

Advocacy

by Larry Hovis | CBFNC Executive Coordinator



Do you remember the story of Hector Villaneuva? In 2010, with financial and spiritual support from CBFNC, Hector started a new church, *Bautista la Rocha* in Siler City. Though Hector had permanent-resident status in the U.S., he was arrested after he applied for citizenship and it was discovered that he had committed a felony (cashing a check that wasn't his while he was homeless) many years before he became a Christian, a crime for which he had served his punishment (sixteen months in prison).

Hector was part of the CBFNC family—a brother in Christ with whom we were in fellowship and on mission. There was no question that the CBFNC community would advocate on his behalf. By praying for him, standing with him and his family, and speaking up for him before the authorities, CBFNC staff and churches served as his advocate. Thankfully, after reviewing his case, hearing Hector's testimony, and seeing the support provided to Hector by his Baptist family, a federal judge canceled his deportation. Hector was able to return to his wife, children, church, and community.

Prior to this experience, we had exercised a strong commitment to missions but we hadn't thought much about advocacy. After this experience, we realized that a strong commitment to missions requires a strong commitment to advocacy. The issues that affect those with whom we are in a missional relationship, if that relationship is authentic, become our issues.

Cooperative Baptists have a strong resonance with Jesus' call in Matthew 25 to minister to "the least of these." We have understood that in ministering to the needy – the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, imprisoned – we minister to Christ himself. Much of what have traditionally called "missions" has revolved around ministry to those in great physical need. To be effective, such ministry requires not only that we try to meet those basic needs but that we also address the conditions that caused those

needs to begin with.

If we believe in feeding the hungry and thirsty, we will advocate to change the conditions that cause them to be hungry and thirsty.

If we believe in welcoming the stranger, we will advocate to create a more welcoming society.

If we believe in providing shelter for the homeless, we will advocate for affordable housing for all in our communities.

If we believe in visiting the sick, we will advocate for them to have adequate, accessible healthcare.

If we believe in ministering to the prisoner, we will advocate for a humane, fair criminal justice system.

Because of this understanding of Christ's call, CBF Global established an office of advocacy led by Stephen Reeves. This office has developed many resources to help congregations engage in advocacy efforts in their communities, states, and at the national level. (See related article in this issue by Stephen and visit cbf.net/advocacy for more information.)

Ultimately, we engage in advocacy because we have been the recipients of advocacy. In Jesus' Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17) he explains to the disciples that though the Father has sent him, he must soon leave. But the Father will not leave them as orphans. He will provide an Advocate. That Advocate is the Holy Spirit. That word, advocate, is a translation of the Greek, *parakletos*. It means, literally, "to call alongside." It is sometimes

rendered comforter or counselor. In other contexts it was even used to describe a defender of another in a court of law.

In sending the Son and continuing to walk alongside us through the Spirit, God has advocated for us, to redeem us from sin and bondage and to provide us with abundant and eternal life. We have been promised God's ongoing presence, to pray for us, to speak for us, to defend us, to counsel us, and to comfort us in our time of need. God gave us an Advocate for our benefit to be sure, but also so we can advocate for others. May we be faithful to that call.

"Missions requires not only that we meet basic needs, but that we also address the conditions that caused those needs to begin with."

Oberammergau 2020

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Since 1634, to commemorate their escape from the bubonic plague, residents of the small village of Oberammergau, Germany, have performed a Passion Play commemorating the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus every ten years. The play will be performed again in 2020.

Larry and Kim Hovis will be hosting a trip to Europe, May 18-27, 2020, with the Oberammergau Passion Play as the centerpiece. Additional stops will include Budapest, Vienna, Salzburg, and Prague. "Prior to the trip, an additional educational component will be offered addressing the theological and historical development of the play."

If you are interested in traveling with CBFNC friends on this wonderful adventure, contact Larry Hovis (lhovis@cbfnc.org) for more information.

