

Congreso challenges students to find identity in Christ

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WACO—Texas Baptist leader Julio Guarneri challenged young people at [Congreso 2024](#) to recognize their identity as individuals whom God loves unconditionally and is calling to be part of his redemptive plan.

“Congreso, I came to tell you that your identity is in Christ. You are loved, you are forgiven, and you are called,” said Guarneri, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

More than 1,500 students and leaders from across the state and beyond attended the three-day conference organized by the Texas Baptists’ evangelism team and held at Waco’s Extraco Events Center. Drawing from 1 Timothy 1:15-16, the theme for this year’s event was “¿Quién Soy Yo?” (Who Am I?).

‘You are loved by the Father’



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loved, you are forgiven, and you are called,” said Julio Guarneri, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. (Photo / Texas Baptists)

Guarneri told students they are not defined by their sin or religious performance but by God’s unconditional love for them.

“Often the world teaches that we are either our successes or our failures,” he said. “Today, I want to tell you that you are not your failures or your accomplishments. You are not the things that the world wants to measure you by.

“I came tonight to tell you that you are loved by the Father. That’s who you are.”

Guarneri pointed to Christ’s perfect atoning work on the cross and the freedom available to students because of it.

He encouraged students to recognize they not only are saved from something, but also saved for something—God’s eternal purpose of redeeming the world to himself.

Guarneri, who committed his life to ministry at Congreso 42 years earlier, urged attendees to pray and seek out the purpose God has for their lives.

“God’s purpose doesn’t end with him forgiving us and giving us a new identity. God’s purpose for us extends beyond ourselves, so that others can experience God’s love and forgiveness,” he said.

He closed by encouraging students to take what they learned at Congreso and go out into their communities.

“Whatever happens here is not just going to stay here. It’s going to make a difference in our communities and into eternity,” he said.

Commitments to Christ made at Congress

Long billed as one of the largest Hispanic youth evangelism conferences in the United States, Congreso 2024 marked 60 years of training and equipping students through worship, fellowship and ministry.

With an emphasis on biblical teaching, discerning God’s call and the importance of higher education, the three-day weekend saw 49 students give their lives to Christ and 28 respond to the call to ministry.

In addition to the main sessions, students attended workshops on topics including apologetics, mental health and personal evangelism. Age-specific guidance including a “Pathways to College” course was offered to older students.

As part of their emphasis on higher education, Congreso organizers gave away 20 scholarships to students who demonstrated outstanding academic performance.

Congreso Coordinator David Gonzalez, joined by Texas Baptists en Español Director Rolando Rodriguez, recognized former Congreso coordinators who were instrumental in supporting the event throughout its 60-year history.

Three former coordinators—Frank Palos, Gus Reyes and Gabriel Cortés—were introduced. Guarneri prayed over the honorees, whose ministry represented 30 years of Congreso leadership.

Gonzalez concluded Congreso by calling his wife and 15-month-old son onstage.

Reflecting on his own time at Congreso as a teenager, he challenged students to think about how they would be spiritual leaders in the future, saying he had no idea as a student that he one day would be leading the event.

“No matter what age God has called you, you’re never too young,” Gonzalez said. “You’re going to be the spiritual leaders who are going to lead my son one day.”