



Byron Velásquez, appointed as Canadian Baptist Ministries national field staff on September 1, 2021, serves alongside CBM's Latin America team. In his role to strengthen partnerships, Byron desires to ascertain and assist in local church priorities. Along with his partner staff, he helps to develop project proposals and bring about effective program management.

CBM Team Leaders for Latin America Bruno and Kathleen Soucy are greatly encouraged through this team ministry. Byron has a heart for the local church to engage with their communities, and brings to his work a commitment to see this take place. Since 2006, Byron has been training pastors and churches in Guatemala. For the last five years, ENLACE has benefited from Byron's coaching. (ENLACE is a non-profit organization that equips local churches to transform their communities: see [www.enlace.link](http://www.enlace.link).) Byron is a graduate of Central Florida Community College, where he studied industrial engineering, and of Seminario Teológico Centro America. He is currently completing a Doctor of Ministry (Theology in Culture).

After witnessing a movement for integral mission—to serve communities throughout Latin America through word and deed—Byron's passion has broadened in seeking justice for those living on the margins. In one community project supported by CBM, Byron and the Soucys met with church leaders in El Salvador who have developed an association of coffee farmers living in poor, isolated, Indigenous rural communities. Individual growers receive more profit from their crop when pooling their production and power, eliminating the need for a middleman's sales. (To find out more about this project, see Collective Cup Coffee, listed in the Hopeful Gifts for Change 2021/2022 CBM gift catalogue.)

One of the goals of a trip taken in December 2021 to El Salvador was to connect with ENLACE. Byron and the Soucys also wanted to connect with leadership from the ministry Semillas de Nueva Creación (Seeds of

New Creation). This is a network of churches supporting leadership development, pastoral needs, and small initiatives. As well, CBM works with the Federación Bautista de El Salvador (FEBES), an organization of about 30 churches in the region, so visiting with FEBES pastors and leaders and also with those from another group of about 60 churches, Asociación Bautista de El Salvador, was on the list for the trip. Byron and the Soucys introduced CBM's partners to new initiatives related to marketplace ministries, pastoral support groups, micro-enterprise, and more.

In a recent opportunity, Byron opened the Bible to Nehemiah, Chapter Two, and directed the conversation as to how Nehemiah addressed the challenges of rebuilding the destroyed city walls of Jerusalem. During Nehemiah's day, the people understood the needs of the city and voiced their concerns. Nehemiah, broken by his findings, turned to prayer so that he could follow and carry out God's plan. In a similar manner, the CBM team chose to listen to the pastors and leaders of the El Salvadoran Baptist churches. There has been much loss for pastors, church leaders, and their families in Latin America during this time of the pandemic. Pray for protection of the Baptist churches in Guatemala and El Salvador, and the health of pastors and leaders there. Pray for the families who grieve due to the deaths of loved ones. As of December 2021, only 30 per cent of the population in Guatemala had been doubly vaccinated.

Another item for prayer is for wisdom for the discerning of God's purpose and plan for the future. The Soucys wrote, "This time spent with people, face to face, has been a joy to us both after many months of isolation and Zoom." With another wave of COVID begun now, pray that CBM's Latin American team can use the Internet to build on these personal contacts.

Pray, too, for the Velásquez family. Byron and his wife Irma Yolanda have three children (Pablo, Raquel, and Diego David), and live in San Miguel Petapa, Guatemala.

by Ruth Anna Dana

Sources: [www.cbmin.org](http://www.cbmin.org); email with Bruno Soucy and the Dec. 2021 Soucy CBM ministry update; CBM Hopeful Gifts for Change catalogue; CBM Responding (Fall 2021); CBM Prayerline (Oct. 26 and Dec. 28, 2021); and, email with Bill and Janice Dyck.



Travelling by boat to meet with some of CBM's partners in El Salvador.

Soucy December 2021 CBM update.