

Church disbanded but Valerio family missions legacy endures

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When Primera Iglesia Bautista de Kinwood in north Houston disbanded and sold its property, the congregation wanted to honor the memory of Mike Valerio, the church's pastor more than 50 years, and ensure his family's missions legacy endures.

The church returned a portion of the proceeds from the sale to Union Baptist Association, which had provided the land where the congregation built its facility.

The church had benefited from a matching grant made possible by the [Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions](#), and at least five young women from the congregation attended Texas Baptist universities with help from the Mary Hill Davis Ethnic Missions Scholarship program. So, the church gave \$10,000 to the Woman's Missionary Union Foundation earmarked for the Mary Hill Davis Offering.



Mary Valerio and her family celebrate the creation of the Valerio Endowment for Hispanic Ministries. To the surprise of Mary Valerio, the pastor's widow and longtime leader in Texas WMU, the congregation also made a \$10,000 gift to the [WMU Foundation](#) to establish the Valerio Endowment for Hispanic Ministries.

"I hope the endowment will help train Hispanic leaders and support Hispanic ministries, wherever there is a need," she said.

She and her husband both benefited from Texas Baptist missions and received their education at East Texas Baptist University, she noted.

Call to ministry

Mike Valerio first felt God's calling to preach when he was a teenager attending Texas Baptist Encampment at Palacios. However, World War II interrupted his plans, and he entered the U.S. Navy, serving in the Pacific Theater of Operations. Later, during the Korean War, he served in the U.S. Army.

While he was in Korea, he again felt God's calling to ministry and "wanted to get serious about preaching," Mary Valerio recalled. He began

accompanying his father and several other deacons as they preached on street corners and in Spanish-language missions throughout the Houston area.

During his first few years as pastor at Primera Iglesia Bautista de Kinwood, he attended classes at ETBU in Marshall Monday through Friday and drove to Houston each weekend to preach.

‘No flags and no Kool-Aid’

Mary Valerio grew up in East Texas, where her father—who was born in Mexico—worked in a logging camp outside Livingston. Although she was christened at a Catholic church in Lufkin, she and her family did not attend any church regularly.

“There were two churches—one white and one black,” she recalled. Her family did not feel welcome at the white church, and they feared recrimination from their white neighbors if they attended the black church, she said.

Mary first heard the gospel when three Native American women from the Alabama-Coushatta reservation walked 12 miles round-trip to the logging camp to teach Vacation Bible School to about 10 children.

“There were no flags and no Kool-Aid,” she said. “But they came with their Bibles, told us ‘God is love,’ and taught us a couple of choruses. After that, my sister and I drove our parents crazy playing Vacation Bible School and singing those choruses.”

‘They said I could be a queen’

When her family moved from the logging camp so her father could work at the sawmill in Camden, one of Mary’s classmates invited her to attend Sunday school at Camden Baptist Church. Mary’s father granted

permission, provided she did all her chores before she left home on Sunday morning.

“I beat the rooster in getting up that Sunday morning,” she recalled.

At the church, she not only attended Sunday school, but also became involved in Training Union and the Girl’s Auxiliary, the missions organization now called Girls in Action.

“In GAs, they said I could be a queen, and I liked that!” she recalled.

Scripture memorization led to salvation

In one of the first of the “forward steps” required for advancement in GAs, she learned several Bible memory verses, including Isaiah 53:6: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

The Holy Spirit used that verse to lead her to saving faith in Jesus Christ, she said, recalling how she crawled out of bed in the predawn hours of the night, knelt beside her bedside and prayed to invite Jesus into her life.

Within a short time, her younger sister also accepted Christ as Savior. Although 15 years passed before her parents became Christians, they gave in to their daughters’ pleadings when a traveling salesman visited their house selling Bibles.

Although the family did not have any cash available, the salesman agreed to sell the Spanish-speaking family an English-language family Bible in exchange for a frying hen and some eggs.

“When I went to school at East Texas Baptist, I knew I needed a Bible,” Mary recalled. “So, I took that big family Bible with me to college.”

Texas Baptists helped make her education possible, she added, noting she

received the Mary Hill Davis Offering-supported Ethnic Missions Scholarship.

‘Fifteen minutes with Mary’

After Sandy Wisdom-Martin heard Mary Valerio’s testimony, she incorporated Valerio’s story into her final charge to the Texas WMU board as the mission organization’s executive director-treasurer, before moving on to the top leadership post at national WMU.



“Fifteen minutes with Mary changed my life,” Sandy Wisdom-Martin said. “Fifteen minutes with Mary changed my life,” she said. “I felt like I had been in a revival when I heard how God worked in her life for 81 years. Mike and Mary were passionate about sharing Christ and challenging church members to live a missional lifestyle.”

The gift by Primera Iglesia Bautista de Kinwood to establish the Valerio Endowment for Hispanic Ministries “will extend the missions vision and passion of Mike and Mary Valerio for years to come,” said Carolyn Porterfield, interim executive director-treasurer of Texas WMU.

“The Valerio Endowment for Hispanic Ministries will provided additional funding to help train missions discipleship leaders in churches and associations, expand missions outreach by Hispanic women and create

culturally relevant missions discipleship resources for Hispanic churches,” Porterfield said.

The \$10,000 endowment for the Mary Hill Davis Offering means about 4 percent—at least \$400 annually—“will be used each year to share God’s love in Texas,” Wisdom-Martin noted. Mike and Mary Valerio’s son, Mark, pointed out that is roughly equal to the amount members of Primera Iglesia Bautista de Kinwood gave sacrificially each year to the offering.

“Now, in honor of Mary and in memory of Mike, that much will be given every year until Jesus comes,” Wisdom-Martin said. “The Valerio story is a beautiful picture of what it means to be a cooperating Baptist.”