

Voices: The truth about immigrants

September 18, 2024

“My adopted country gave me a new start, freedom I never had enjoyed before and a bright future for my family. But as a Christian, I’m saddened by the hateful rhetoric that often greets newcomers today.”

Editorial: Condemn false claims about Haitian immigrants

September 18, 2024

Editor Eric Black condemns the false claims against the Haitian community in Springfield, Ohio, for at least three reasons.

Voices: The story of Baptists and religious liberty

September 18, 2024

“For more than 200 years, Baptists in America and Southern Baptists in particular proudly have repeated the stories of our fight for religious

freedom.”

Voces: Fe, legado y misión bautista hispana

September 18, 2024

Sergio Ramos, durante el Mes de la Herencia Hispana, recuerda el rico legado de familiares y ministros que han influenciado su vida.

Voices: Hispanic Baptist faith, legacy and mission

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Sergio Ramos, during Hispanic Heritage Month, remembers the rich legacy of family and ministry leaders who have influenced his life.

Commentary: Immigrants, pets and the sin of slander

September 18, 2024

Matthew Soerens warns against sharing false information online that may constitute slanderous lies against those bearing God's image.

Guest Editorial: Advice from a pastor to pastors

September 18, 2024

As I reflect back on the many years I was a pastor and then an associational director of missions, I want to encourage "young" pastors.

At my age, "young" is relative. A young pastor could be 50 years old and starting pastoral ministry. Whatever your age, I hope this advice will encourage you.

Calling

Being a pastor is very important.

I remember when I started out, I had a scrapbook I wrote in, and I remember sharing it with my grandmother, and I remember her reaction when I had written in it: "I would rather answer God's call to be a pastor than to be the president of the United States."

That calling is the highest calling.

I never remember ever thinking I was somebody. I didn't deserve it. I certainly didn't earn it, but it was there.

Love

As far as how I saw my role, first of all, was that I was to love the people.

There were times when I got upset, but I never doubted people will overlook some mistakes if they know you love them and you are serving the Lord by serving them. Love covers a multitude of sins.

I really have felt so blessed through the years that the Lord gave me that feeling of commitment and love to really be a minister and to care for the people. Part of my sense of calling is to try to minister to them and pray with them.

Family

Yet, there were times when, looking back, I was more committed to doing those things than I was spending the balance of time with family. In every family, there are times like that.

Try to keep a balance between your ministry to the church and your ministry to your family.

There will always be church people who think you owe it all to them. At the same time, you just have to love them and go on the best you can.

Leadership

I never tried to be a ramrod. In my favorite ordination sermon, I always tried to point out the difference between being a shepherd and being a trail boss on a cattle drive. Jesus called himself the Great Shepherd. To me, that is a real distinction.

Peter talks a lot about being a shepherd and ministering to people and guarding them.

Treat people the way Jesus treats us—loving us, caring for us, showing respect.

Love again

Three words that stand out as far as our relationship with Jesus are grace, mercy and love. If we as pastors don't show those attitudes, something is missing.

Grace is getting what we didn't deserve. Mercy is not getting what we did deserve. Love covers it all. If you don't have love, mercy and grace, something is missing badly.

I don't care where you are, there's always going to be someone who is hurting, and a minister who chooses not to be there is missing something.

Preaching

If God hasn't called you to preach, then do what you need to do. But if he has, that's where you're going to find your fulfillment.

Preaching is a crucial part of your ministry. It needs to be biblical. We're there representing the Lord. We need to be telling his message, not some

pet peeve or using the platform for your agenda. As the prophet said, “Thus sayeth the Lord.”

Did God really say this? Is this really what he wants us to know? What is his message to us, and how are we to respond?

Somewhere in the message, you need to be telling the good news. People need to know there's hope and that Jesus saves.

It's easy for some to get sidetracked, and I think we're seeing a lot of that in our day today with the political stuff. There are people who have missed what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and they've tried to make it a political issue, rather than understanding we're here to represent the Lord, and that we're to represent him well.

The Lord is the one who matters. It's about his glory and his honor.

Endurance

The thing that helped me as much as anything was when the church gave me a sabbatical. There were some people who understood it and promoted it; otherwise, I don't think it would have happened.

A sabbatical can provide relief before burnout starts.

A sabbatical says to a pastor, “We're a hundred percent in favor of blessing you, so in turn you bless us, and to giving you the opportunity to grow and to learn yourself.”

You need to have a network with other pastors who can listen and pray for you. You have to be careful, though. There has to be trust developed. If you're not careful, you can share too much, and you wind up with people you thought were close gossiping about you.

You can't just unload everything. You need to have a good listener who is willing to come alongside and share the load a little bit.

Don't be too trusting, but don't be too cautious either.

Calling again

Whatever your age, stay with it, and be faithful to the end.

Editor Eric Black recorded this interview with his father-in-law Glenn Ward on Aug. 25. [Glenn died on Aug. 31](#). He stayed faithful to the end.

Glenn Ward was a pastor for 45 years—37 years at Acton Baptist Church outside Granbury—and director of missions for Paluxy Baptist Association in Granbury for 11 years. This interview was edited for length.

Voices: Anticipating heaven

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Ruth Cook shares her perspective on heaven gained in childhood from her mom, from her grandmother and through her own aging.

Voices: Threats to Christian unity

September 18, 2024

Wade Berry cautions against three types of threat to Christian unity—cultural change, competing gospels and toxic ecclesiology.

Editorial Invitada: Llena el vacío de liderazgo hispano

September 18, 2024

Jesse Rincones explica el vacío de hispanos en el liderazgo bautista del sur y cómo una nueva red satisface la necesidad.

Guest Editorial: Fill the Hispanic leadership gap

September 18, 2024

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!*

Jesse Rincones is board chair of the National Hispanic Baptist Network, executive director of Convención Bautista Hispana de Texas, and a member of the Baptist Standard board.

Voices: What does the local church have to offer?

September 18, 2024

I still remember going to video rental stores as a kid, excited to get a movie, TV show or video game to enjoy. Of course, those days are over. The video rental store industry is essentially dead.

In an age of online streaming, most consumers simply do not want or think they need to rent physical media anymore. This illustrates a simple but vital principle of business: If you only push a product people do not want and/or do not think they need, your business will fail.

The local church is not a business, and we are not “pushing a product.” Nevertheless, the principle still applies. If your community does not want or

think they need what your church has to offer, your church eventually will close.

The end of an era

There was a time in many regions of the United States when there was a widespread cultural custom that people should go to church. How personally devout you were, the details of your theology and your chosen denomination weren't super important. You just needed to be a member and (somewhat regular) attender at a relatively mainstream church.

Why? Because widespread cultural Christianity in the United States resulted in strong social pressure to participate in local churches. If you wanted to be seen as a decent, respectable member of society, you went to church.

This norm affected the way churches did outreach and evangelism. Your church didn't have to work too hard to convince people to come to church. You just had to convince them to come to *your* church.

But American culture has shifted dramatically in the past few decades. There no longer is this widespread cultural pressure to be part of a church. For many people now, going to church will actually *cost* you social status and respectability.

Coddling consumers

Most churches in the United States, even within the Bible Belt, are feeling the effects of this cultural shift. Churches are losing members and closing their doors. Many churches realize if they want to survive, they need to reach more people. But how? What does the local church have to offer that will make people want to come?

There are a number of “real-world” [benefits](#) to church attendance even some secular people have recognized: community, a support network, encouraging sermons, uplifting live music, various fun activities for people of all ages, community service opportunities and more.

Numerous churches around the country are growing precisely because they do a great job providing the benefits listed above. But there’s a problem: Churches aren’t the only organizations that can provide those benefits. You can find community, fun activities, service opportunities and so on in all sorts of places.

And being a faithful, committed member of a biblical church requires sacrificing time, energy, money and often social status.

If I can have fun with my friends just by staying out late at a bar with live music on a Friday or Saturday night, why get up early on Sunday morning to attend a comparatively boring church service, especially when many of my friends consider what my church teaches to be stupid, offensive and bigoted?

Naturally, as the Apostle Paul predicted, many churches therefore decide to water down the more difficult and offensive parts of the Bible and church life to keep people from leaving (2 Timothy 4:3).

The words of eternal life

Hopefully, readers will recognize watering down biblical truth is not a faithful option. But what should churches do then?

One solution is to try and draw people in with the real-world benefits described above, but then take the opportunity to evangelize them and teach them the truths of God’s word.

At first, that seems like a great idea. But it didn’t quite work out that way

for Jesus. In John 6, Jesus is being followed by a massive crowd—literally thousands of people—after the feeding of the 5,000.

But then Jesus says this to the crowd: “You are looking for me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Don’t work for the food that perishes but for the food that lasts for eternal life” (John 6:26-27 CSB).

In other words, Jesus tells the crowd they are seeking him for the wrong reason: earthly, this-worldly benefits. Free food. Jesus says the real reason they should follow him is because he offers eternal life.

Jesus then starts teaching the crowd (6:28-59). But they get confused and angry over his teachings (6:41-42, 52, 60). However, Jesus just doubles down. By the time he’s done, the crowd and even a number of his closer followers have walked away, leaving only the Twelve (6:61-67).

When Jesus asks the Twelve if they plan to abandon him as well, Peter responds: “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (6:68-69).

Why does this small, ragtag group of followers stick with Jesus after everyone else has left? Just one reason: Jesus has the words of eternal life.

What the local church has to offer

Our churches might draw in a lot of people with fun activities, good music, community service and such. But if we stand firm on the hard parts of what Jesus and the Bible teach, we can expect to lose many—probably most—of those same people pretty quickly (Mark 4:13-20).

But here’s the good news: We have the words of eternal life. They have been entrusted to us by Jesus himself—the gospel message and the

Scriptures. On top of that, Christ has given us the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17). And these are more than sufficient.

There is one thing—and only one thing—the local church has to offer the world it can't get somewhere else—the love of Jesus Christ (John 13:34-35, 1 John 4:7-21). By faithfully embracing, teaching and living out the words of eternal life given to us by Jesus, local churches can provide their communities with a “product” infinitely greater than any earthly good.

The people all around us need Jesus. They need his atoning death on the cross. They need his resurrection from the dead. They need his words—the Bible. They need the love of Jesus.

When we point people to Christ and demonstrate his love, we may not save every church from closing. We may not draw large crowds. But we will give people something they absolutely need, something no one else can give them.

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