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HISPANIC COMPASSION MINISTRIES

# A Holistic Community Center

EL ENCINO  
AND REDEEMER  
COVENANT CHURCHES

By Amy L. Sherman



faith  
IN  
COMMUNITIES  
*A Hudson Institute Initiative*

# *A Holistic Community Center*

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**Church Name:**

El Encino and Redeemer Covenant Churches

**Location:**

Downey, California

**Size:** 70

**Compassion Ministry:**

Bernabe Community Center

**Year Started:** 2001

**Estimated Yearly Budget:** \$10,000

**Paid Staff:** 2 part-time

**Volunteer Staff:** 6

## Brief Description

The Bernabe Community Center serves the families and children of the Downey, Norwalk, and Santa Fe Springs neighborhoods through four main programs: soccer schools for youth ages six to twelve years old; ESL classes at the church; a counseling center offering free counseling services provided by trained, bilingual professionals; and parenting classes taught at local schools. The ministry is jointly supported by the English-speaking Redeemer Covenant Church and the Spanish-speaking El Encino Church. Both congregations meet in the same building, at different times.

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# GENESIS

Bernabe largely grew out of the shared vision of Brad Reed, the English pastor of Redeemer Covenant Church and Daniel Anabalón, the church planter of the Spanish-speaking congregation, El Encino. Brad had noticed the changing demographics in the neighborhood and the lack of growth in the church. These two realities indicated a need for a new approach emphasizing greater outreach to the community. So, Brad took several church leaders on a vision retreat. At this “leadership summit,” the group wrestled with the question, “What is our church’s purpose?” Out of that discussion came a unified desire to set specific goals in terms of strengthening the church’s role in community development. Simultaneously, the local conference of the Covenant denomination was just beginning to catch a greater vision for church-based community outreach, and thus looked very favorably on the direction Redeemer Covenant wanted to go. When Daniel Anabalón was selected by the denomination as the new church-planting pastor for the Spanish-language church (to be based at Redeemer Covenant’s site), he and his wife Rosmarie came with a passion for community outreach and concrete ideas for the kinds of programs they dreamed of starting. When Edward Delgado joined the church-planting team, he brought much expertise regarding the “how-to’s” of community development ministry. (He has taught about community ministry at the Hispanic Center for Theological Education (CHET) for the past two years.) This combination of conviction, passion, and expertise positioned the church to move ahead with serious planning for a significant community outreach venture.

The three men and their wives, plus two other church members, formed a leadership team to brainstorm. This team built on the community assessment work that had already begun as part of the church-planting process. They examined demographic data for the neighborhood, researched what other churches and agencies were already doing in terms of outreach, and identified service gaps. They also spent time in the neighborhood just talking with residents and school officials. These activities gave them a picture of the kinds of ministries that would fit the “felt needs” of the community.

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# MISSION

Bernabe's mission is to "reach the community for the Kingdom of God—to bring the healing power of Christ's 'shalom' into lost lives." The neighborhood surrounding the church is dominated by moderate income, working class families and also includes some low-income, single parent families. The ministry's target community is not "the poorest of the poor." Instead, the Center seeks to reach struggling working families, many of whom are unchurched. El Encino and Redeemer Covenant church leaders believe that poverty is not simply material, but also emotional and spiritual. Thus, the Bernabe Community Center seeks to offer holistic ministries that address the felt needs of community residents. Church leaders emphasize that, by serving the community, neighborhood members will be more attracted to the church and more open to visiting or attending worship services.



# PROGRAM

The **soccer schools** sponsored by Bernabe have provided means through which church members can connect with neighborhood children and families. The program runs from 9:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m. on Saturday mornings, for five weeks per session. Boys and girls aged six through twelve may participate for a modest registration fee of \$10. (Parents unable to afford this can pay a discounted rate if they agree to give some time volunteering to help with the program.) El Encino member Cesar Venier, a former professional soccer player in Argentina, leads the soccer clinics with help from Rey Guevera, the church's youth director, Pastor Anabalón, and other volunteers. The clinics take place on a local school's athletic field.

**A youngster receives a medal at the close of Bernadbe's soccer school.**

The day begins with stretching and exercises, followed by about an hour of drills and 45 minutes for scrimmaging.

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## PROGRAM continued

At the end of the games, the coaches gather the youth together for a brief pep talk emphasizing positive values (drawn from Biblical principles, but this is not a Bible devotional talk).

The soccer program began in March 2001 and the church has already served over one hundred children. At the end of each five-week soccer school, El Encino hosts a family picnic, presenting participating children with a T-shirt or trophy as a “graduation” gift. At the end of the school year, soccer families were invited to register for Bernabe’s “Summer Academy.” This week-long program, running from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. daily, offered 62 children opportunities for academic enrichment and recreational activities. And it was another way for church members to meet parents and further connect with these community families, thus deepening relationships.

Now Bernabe has organized a soccer club and gotten the youth involved in league play. Since many parents bring their children weekly to practices and games, church volunteers have opportunity to interact with parents and invite them to church events. At El Encino’s special one-year anniversary celebration, six persons from “soccer families” made first-time decisions for the Lord!

In September 2001, Bernabe launched a **pilot ESL program**, overseen by Charlotte Boquist, secretary at Redeemer Covenant Church. Initially, the local school provided both the teacher and curriculum (the classes took place at the church), and nearly fifty people participated during two different semesters. Currently, a Christian from a large Hispanic church teaches approximately 15 adult students meeting at Redeemer Covenant on Thursday mornings from 9:30 a.m.-11:45 a.m. Several of the ESL students have visited worship services at El Encino on Sundays.

Approximately 25 adults are participating in the **parenting classes** sponsored by Bernabe and taught by church members Brad and Lisa Reed, Daniel and Rosmarie Anabalón, and Lynda Delgado. The classes are held on Tuesday evenings at Studebaker Elementary school (a mere five blocks from the church). They run eight weeks, approximately 1.5

**Adult students at work at Bernabe’s ESL class.**



# Making an Impact

## *Inside and Out*

- ▶ Ministering side by side in an ambitious and challenging new outreach venture has brought the Spanish and English congregations together. Their common mission and common struggles have deepened relationships between members of each fellowship.
- ▶ Some families of children involved in the soccer program and some ESL participants have begun visiting El Encino Church. Over 200 people attended El Encino's one-year anniversary worship service!
- ▶ Focusing on outreach gives the El Encino church plant a sense of energy and mission that is attracting younger (e.g., college-age) believers.
- ▶ The church is becoming more well-known in the community and its reputation has been enhanced by its outreach ministries.

hours per session. The curriculum, "STEP," was designed by a Christian organization, though it does not contain explicitly Biblical material. The teacher/facilitator reviews the session's chapter and the class watches a video depicting a variety of scenarios in which the principles from that chapter can be applied. This is followed by class discussion, during which group members swap stories, share struggles, and talk about how they can put into practice in their own homes the principles they are learning.

Bernabe's **counseling center** opened its doors in June 2001 and has already served over 200 individuals. It is staffed by professionals, including church members and faculty and students from CHET, who volunteer their time to meet the felt need in the community for Spanish-speaking counselors. Community residents learn about the center through word of mouth, announcements at Redeemer and El Encino services, and through a radio program co-hosted by Daniel Anabalon and Dr. Jorge Maldonado (the President of CHET and a licensed therapist). Students in CHET's counseling track are being trained and supervised as they participate with Dr. Maldonado at the counseling center. Counseling services are free, though donations are accepted. The center (which is simply a designated, remodeled room in the church building) does not have regular hours. Rather, individual counselors set their hours and take appointments accordingly. Initially, the counselors were serving more people from the two congregations than from the local community. Now, however, approximately half of the counseling clients are individuals from outside the church.

Through these four programs, the Bernabe Center offers a powerful and practical witness in the community regarding the love of God. The diverse ministries allow church members to express their varying gifts. Some have a passion for kids; others, for adults. Each member can find a place to serve. And Christ's concern for the family, for education, for relationships, and for physical and emotional health is demonstrated as church members bring Jesus to their neighbors through community services that address these different areas of well-being.

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# KEY RESOURCES

What has it taken to get the Bernabe Community Center “up and running”? Church leaders identify several important elements:

<1> **Key people/leadership.** Bernabe’s steering committee, composed of the Reeds, the Anabalons, the Delgados, and Charlotte Boquist, brings vision, expertise, experience, passion, and commitment. This group has been the driving force behind Bernabe.

<2> **Knowledge and Relevant Experience.** Edward Delgado has prior experience in community development and practical expertise in launching community ministries, including knowledge of how to do appropriate community needs assessment and of the process for incorporating new nonprofit organizations. Pastor Reed doubts whether Bernabe could have been possible without Edward’s technical expertise.

Other steering committee members also brought particular training and skills on which the ministry’s initial programs could be built. Daniel Anabalon’s background as a physical education teacher, for example, well-positioned him for a leadership role in the soccer schools. Lisa Reed, Lynda Delgado, and Rosmarie Anabalon are all professional teachers and thus were well-equipped to head the parenting classes.

<3> **Key partnerships.** Pastor Brad Reed and his family have lived in the community for five years. During that time he has built relationships of trust and credibility among civic leaders such as public school officials and the local Little League organization, by serving on the PTA and coaching baseball teams. These relationships have been critical in advancing El Encino’s efforts to serve the neighborhood. For example, Brad gained permission to use the school’s athletic fields for the soccer program and school officials voluntarily photocopied and distributed flyers about the new initiative. The schools provided the curriculum and the first teachers for the ESL classes. The schools also fund the STEP curriculum, advertise the parenting classes, and provide classroom space. In short, because of these relationships, Bernabe enjoyed partners from outside the church right away—partners who offered essential resources. The key partnership with CHET was also made possible by the networks of those on Bernabe’s steering committee. As a faculty member at CHET, Edward Delgado has been able to facilitate CHET’s involvement in the Bernabe Center’s counseling ministry.

**Denominational support for Bernabe Community Center was not absolutely essential, but, as Pastor Reed notes, certainly helped.**

<4> **Money.** El Encino, as a church plant, enjoys support from the English-speaking sister church, Redeemer Covenant, and from the Covenant denomination. The denomination underwrites church-planter Daniel Anabalon’s salary. Redeemer Covenant has provided approximately \$4000 to help fund Bernabe’s various programs. Bernabe also received a \$4000 donation from a Covenant church in Pasadena to assist in launching the soccer schools. Freewill donations from persons receiving counseling services have brought in nearly \$2000 in additional funds.

Funding was needed for several aspects of the outreach: part-time salary for the head soccer coach; sports equipment and trophies; video production; furnishings for the counseling room; STEP certification fees (each instructor completed a two-day training course); and food and snacks at various activities.

## Pilot Before Starting Officially

Lynda Delgado heads Bernabe's parenting class ministry. She reports that she and her co-leaders taught the STEP parenting class at the church for church attenders before taking it out into the community to teach at the local school for neighborhood parents. This "pilot test" approach familiarized the leaders with the STEP materials and gave them a chance to practice their teaching and group facilitation skills. It also afforded them the opportunity to note weak or confusing sections in the curriculum, so that they could make modifications as needed. And, as Lynda notes, this approach meant that church families could begin applying the principles of the parenting class in their own homes before they taught them to others.

**<5> Facilities.** Again, El Encino's special relationship with Redeemer Covenant is critical, since many of Bernabe's program activities, and El Encino's worship services, occur at Redeemer's building. As noted earlier, Redeemer Church has also made the in-kind donation of designated space for the counseling center.

**<6> Denominational support.** The Covenant regional conference partially underwrites Pastor Anabalon's salary and has provided technical assistance and counsel from denominational staff with expertise in community development. Denominational support is not absolutely essential. As Pastor Reed says, "The local congregation has the ability to go forth without this kind of help." But, he adds, the process of launching an ambitious new community ministry can be overwhelming for those without prior experience. Not everyone knows the legal steps for incorporating a nonprofit agency or how to write a successful grant application. The help the steering committee has received from the denomination in these areas has been extremely valuable.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Bernabe's leadership team highlights several lessons learned:

► **Take the time to motivate the congregation and get them behind the vision.** For church planter Daniel Anabalon, this was simply a matter of stating clearly, from the very beginning, that outreach would be a core value of the new congregation called El Encino. Pastor Reed of Redeemer Covenant admits that he got ahead of his congregation, not investing enough time initially in casting vision and communicating regularly with the congregation about the dream of the Bernabe Community Center. To address this issue, the

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steering committee planned a special, joint “celebration service.” During it, the two congregations came together on a Sunday morning to worship and hear reports and testimonies about what God was doing through the outreach programs of Bernabe. This increased the church’s excitement about the Bernabe Center’s work.

▶ **Use videos to help in the communication and vision-casting process.** Bernabe’s leadership team has found videos to be powerful tools. Program coordinators interview program participants, volunteers, and parents and let them say in their own words why they value Bernabe’s programs. These kind of testimonies work powerfully to motivate others to join in the outreach work.

▶ **Develop strong relationships of credibility in the community prior to launching a community center.** This kind of “pre-ministry” groundwork lays the foundation for success. The relationships Pastor Reed cultivated with school officials over a few years, for example, paved the way for fruitful collaboration once Bernabe was launched. The school has been very receptive to sharing information about Bernabe’s programs with kids and parents, and that has contributed to high participation in the soccer schools and parenting classes. The school provides valuable resources such as facilities and curriculum that would otherwise be major expenditures for Bernabe.

▶ **Conduct targeted volunteer recruitment.** Both El Encino and Redeemer Covenant make general announcements to the congregation to invite participation in Bernabe’s various programs. But the team leaders also specifically target particular individuals with the gifts or expertise needed for different tasks, and personally ask those individuals to consider serving. They have found this generates a higher response rate than broad, general appeals for help.

## CHALLENGES

As with most ministries, one challenge is avoiding burnout on the part of the key leaders. Each has had to sacrifice to make this vision a reality, and each has to learn how to balance ministry commitments with family time.

One unique challenge at Bernabe is organizational: the Center is “co-owned” by the two congregations, El Encino and Redeemer Covenant. Of course, the two see themselves as one church— in fact, every leader strongly emphasizes this point. Nonetheless, this structure is complicated and requires diligence in communication between the two churches to avoid misunderstandings.

### Closing ceremonies at Bernabe’s soccer school



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# CHURCH CONNECTION

Pastor Reed believes that El Encino's connection to Redeemer Covenant is a strength of the Bernabe model. The link to an English ministry is crucial for El Encino's future development because, he argues, "first generation, Spanish-only ministry doesn't work for the second and third generations." Simultaneously, the partnership benefits Redeemer Covenant. As Charlotte Boquist notes, Bernabe has stimulated greater concern for and involvement in the community by the English-speaking congregation and has even motivated some of the congregants to try to learn Spanish.

A member of Redeemer Covenant's ruling Board sits on the steering committee of Bernabe as the liaison to the Board. His job is to report back to church leaders on the discussions and decisions concerning Bernabe's activities. As El Encino develops its own governing board, a member of it will be asked to serve in a similar capacity. This kind of overlapping leadership and communication is needed, for example, in terms of setting policies and clarifying who controls resources donated to Bernabe. These deliberate communication links will help the two churches remain united in their support of Bernabe and in their common vision of what the Bernabe Community Center should be and do.

**Bernabe's leaders emphasize that the ideal community center 'reflects both the gifts of the church members and the felt needs of the community.'**



## ADVICE *For Other Pastors/Church Leaders*

Edward Delgado emphasizes that the ideal community center "reflects both the gifts of the church members and the felt needs of the community." Bernabe offers programs that have built on the strengths, gifts, and prior experience of the leadership team members. A soccer program was a natural fit, given Pastor Anabalon's background in physical education and the fact that the community had no official youth soccer program (and soccer is the "sport of choice" for many Hispanics). The parenting classes built both on a need felt by local school officials trying to integrate new, Spanish-speaking families in the district and on the expertise of teachers from the church like Lisa Reed, Rosmarie Anabalon, and Lynda Delgado.

Bernabe's steering committee also counsels others to stay small and grow slowly, focusing on doing a few things well rather than taking on too much too fast.

Leaders also point out that a church desiring to launch a community center must be aware of several mundane but critical issues. For example, the church had to review its insurance policy, to ensure that it would cover liability situations that might arise in the course of community ministry. In addition, program leaders distribute permission slips to parents of all children enrolled in any of Bernabe's activities. This helps to cover Bernabe Community Center from liability in the event that something goes wrong on the soccer field or during an activity. Clients of the counseling center are asked to sign waiver statements that clearly explain what the counselors at Bernabe can, and cannot, do for them based on their training and certification. Counselors also inform clients that if any information is shared with them concerning possible child abuse or neglect, the counselors are legally bound to report such information to appropriate authorities.

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## Who Could Do This, Too?

The Bernabe Community Center was launched by a small but energetic Spanish-speaking church plant and a modest-sized English-speaking congregation that realized it was out of touch with its surrounding community. The two congregations have come together as one to make an impact for Christ in the local community. They each bring strengths to this endeavor. Redeemer Covenant has given facilities, finances, and a network of key community relationships. El Encino brings the cultural knowledge and language ability that enables outreach to community residents. Both churches bring skilled people with a passion to reach the lost and to meet felt needs in the community. Together, the two congregations are stronger than they would be individually. They have creatively mixed their talents and together built a community serving ministry that is already making an impact. And as they co-labor in ministry, their unity grows stronger.

Bernabe Community Center is a powerful model of how co-located churches, English and Spanish, can join forces and jointly reach out to the community to advance the Kingdom of God. Of course, individual congregations can also accomplish a work like Bernabe. And Bernabe's story shows that a congregation does not need to be large or have a lot of money to get started.

The essential elements for building an effective community center are visionary leaders; perseverance; an emphasis on building relationships and credibility in the community; a strategy of crafting ministry on the basis of both the church's assets and the community's felt needs; and, obviously, a physical facility. Just as Jesus' ministry was incarnational, so a community center must have a concrete, identifiable place from which to offer programs. In Bernabe's case, the church building itself is the facility. No separate community center is needed; rather, the church itself provides the counseling room, an office for Pastor Anabalon, a classroom for the ESL classes, and a kitchen where snacks for the various programs can be prepared. Establishing a community center also takes more than one leader—it is too big a job for just a single individual. A team of committed leaders is required. At least one person on the team needs to have technical expertise regarding the administrative and legal steps for establishing a community center—or team members must know someone with this expertise who can be called upon for help and guidance.

**Bernabe Community Center is a powerful model of how co-located churches, English and Spanish, can join forces and jointly reach out to the community to advance the Kingdom of God.**

Bernabe Community Center gets its name from Barnabas, the encouraging friend of the Apostle Paul. The Center is a concrete expression of El Encino church's desire to befriend the community. If neighbors are not coming to the church, then the church has to go out to the neighbors, Bernabe's leaders explain. Through practical outreach programs that meet felt needs and offer opportunities to build new friendships with neighborhood families, El Encino's Bernabe Community Center is taking the good news to the streets.

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