourage other existing works in the area, provide incentive and support to new works in Brownsville and other communities, strengthen the base for an RUF work at UT Pan Am, raise up more men as future church planters, pastors and missionaries with a local vision for building God's Kingdom in the RGV, and promote mission work in neighboring communities on the Mexican side of the border. With strong churches on the US side, BEAMM will not always have to look as far for support for work in Mexico.

Challenge: The McAllen area presents an exciting challenge for the planting of a new church to continue the expansion of God's Kingdom in the RGV. Our Mission to North America of the PCA desires to continue to develop Hispanic Ministry; the Missions Committee of the South Texas Presbytery and the Southwest Church Planting Network are committed to expanding Hispanic Ministry; and BEAMM was established to be used by God in his work of building the Kingdom in Mexican and Hispanic communities along both sides of the border.

The challenges of working in this area include understanding Hispanic and Anglo populations and the relationships of people in this border community. Many use Spanish, especially those who have recently moved across the border. There is a strong Roman Catholic presence in the valley, so a church planter needs to be sensitive as to how to minister in that religious context. This person needs to be winsome in his Christian testimony, confident and outgoing, speak Spanish or be willing and able to learn. Many in this community are middle/upper-middle class Mexican, Mexican American, and have distinctives that set them apart from their Anglo counterparts. Anyone who will work here must take the time to learn about that context as well. An Hispanic man will have much of that understanding already as he arrives and goes to work, but an Anglo with the same Gospel love, passion, and patience and openness to cross-cultural relationship building can reach across boundaries effectively.

For more information please contact Bill Thomas, Executive Director of the SW Church Planting Network at Southwest Church Planting Network, 3838 Oak Lawn Avenue, Ste 200, Dallas, Texas 75219 Ph: (214) 528-9422

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