

Voices: Where are Texas Baptists' Hispanic graduates?

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Traditionally, when you come across a “Where are they now?” article, you’re given an update of where people we grew up with or who were once famous are at the moment.

Today, however, I want to share a glimpse, not only of where many Hispanic graduates of Texas Baptists-affiliated schools are now, but also where they may be in the future.

Continuing education and impacting institutions

First, our Hispanic Baptist graduates are continuing their graduate and postgraduate education.

A growing number of Hispanic students at our institutions recognize the value of pursuing advanced degrees to reach the potential for which God created them and to increase their kingdom impact. They often work or serve full-time to provide for their families or pay for school, doing all they can to avoid obtaining educational loans.

As they earn these degrees, Hispanic graduates from Texas Baptists institutions progressively are becoming faculty members on a full-time or part-time basis.

Many also are stepping into leadership roles where they teach. By doing so, they provide a much-needed cultural lens as our institutions seek to recruit, retain and graduate students from the fast-growing Hispanic population in

our state, which now exceeds 12 million people.

Leading the church

As the Hispanic population grows, more churches are recognizing the need to expand their efforts strategically to reach the surrounding community. So, they are bringing bilingual Hispanic graduates from our institutions to lead “Español” (Spanish) ministries.

These “Español” ministries are not isolated. They are integrated fully into the life of the whole church. The Hispanic staff member usually is recognized as one of the pastors for the entire church and plays a key role in the congregation’s present and future.

Many consider this model of ministry one of the best ways to reach the Hispanic population today. Some congregations are taking an even bolder approach by calling a bilingual and bicultural Hispanic leader as their senior pastor, a commendable step forward in the right direction.

Hispanic graduates of our institutions also are pastoring Hispanic Baptist churches across the state. More than 1,000 Texas Baptists churches identify themselves as Hispanic, and I would venture to say most are led by one of our graduates or have been impacted in some way by one of our graduates.

The large majority are bivocational—balancing work and ministry—so they can provide for their families better, or they serve full-time, trusting in the Lord’s provision for their basic needs. Still, they wholeheartedly lead the congregations God has called them to, maximizing their limited resources. They are my heroes.

Exceeding expectations

If you would like to know where many other Hispanic graduates from our schools serve, look no further than our Texas Baptists staff.

We are extremely blessed with Hispanic staff members and ministry leaders at all levels, all the way to our executive director, Julio Guarneri.

This growing diversity also is becoming a reality in our institutions and partners. The Baptist General Convention of Texas increasingly looks more like the people in our state, which is key as we seek to win the lost for Christ.

We recently formed a team to develop a doctoral cohort to support Hispanic Baptists pursuing a doctorate at our Texas Baptists institutions. The first step was a survey to collect data from current Hispanic Baptists with doctorates regarding their doctoral journey.

The goal is to develop a framework for the cohort to provide encouragement, support and training that will complement their learning.

In total, 28 of 32 doctors completed the survey. These numbers may not seem like much to some, but when I arrived in Texas almost 30 years ago, you practically could count the number of Hispanic Baptist doctorates with one hand. The fact there are more than 30 now is absolutely worth celebrating, though we certainly need more.

Everywhere

When you think of all the programs our higher education institutions offer, you probably can say there may be a Hispanic graduate in nearly every single career.

Hispanic graduates of Texas Baptists colleges, universities and seminaries serve in many other congregational roles. They are church planters, missionaries, educators, professional counselors, business leaders, entrepreneurs, musicians, doctors, engineers, social workers and more.

They are making a tremendous difference in their world and are setting extraordinary examples for those coming behind them.

So, if you ask me, "Where are they now?" I would say, "Everywhere!"

Gabriel Cortés is Texas Baptists' Hispanic education director.