

Voices: Convención is connection for the kingdom

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My wife, my in-laws, a couple of staff members, other members of my church and I had the privilege of attending the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas annual meeting at Dallas Baptist University.

My father-in-law mentioned he has attended Convención for 68 years. As I thought about my connection with Convención, I realized 2021 marks 40 years since I started attending. I'm glad I attended this year, and I'm glad I attended for the first time 40 years ago.

Hispanic Convention of my youth

I was 16 years old when I attended my first annual meeting of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas—called the Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas then. The meeting took place at First Baptist Church of San Antonio.

My father was the pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista in Beeville. Our family had been serving small Hispanic churches in South Texas, and it was not always easy.

Walking into the large First Baptist San Antonio worship center filled with Hispanic Baptists from all over Texas, a huge combined choir on stage, and the congregational singing that reverberated throughout the space was a fresh wind for my teenager-preacher-kid soul.

Rudy Hernandez, Rudy Sanchez, Leobardo Estrada, Carlos Paredes, Eliseo Aldape, Roberto Garcia, Frank Palos and other Hispanic Baptist giants preached, led sessions and served as Baptist General Convention of Texas

staff.

After years of serving struggling congregations, I was in awe of the strength, conviction, boldness and power of thousands of people who loved Christ, shared a heritage and were committed to the Great Commission.

Inspired by Hispanic leaders

It just so happened my first Hispanic Baptist Convention annual meeting was the centennial celebration of Hispanic Baptist work in Texas.

As Dr. Joshua Grijalva prepared to publish his book, *A History of Mexican Baptists in Texas 1881-1981*, the convention celebrated 100 years of Hispanic Baptist witness in Texas, marked by the work of Thomas Westrup in Laredo in 1881 that eventually led to the establishment of the Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana.

It was momentous for me as a high school student to know I was part of such a rich legacy. I wore my messenger badge with a sense of gratitude.

As I engaged the youth and single young adult component of Convención, I observed young adults in leadership—such as Albert Reyes, Ellis Orozco, Noe Vella, Delfino Aleman, Rhoda Sanchez, Patty Villarreal and several others—who inspired me with their commitment to education and to leadership.

Convención, along with Congreso—the student equivalent of Convención—and Campamento—the BGCT-sponsored Hispanic camp at Mt. Lebanon—were instrumental in my surrendering to God’s call on my life for vocational ministry and my pursuit of ministerial education in our Baptist institutions.

As a young person, Convención offered me inspiration, encouragement and access to resources and opportunities that strengthened my faith,

sharpened my skills to serve my local church, and set the course for future ministry in the kingdom.

Serving Convención for the next generation

Much has changed in 40 years for me. I have finished college, seminary and doctoral studies. I have served multiple churches in South and North Texas. I have raised a family of preacher's kids, who also have benefited from denominational work and Texas Baptist universities. I have participated in Convención as a messenger, a key note speaker, workshop facilitator and parliamentarian.

In this season of my life, I feel blessed to serve and support the next generation of leaders God is raising up. What a privilege it has been for me to see God raise up leaders like Dr. Tony Miranda, Dr. Joe Rangel, Eder Ibarra, Oliver Martinez, Edson Lara, Dr. Rolando Aguirre, Jordan Villanueva, Israel Villalobos, Fernando Hill, Fernando Rojas, Robert Rueda and many others like them. Our job is to encourage them and support them.

For the last 11 years, I have had the high privilege of serving as the lead pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in McAllen. Calvary is a historically majority-Anglo congregation but has become a multiethnic congregation over the last several years. More than half of our congregation is Hispanic, and about half of our Sunday worship attendance is in our Spanish language service.

We seek to minister well to everyone in our church, including Anglos, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and others; to celebrate our diversity and to rejoice in the richness of our cultures, backgrounds and languages.

Our participation in Convención allows us to stay in touch with how

churches are reaching and ministering to Hispanics, the fastest growing population in our state. It allows that segment of our congregation to stay connected for fellowship, encouragement and networking. Furthermore, it allows our church to be an encouragement and a support to other churches and leaders, hopefully providing one more model of how to fulfill the Great Commission in our context.

Beauty in cooperation

The beauty of associations and conventions is they are a two-way street. Churches and leaders sometimes receive the benefits of their voluntary cooperation, whether those benefits are spiritual, theological, educational or financial.

Other times, churches and leaders give for the benefit of others, whether the gift is service, encouragement, inspiration, mentoring or financial. When it is a church's or leader's turn to give, they also receive, because when we cooperate together we get the most "bang for our buck."

Churches that participate in Convención by attending, serving and giving help to advance kingdom work, receive a blessing from doing so, and get to be a blessing to others. Church members and leaders who invest in Convención are investing in the present and future of the gospel work in Texas. We are better together.

Thank God for the legacy of those who came before us. Praise God for the bright future we can have if we work together.

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