

Three vie for Hispanic Baptist Convention president's post

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By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

A theology professor and two pastors will vie for the president's post at this year's Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas, June 25-27 in Arlington.

Expected nominees include Javier Elizondo, vice president for academic affairs and professor of biblical and theological studies at Baptist University of the Americas in San Antonio; Baldemar Borrego, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Nueva Esperanza in Wichita Falls; and Mario Alberto Gonzalez, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana in El Paso.

Julio Guarneri, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Getsemani in Fort Worth, who will nominate Elizondo, praised him for his "pastor's heart," "scholarly mind" and "passion for touching the world in and through Texas."

"At a very critical time for Hispanic work in Texas, Dr. Elizondo is God's man for the office of Convencion president," Guarneri said.

Elizondo is current first vice president of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas. He serves on the board of directors for the Baptist Spanish

Publishing House Foundation in El Paso.

Before assuming the vice presidency at Baptist University of the Americas in 2002, Elizondo was the school's dean of student services.

He served as a church-planting missionary with the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board and design editor with LifeWay Christian Resources. He was pastor of First Mexican Baptist Church in San Antonio, Iglesia Bautista del Salvador in Waco and Mision Bautista Hispana in Decatur.

Elizondo graduated from Texas Tech University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Baylor University.

Saying he wants to "be a part of contributing to the future of Texas Baptist work in whatever place of service the Lord opens for me," Elizondo hopes to lead Hispanic Texas Baptists to emphasize church planting, promote theological education and work alongside other ethnic groups in the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

He outlined a four-part vision for the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas:

- Give priority to education. "If we want to have trained leadership for tomorrow among our Hispanic people, we need to make sure our young people finish high school and go to college," he said.
- Unite around missions and evangelism. "I am particularly interested in increasing the number of Hispanic churches doing missions among hard-to-reach people groups," he said. "We already have Hispanic churches and leaders with a passion for reaching these people groups. We would like to encourage these to continue this good work and encourage others to join in this great task."
- Address the needs of all Hispanics. "I want to help represent first-

through third-generation Hispanics—English-speaking and Spanish-speaking,” he said.

- Protect human rights. “I want to speak to the need we have to treat all people—documented and undocumented—in a way that will honor the Lord,” he said. “All of us have been created in the image of God, and we have the rights given by our Creator—rights that no human being should take away.”

Alex Camacho, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Cristiana in McKinney and director of the nonprofit Immigration Services agency, will nominate Baldemar Borrego, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Nueva Esperanza in Wichita Falls, for president.

Borrega has demonstrated consistent commitment to strengthening families, leading family conferences in about 200 churches throughout the United States and Latin America, Camacho noted. And he has demonstrated courage in addressing immigration issues—a “hot potato” many Hispanic church leaders have been afraid to tackle, he said.

Borrego, a former first vice president of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas, member of the Convencion’s strategic planning committee and president of the Hispanic Ministers Conference, has been in the ministry 30 years.

He has been the host of a radio program, “Jesus is the Answer,” and is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors.

Borrego hopes to use the president’s position to promote unity, encourage pastors, strengthen families and enhance ministry to immigrants.

“If I’m elected, I would try to go to every corner of the state to speak with leaders, and I would make them feel a part of this great convention,” he said.

The upcoming convention could be of historic importance, Borrego stressed. "My desire is to bring all leaders together and to maintain the dignity and respect that we should have among ourselves and overall—to maintain our own identity as a convention that reflects all Hispanics in the state and those we need to serve, particularly if immigration reform becomes a reality for millions of people," he said.

"We have in front of us a great challenge to reach out to all those people who will need assistance when they start the process to become legal in this country. A lot of ministries can be done among these people."

Martin Ortega, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Emanuel in Midland, will nominate Mario Alberto Gonzalez, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana, for president.

Ortega characterized Gonzalez as "a good pastor, a good leader and a good servant" with a proven record of leadership and no personal agenda.

"A large group of pastors went looking for him; he didn't come looking for us," Ortega said. Gonzalez's previous pastorates include Iglesia Bautista El Buen Pastor in Las Cruces, N.M., and Iglesia Bautista Jeezreel in Chihuahua, Mexico.

He is a past president of the Hispanic Baptist Convention in New Mexico and the Hispanic Companerismo of El Paso.

He has served as church-planting strategist with El Paso Baptist Association.

Gonzalez, a graduate of the Universidad Autonoma de Chihuahua, earned a diploma in theology from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary and holds a master's degree in religious education from Luther Rice Seminary.

"I can see a great Convencion where all the Hispanics—first-, second- and

other generations—are working together to reach people for the Lord,” Gonzalez said.

The Convencion can help connect Hispanic Baptist churches to missionary opportunities throughout Texas and around the world, and it can encourage small churches that need support, he said.

Gonzalez envisions the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas as “not a political entity aligned with human interests but a real missionary family which is capable to use all its resources for the kingdom.”

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