

Pioneering home missionary, bilingual early-childhood educator, dies at 89122004

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By George Henson

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SAN ANTONIO-Jovita Galan, a pioneer in bilingual early-childhood education and a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board missionary for more than 40 years, died Dec. 5 at the age of 89.

Galan served in the San Antonio area during most of her ministry. "She was a Home Mission Board appointee, and served during the years when the HMB used the kindergarten as a church strategy to minister and evangelize the community," explained Jimmy Garcia, director of the office of Hispanic work at the Baptist General Convention of Texas and a longtime friend.

Jovita Galan is pictured with one of the South Texas children in whose lives she invested her own life.
(Everett Hullum Photo)

"A good number of churches in Texas started kindergartens using this strategy," he said. "Jovita was perhaps the last of the surviving Hispanic Christian ladies in Texas that committed their lives to this ministry."

Garcia said Galan and the others involved in this ministry were breaking new ground in education.

"Before there was a bilingual program in the public schools, Jovita and others like her were trailblazers in the bilingual education of Hispanic children in Texas," he said.

"Their success rate was far better than any bilingual program in Texas today."

Galan served as a Home Mission Board summer missionary in 1945.

Following her appointment as a home missionary in 1947 , she worked in Alice until 1951, when she began serving at Antioch Mexican Baptist Church in San Antonio.

She served in Pearsall for a year beginning in 1955. She moved back to San Antonio in 1956, serving there until her retirement in 1990, except for three years when she helped prepare preschool material for the BGCT's River Ministry and served as a seminar leader for preschool caregivers.

Her longest tenure was at Iglesia Bautista Central in San Antonio, where she served from 1962 until 1986 when not helping with River Ministry.

She continued to serve as a Mission Service Corps volunteer after retirement.

Joshua Grajalva remembers serving with Galan at Antioch Mexican Baptist Church. "I once told her, 'I'm going to call you Miss Always.' When she asked why, I told her, 'Anytime I see you, you always have a smile, you're always ready to help and you're always ready to do that which honors the Lord.'"

Galan's influence was obvious at her funeral ceremony, he noted. "At her service, eight pastors gave testimony as to how influential she was in their lives," he reported.

Rudy Sanchez, longtime pastor and Hispanic leader in Texas, remembers her influence on his own life as well.

"She was my counselor, my mentor," he said. "She was a legend in our barrio."

in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.