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FIRST-PERSON: Standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us

by Julio Arriola, posted Wednesday, April 22, 2020 (5 days ago)



EDITOR'S NOTE: Julio Arriola is executive director of Hispanic Relations and Mobilization with the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee. April 26 is Cooperative Program Sunday in the Southern Baptist Convention.

NASHVILLE (BP) -- In the late 1990s, I met the one who is now my wife of more than 20 years. Carla was born in Mexico, though her grandparents, Wyatt and Beth Lee, were Americans. They served in Mexico as IMB missionaries for 36 years planting churches, serving in the medical field, being part of the team that founded the first Baptist hospital in Mexico, housing low-income Baptist students and ministering to the inmates of a local prison.

The Lees blessed thousands and thousands of people on the mission field. They learned the language, loved the people, trained the locals to become pastors and missionaries -- and Beth even learned how to eat *real* spicy Mexican food.

When I met Wyatt and Beth Lee, they were already retired. But their lives made a profound impact on Carla, who felt God's call to full-time ministry at an early age. For our entire married life together, Carla and I have served the Lord with our eyes set on Jesus -- but with her grandparents' testimony still cheering us on like the cloud of witnesses mentioned in Hebrews 12:1.

Earlier this year, when I was moving into my new office at the Southern Baptist Convention building in Nashville, someone brought me a plaque the SBC had received a few years ago from the Mexican Baptist Convention, thanking the SBC for supporting 150 years of work in Mexico. (The Mexican Baptist Convention, which consists of thousands of churches, grew from the work of Southern Baptists; the first evangelical church, founded in the 19th Century, was Baptist.)

Included in the names of about 500 missionaries on the plaque: Wyatt and Beth Lee.

Each of those missionaries had been fully supported by the SBC because of the generosity of our churches and their members, who had faithfully participated, year after year -- and often with great sacrifice -- in giving through the Cooperative Program. The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' channel of giving, through which a local church can contribute to the ministries of its state convention and the missions and ministries of the SBC through a unified giving plan to support both sets of ministries.

The love and gratitude those missionaries have for their convention is also amazing. Before Wyatt and Beth died, they decided to donate a large portion of their savings to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. It was not a lot of money, but they did it because they believed in the power of unity for the Gospel through giving, and they personally knew the difference those offerings make for eternity.

It is surreal for me today, serving our churches as the one entrusted with Hispanic Relations and Mobilization for our Southern Baptist Convention. Some say we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. This has definitely been true in my life. I would not be here, working to advance the Gospel, if not for what Southern Baptists invested in my wife's family -- our family -- through the Cooperative Program and through other mission offerings.

Right now, our convention has more than 6,500 people on the mission field (including missionaries and their children) who are fully funded to do what they were called to do: reach the world for Jesus. During this season of uncertainty because of COVID-19, we are more committed than ever to fulfilling the Great Commission. Let's not stop.

"And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16).