

Hispanic pastors and wives find support, encouragement during retreat

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On the refreshing shore of Lake Tiak-O'Khata in Louisville, 12 couples gathered for the annual Hispanic Pastors and Pastors' Wives Retreat, March 1 – 2, along with their children.

“This retreat is to encourage our pastors, because ministry is stressful!” said Rocky Tzib, the Hispanic Ministry Consultant of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) and pastor of Iglesia Bautista Cristo Vive (Christ Lives Baptist Church), Pontotoc. “Every year, I invite them to come so they can be encouraged and hear some fresh Word for the week. Then they can go back and think about their calling that God entrusted to them.

A man with glasses and a dark jacket is speaking at a white podium. The podium has a sign that reads "LAKE of the Ozarks" in blue and red. Behind him is a large projection screen displaying text in Spanish. The text on the screen includes "Amando Para Servir" and a quote: "¡Mirad cuán bueno y cuán delicioso es habitar los hermanos juntos en armonía. Es como el buen óleo sobre la cabeza, el cual desciende sobre la barba; Tal como el rocío de Sion, que desciende sobre los montes de Jerusalén. Porque allí envía Jehová su bendición." followed by "(Salmo 133, RVR60)". In the foreground, the back of a person's head and shoulders are visible, out of focus. A water bottle is on a table in front of the speaker.

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Samuel Garcia, from the Hispanic Ministry of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, spoke on various Scriptural themes. On his topic of “Loving to Serve” from John 15, he explained, “We talked about the way Jesus sustains us. He said there is nothing we can do if we don’t abide in Him, so we need to abide in Christ, have intimacy with God by abiding in the Word, and be together as a group of pastors.

“Often, when time goes on, we forget the reason behind the ministry. So we try to go back to that specific reason behind our calling. We were called by God, so we encourage each other to keep being faithful and to finish strong the race He has given us.

“I can see the ministry is growing in Mississippi. The Lord is bringing people to the state, and that’s an open door for most

of them to come to pursue a better life. But there is not a better life without Jesus Christ. The Lord is opening that door for us to do ministry," Garcia affirmed.

Persevering in the Lord

Pastor Israel Alva Navarro attended the retreat with his wife, Lucero, and their two small children. Navarro pastors in the Hispanic Ministry of Colonial Heights Church, Ridgeland. "Since I'm in an English church, I like that I don't have to speak English here," he laughed. "I enjoy this retreat because I get to see other pastors that do some of the same things I do. It's very helpful and encouraging to get enriched by their experiences.

"Personally, I have learned a lot of patience with our ministry," Navarro attested, "and to rest more on the Lord regarding the results, because it is a difficult ministry. As a church, we have experienced some trials. It was a difficult transition to overcome that. But it's good to see that those who have remained have grown spiritually."

Pastor Cosme Arana attended the retreat with his wife Eva. Arana has pastored Hispanic Church of Clinton (supported by Morrison Heights Church) for nineteen years. "I love this retreat for the unity, and that this year I see more people supporting the Pastors and Wives Retreat. That's good because it's very needed," he confirmed.

"The Lord is at work in many ways. He has allowed us to come through difficult trials, and we have seen His blessing because He has led us to be more focused on Him. After we fasted together in January, we have seen more people come and visit the church. And we have seen more people make decisions for Him between the week before last and this past week, and we have had more baby dedications, and experienced more baptisms last week.

"The evangelism minister said to me that he received from the

Lord that we should invite people to a special service on a Saturday,” Arana recounted. “So I told him, ‘Yeah, we can do that,’ because we witness at Walmart, so the people we witnessed to there, we invited them, and they attended the Saturday service. We had 43 people that came in.

“The glory of God made it possible for us to be doing what we’re doing out of the ordinary. Then the following day in the regular Sunday service, we had baptisms, baby dedications, we had the Lord’s Supper, and we had an attendance of 78 last week. So the Lord is doing a lot of things in the mix of people being sick, in the midst of trial and tribulation. We keep going. We persevere in the Lord.”

Another pastor, Santiago Damian, shared his testimony, “I am the pastor of Iglesia Nueva Vida (New Life Church) in New Albany, and my family and I will be celebrating six years of pastoring this church. My wife, Ruby, and I have been married for 30 years. I came to America in 1999. From 1999 to 2003, I lost myself in alcohol and drugs, but there Christ lifted me up. I had been sleeping on the streets when, in August 2003, the call of Christ came. For 12 years, I was a member of the Bridge of Life Church in Corinth. In 2018, they called me to become a church pastor at New Life. We started with six people. Today we are 120 people. We preach love and humility.”

Supporting with prayer

The pastoral role is a difficult road full of heartache, as is the supportive role of the pastor’s wife. “It’s challenging that I have to share him with other people,” shared Glenda Tzib. “And sometimes in important decisions, I worry something will go wrong. When he is counseling, sometimes I have to be kind of counseling, too.

“I pray for him a lot to make wise decisions for all the people he counsels. That’s what I mainly love to do for him – pray for him. Support him when he’s discouraged. Sometimes he

does get discouraged. Sometimes things don't go well. I tell him, 'It's okay. Just keep going,'" said Glenda.

Christ's power resides in corporate prayer. When asked how Mississippi Baptists as a whole can better pray and work alongside the pastors and their wives, Glenda Tzib answered, "Pray for us because there are a lot of people in our community who are low-income families, so they don't have all the resources they need. Most importantly, pray that they find Jesus, because we know that Jesus is our source of everything we need. He tells us in His Word that he will always be with us and not to worry about anything, that He is the One Who will provide all our needs."

Garcia responded, "Pray for us to be able to reach out to the community and impact the community, and help provide the resources for evangelistic projects so that people can come to Christ."

"Pray for more Hispanic laborers," Navarro replied. "There are a lot of places in Mississippi where the Hispanics are, but no biblically sound churches there. So there is a lot of need for more laborers."

"Pray for strength for us to continue in perseverance in evangelism ministry to people, and for the whole church to go and be obedient to the Great Commission," Arana added.

"May we keep it in our minds that there is Hispanic ministry being done in the state," Tzib said in response to how all believers can pray better. "As Baptists, we should pray and work together, because I believe praying and working together will achieve Kingdom work and what God wants us to do. One person can't do much, but a group can do more. So I believe as Mississippi Baptists, we should come together with the Hispanic ministers and work together for the sake of the Kingdom."