

Filipino Baptists sign covenant with IMB

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BOHOL, Philippines (BP)—The Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board signed a covenant with One Sending Body, the sending entity of five Baptist conventions in the Philippines.

The agreement creates an official partnership between the two missionary-sending organizations and facilitates teaming between Filipino and IMB missionaries to advance the gospel.

IMB Executive Vice President Todd Lafferty and Vice President of Global Engagement John Brady signed the covenant during the fourth National Congress for Global Missions, Aug. 13-15 on the island of Bohol in the southern part of the Philippines.

"Our vision is that we would strive together for the sake of the gospel to the ends of the earth," Lafferty said of the agreement. "I hope to see dozens of Filipinos called to missions and partner with our teams to share the gospel, make disciples, plant churches and train leaders."

Two hundred pastors and church leaders from five Filipino Baptist conventions gathered at the congress. The Filipino conventions established One Sending Body in 2008, and IMB missionary Steve Hagen said OSB has 21 missionaries serving in other countries.

"Some of these have done remarkably well. However, many have struggled, often because they were not connected to a receiving team," Hagen said. "Sometimes they became frustrated by joining teams who didn't share their beliefs. Sometimes they couldn't find any partners and floundered."

At OSB's request, Hagen began consulting with their board of directors.

"As the relationship developed, I saw more and more potential for how God can use Filipinos around the world," he noted.

Combined strengths can advance the gospel

Hagen also heard from IMB colleagues who had pressing needs for more teammates to join them in the missions task. Hagen knew there must be a way to connect the OSB missionaries with the IMB teams who needed them. As it turns out, IMB leaders were pursuing partnerships just like this one.

Representatives from both organizations acknowledged how their combined strengths can advance the gospel, and they are eager to work together in the new partnership.

Among the action points detailed in the covenant, Filipino missionaries will be commissioned to serve alongside IMB workers as second team members. IMB missionary teams are prepared to receive Filipino missionaries. The first missionary training program is scheduled for April 2020.

IMB will partner with OMB in training the Filipino missionaries, but their funds will come from various other sources, including the five Filipino Baptist conventions. Some of the Filipino missionaries will raise or earn their own support. Southern Baptists in the United States will soon be able to help support Filipino partners through special-gift funds.

The IMB is exploring how churches in the United States can be a part of the missions-sending process with OSB.

Future partnerships likely

Future U.S. church partnerships could include offering advice, coaching churches and pastors, or providing financial support in a manner that does not result in financial dependency.

Brentwood Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., already has committed to partnering with OSB, and Brentwood's missions pastor, Scott Harris, helped lead a session during the congress on how best to mobilize the local church.

While there are many geographical areas and isolated people groups in the Philippines still in need of the gospel, there is also a thriving national church, Hagen said. He believes the Filipino churches are well-equipped to take on scriptural challenges to share the gospel with those who've yet to hear it.

"There is great potential for the Philippines to be an influential sending nation," Hagen said. "Not only is there a strong national church, Filipinos are incredibly adaptable and amiable; able to fit in and get along in situations where many cannot, with an unparalleled passion for serving others.

"Filipinos have the capacity to be a powerful force for sending to Southeast Asia and around the world."