

Guest Editorial: Fill the Hispanic leadership gap

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If the more than 3,300 Hispanic congregations in the Southern Baptist Convention were their own state convention, they would be the fourth largest convention in the country, behind the Baptist General Convention of Texas and Baptist conventions in North Carolina and Georgia.

You might be surprised—as I was—to find out this important constituency has no representation on the SBC Executive Committee or its staff and no resourcing in the SBC budget.

Enter the National Hispanic Baptist Network to fill the urgent need for Hispanic leadership at the national level.

An ever-growing mission field

The growth of the U.S. population is driven by the Hispanic community.

According to [Pew research](#), from 2010 to 2022, Hispanics accounted for 53 percent of the population increase. However, between 2022 and 2023, “the Hispanic population accounted for just under 71 percent of the overall growth of the United States population,” according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).

By 2023, Hispanics comprised almost 20 percent of the population, making them the second largest group in the United States.

To see this community as Jesus once saw the crowds and felt compassion for them, is to declare in agreement: “The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few” (Matthew 9:37).

The Hispanic churches in the SBC, though growing, are also few.

Since 2011, the SBC had a net gain of 111 Hispanic congregations, while Anglo congregations suffered a net loss of 1,337 congregations.

Nevertheless, Bruno Molina, executive director of the National Hispanic Baptist Network [notes](#): “Although Hispanics make up about 20 percent of the nation’s population, we only make up 7 percent of the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention. Although a good number of SBC church plants are Hispanic churches, there is a 13 percent deficit in Hispanic representation.”

Hispanic congregations are at the forefront of reaching and ministering to almost one-fifth of the country’s population.

Never in our nation’s history, have so few Hispanic congregations had so great a ministry opportunity.

Juxtaposed to this historical evangelistic prospect facing Hispanic churches in the SBC is the glaring void of Hispanic leadership and resources available to them at the national level.

Hispanic representation in the SBC

There is no Hispanic representation on the SBC Executive Committee, the denominations governing body composed of 86 representatives.

There is no Hispanic representation on the SBC Executive Committee staff. This means no Hispanics are in the president’s office, communications, finance, advancement and relations, or facilities teams.

Contrast that with the richer context we see in Baptist work here in Texas.

Texas Baptists (BGCT) has 48 Hispanic employees. Texas Baptists en

Español, the convention's department focusing on Hispanic churches and leaders, has three staff dedicated to their efforts. Notably, there are 14 Hispanic directors on the Texas Baptists' Executive Board.

SBTC en Español, the corresponding office of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, has five staff members committed to serving their Hispanic churches.

Convención Bautista Hispana de Texas—the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas—has four employees dedicated to serve the almost 1,100 Hispanic Baptist churches in the state.

The Hispanic constituency of the SBC is also absent from resourcing in the annual budget.

In 2023, [citing “current budget constraints,”](#) the SBC cut the position of the executive director of Hispanic relations and mobilization, the only Hispanic on the SBC Executive Committee staff.

In an SBC budget of \$1.067 billion—which is a \$235,000 increase from the previous budget—there is no funding for ethnic relations leaders. There is no funding for annual meeting gatherings of the ethnic groups. And there is no funding for contract workers to relate to the Hispanic churches even on a part-time basis.

Enter the *Red Nacional Bautista Hispana*.

The National Hispanic Baptist Network

The [National Hispanic Baptist Network](#) was formed to fill the leadership and representation void at the national level for Hispanic Baptist churches.

The seeds for the network were planted by the efforts of Daniel Sanchez (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) and Bobby Sena (Midwestern

Baptist Theological Seminary).

Their vision was to create a formal and cohesive national effort that would serve Hispanic churches in the SBC. For several years, they gathered the Hispanic leadership of various state conventions and organizations to share insights about their work and explore the future of their ministries.

In December 2022, the leaders formally organized and created the National Hispanic Baptist Network. NHBN seeks to “fill the gap” of national SBC leadership by fulfilling its mission to connect on mission, to contribute and share resources, and to celebrate what God is doing among Hispanic Baptists.

Additionally, the NHBN will focus on facilitating communication and collaboration among Hispanic Baptist pastors and leaders and the entities of the SBC.

Texas benefits from having two Baptist state conventions and the oldest and largest Hispanic Baptist Convention in the country. Some state Baptist conventions don’t have a single Hispanic on staff for the entire state.

Where these state voids exist, the NHBN is helping establish Hispanic state fellowships to increase Hispanic Baptist congregations’ collaboration in gospel dissemination, discipleship and Cooperative Program giving.

The NHBN consists of several teams that serve the Hispanic Baptist community to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

The Network already has several of these teams formed, including prayer, evangelism, discipleship, emerging leaders, women’s ministry, church revitalization, education, finance, state leaders and church planting. Future teams include missions mobilization, pastors’ support network, children’s ministry, men’s ministry and worship ministry.

¡Juntos podemos!

I urge the SBC to acknowledge the underrepresentation of Hispanics and take concrete steps to address it by providing Hispanic representation on the Executive Committee and its staff, and adequately resourcing the various ethnic groups' work.

Meanwhile, the NHBN will move forward to equip and serve Hispanic congregations and leaders, while reaching out to broader communities.

Together with state conventions, SBC seminaries and related entities, the NHBN will embrace opportunities for growth and will empower Hispanic Baptist churches to share the gospel, make disciples and facilitate the flourishing of the Hispanic community.

Together we can. *¡Juntos podemos!*

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