

Convención changes to meet changing needs

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En Español [aquí](#).

Texas Baptist work among Hispanics predated the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas establishing its own office with an executive director seven years ago. But the Convención wanted to do more to meet needs and respond to opportunities, the group's chief executive officer noted.



Jesse Rincones, executive director of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas

Jesse Rincones, executive director of Convención, views the Baptist General Convention of Texas as a national leader in Hispanic ministries. In fact, he sees the BGCT as the model other state Baptist conventions follow when it comes to ministry that connects with Hispanics.

Even so, gaps needed to be filled, Rincones said. When Convención began

to relate to the BGCT as a freestanding partner seven years ago, it marked the next logical step in a progression nearly 50 years in the making, he noted.

Unification Agreement of 1963

In the early 1960s, Anglo and Hispanic Texas Baptists alike recognized good work had developed in the state, such as Valley Baptist Academy in Harlingen and the Mexican Bible Institute in San Antonio.

But for Baptist work among Mexican-Americans in Texas to advance, leaders saw the wisdom in allowing what was then called the Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas to come under the guidance of the BGCT. So, the BGCT and Convención signed the Unification Agreement of 1963.

The Unification Agreement served Hispanic Texas Baptists well in some respects but certainly not flawlessly, Rincones noted.

The structure of Convención was problematic since presidents of the organization were elected for a two-year-term, with a chance to be re-elected for a third year, he observed. Elected officers were pastors who “basically had two full-time jobs,” Rincones said.

“There was also no funding to cover for the president’s travel expenses, or to send reports to communicate with churches,” he added.

By the time the next annual meeting rolled around, budgets already had been set, making it difficult for presidents to achieve any goals they might have had in mind, he observed.

The BGCT and Convención revised the Unification Agreement three times since 1963. When committees from Convención and the BGCT met to revise it once again in 2010, Rincones said, most members realized the agreement did not apply to the circumstances anymore.

A third way—partnership

Some suggested Convención go back to its pre-1963 status as an independent body that had little to do with the BGCT. Others wanted Convención to fall under BGCT Executive Board staff direction within Texas Baptists' department of Hispanic ministries.

Rincones saw a third way.

He recognized unless Convención presidents could fund their own travel and communication, the job was not going to ever perform well. And even if the presidents successfully presented their goals, funding would not exist to move forward their agendas.

The path of least resistance would have been to maintain the status quo and continue going back to Hispanic churches each year, telling them there was no funding to cover the costs of a program, he realized. But Rincones believed a more difficult course offered a better option.

“We had to go back to our people and say, ‘OK, if you want to do this initiative or this project, then we need to fund it,’” Rincones said. For that to happen, Convención had to become its own entity.

In 2010, Convención celebrated its 100th year anniversary, and in many ways, it began its rebirth as well—as neither a department within the BGCT organizational structure, nor as a separate entity unrelated to the BGCT. Instead, Convención now works as a partner with Texas Baptists.

The next generation

The 2010 Census reported 52 percent of the U.S. population growth among persons under age 18 came from Texas, and Hispanics in Texas comprised 49.3 percent of that sub-group. That represented an increase of 39 percent

of Hispanics ages 18 and under in Texas, while Anglos in that category declined 7.4 percent.

Rincones could see the need for more work to be done for Hispanic churches, but that was nothing new. He saw it when he was young and noticed the work in many Hispanic churches did not match the quality of work done in Anglo churches.

“I had the burden of seeing young Hispanic teens not get the same quality just because of their circumstance, or because a church does not know how to minister to them,” Rincones said.

About six out of 10 Millennials (young adults who came of age around the year 2000) and members of Generation Z (the rising generation who followed Millennials) are Hispanic, and many of them long have been missing from Sunday morning worship services, he noted.

Hispanic Texas Baptists must invest in that group right now, Rincones insisted.

Conferences like “Shine! Girls” for Latina teens and girls, the Young Latino Leadership Program, and the scholarships that Dallas Baptist University and East Texas Baptist University offer Hispanic students show Convención’s vision for the future. Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary recently announced it also has launched a Hispanic Texas Baptist scholarship and is accepting applications through Oct. 15.

Convención also is offering young leaders hands-on experience to develop their skills. Three out of five of Convención’s board members are young Latino officers.

Now is not the time for churches to lose generations of Christian Hispanic leaders just because “we did not know how to minister to that generation,” Rincones asserted.

New models for ministry

Hispanic ministry also involves working with first-generation Hispanics who may only speak Spanish. But the language barrier in ministry disappears among second and third generation Hispanics, Rincones noted, adding churches need to consider culture rather than language as the defining element.

Cultural traits that distinguish Hispanic Baptists include a strong sense of family and vibrancy in worship, he observed.

But instead of relying on outdated approaches to ministry, churches that want to work with the Hispanic population need to consider throwing away the old playbook and using new models, he said.

“Before, you had 40 year-old missions that had developed co-dependent relationships with their sponsoring churches,” Rincones said. Any major decisions involving the mission required the approval of the sponsoring congregations.

Calvary Baptist Church in McAllen offers a better model, Rincones asserted. Rolando Aguirre, president of Convención, serves as the pastor of the church’s Spanish congregation, Calvary en Español.

“In this model, you see that these pastors are an equal part of the staff, and the congregations share the same resources with the rest of the church” Rincones said. “The Spanish ministry is the church.”

Seven years after Convención gained its own identity, Rincones still finds himself having to explain it to churches. Many see Convención as a department of the BGCT. Others know Convención and BGCT are separate, but those individuals need to understand the two conventions are partners who seek to assist and help the same churches.

“Our churches are going to be most blessed when Convención and Texas Baptists are strong partners,” Rincones said. That can be seen in the message Rincones first delivers when he visits a church: “There is no better place to invest than the ministries of Texas Baptists, so give to the Cooperative Program.”

Convención’s goal is to help Hispanic churches grow stronger and healthier, and that that will be possible only if there is a strong partnership with Texas Baptists, Rincones insisted.