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First IM Global Servants to Serve in Colombia, South America



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“It is with great joy and thanksgiving that International Ministries (IM), registered as the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, has accepted the invitation to send our first global servants to Colombia, South America,” says the Rev. Adalia Gutiérrez-Lee, IM area director for Iberoamerica and the Caribbean.

Longtime IM global servants Carlos Bonilla and Mayra Giovanetti (or “the BGs,” as they are known by their support network) have accepted the invitation that was extended by IM partner UNIBAUTISTA (Baptist University) to serve in discipleship formation and training church leaders. They will work among the Wayuu ethnic group in the Guajira northern region of Colombia, one of the most neglected areas of the country. The Wayuu people is one of more than 80 recognized ethnic groups in the country.

“When praying to go to Colombia, we struggle with how big the country is, the newness of serving with indigenous groups and not having visited often or long enough in almost 30 years!” says Giovanetti. “In many ways, it will be a new country for all of us—including Carlos, who was born in Colombia.”

The BGs have served as IM global servants for 18 years, starting with two five-year terms in Chile (2000–2010), followed by a short term in Spain (2010–2013) and most recently a full term in Nicaragua (2013–2017).

“We are experiencing changes in our family’s dynamics,” says Bonilla, “yet we know that, just as God has been faithful to keep us together, He will continue to care for us all, regardless of where we are. Our recent visit to Chile encouraged us and reinforced our philosophy on discipleship, as we were able to revisit the people and places where God used us at the beginning of our ministry and saw how they are bearing fruit that will carry into our next assignment.”

Gutiérrez-Lee comments, “It is wonderful to see how God has been preparing Carlos and Mayra while they were studying the Bible with local leaders in rural villages in several countries, so that now they can humbly continue learning together the Word of God and making disciples among the ethnic groups in Colombia!”

One of the BGs’ first assignments when they arrive in Colombia will be to provide support and coordination for two events to be held in July 2019: the Global Baptist Peace Conference and the Continental Christian Network for Peace. These are the continuation of a series of influential global peace conferences. Past gatherings have sparked an immense amount of effective grassroots work and have inspired and equipped many individual peacemakers to continue their own work. These two events will take place in Cali, Colombia, in the midst of the peace process that the country is experiencing.

“Getting to Colombia is not without its challenges,” says Giovanetti.

Bonilla explains, “We have a big financial hill to climb as we work to bounce back to 100% physical, spiritual and financial health. The financial challenge is particularly great, mainly due to the devastation wrought by hurricane Maria to the island of Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017. The Baptist Churches of Puerto Rico are still trying to recover. Their giving is sacrificial, but very limited due to their current circumstances and far from what it was in the past.”

All eight of IM’s global servants from Puerto Rico are also struggling. “We all have been negatively affected by the overall financial crisis of the island; it existed before the hurricane and has only worsened since,” Bonilla notes. “And yet the churches continue to pray for us and lovingly give what can be considered their widow’s mite.”

To support Bonilla and Giovanetti and help them to reach Colombia as the first IM global servants to serve in that country, give online [here](#).