

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

LATINX WOMEN IN MINISTRY:  
SPIRITUALITY AROUND THE KITCHEN TABLE  
THROUGH ADVERSITY AND OPPRESSION

A DISSERTATION AND ARTIFACT  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
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KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI  
APRIL 2024

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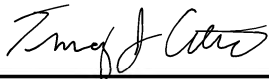
## Doctor of Ministry Dissertation Approval

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**Date of Defense:** March 11, 2024

We, the undersigned, determined that this dissertation has met the academic requirements and standards of Nazarene Theological Seminary for the Doctor of Ministry program.



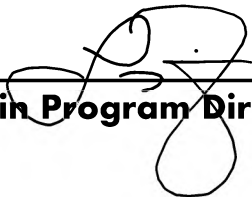
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My gratitude and appreciation for my academic advisor, Dr. Tim Crutcher, whose guidance, support, and encouragement have been invaluable throughout this study. I am grateful to Dr. Levi Jones for the opportunity to explore the field of Spiritual Formation more profoundly. I would like to express my profound and deepest appreciation to Dr. Rebecca Laird for introducing me to the Ministry of Spiritual Direction and for her valuable feedback on this research as my second reader. I could not have undertaken this journey without Dr. Douglas Hardy's spiritual guidance, care, compassion, and encouragement. Special thanks to Dr. Rhonda Crutcher for her editing guidance.

Words cannot express my gratitude to my sisters from the SWLA District of the Church of the Nazarene, who contributed to this research with their testimonies. Thanks to Dr. Juan Lelli and Dr. Roberto Hudgson for their valuable contributions to this project.

I am grateful to my cohort, professors, and staff at NTS for walking the walk with me and showing me God's love genuinely during our time together on this pilgrimage.

My appreciation to my parents for giving me the freedom to become the woman that I have become. They are no longer physically with me but always in my heart. I am grateful to my in-laws who always encouraged me to believe in myself and work hard to see my dreams become a reality. My deepest gratitude to my beloved Pastors of 29 years, Rev. Dr. Ogdon and Georgina Rico, who introduced me to a loving God who loves and accepts me just the way I am.

I am grateful for my new Christian family at Crossroads Nazarene Church and Camino de Gracia Iglesia del Nazareno.

To my family and friends, thank you for your love and support.

My gratitude and appreciation to my husband, Hank Allyn, for being my greatest cheerleader, encourager, and supporter. Your unconditional love means the world to me. Thank you for being my partner on this journey. Finally, I am grateful to Jacob Fibonacci Allyn, my fur baby and faithful companion, for loving me unconditionally.

## ABSTRACT

Maria P. Allyn

### Latinx Women in Ministry: Spirituality Around the Kitchen Table Through Adversity and Oppression

This research focuses on women in Christian ministry in the U.S. Latinx communities in The Church of the Nazarene. Through the light of Mujerista Theology, it examines the role and contribution of women in Christian ministry to spiritual formation and spiritual direction and the obstacles and challenges they encounter in a patriarchal society influenced by the Latinx culture. This culture limits the potential of women's roles in ministry.

This study attempts to bring awareness to Latinx congregations in the U.S. of the position of the Church of the Nazarene on women in Christian ministry. In eight lectures which explore the narratives of the Old and New Testaments that underlie this stance, congregations will learn about the history of God's calling, entrusting, equipping, and promoting women in roles of church leadership and ministry. Awareness is the first step towards changing a patriarchal leadership style to an inclusive one, where men and women have the same value and capacity to serve in any ministry position God has called them to serve. Mujerista Theology practices are encouraged to follow as a second step, offering conversations around the kitchen table where Latinx women can be heard and encouraged to remain in the struggle towards achieving liberation for all.

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## Chapter 1

### Overview

In Christian history, we learn that women have been messengers of God since the time of creation through the Old and New Testaments up to the present time. When Jesus came to this world to live among humanity, he selected a woman, Mary Magdalene,<sup>1</sup> John 20:11-18 NIV<sup>2</sup> to be the first person to see him after his resurrection and to be the first to receive the core message of our Christian faith, that “The Lord is risen and has triumphed over sin, evil, and death.”<sup>3</sup>

First generations of Latinx<sup>4</sup> communities in the U.S. still resist the fact that women were and are essential in the Kingdom of God. The cultural patriarchal structures of Latinx culture cause this resistance.<sup>5</sup>

The Latinx culture observes patriarchal structures that practice gender roles.<sup>6</sup> Men are the leaders, the providers, the protectors, and the decision-makers. Women are expected to be followers of men; they are not allowed to speak or make any decisions. Women are expected to

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<sup>1</sup>All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version of the Holy Bible.

<sup>2</sup> Zondervan, *NIV, Holy Bible, Larger Print, Paperback, Large type / Large print edition* (Zondervan, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy A. Lee, *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament: Reclaiming the Biblical Vision for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Ana María del Río-González, “To Latinx or Not to Latinx: A Question of Gender Inclusivity Versus Gender Neutrality,” *American Journal of Public Health* 111, no. 6 (June 2021): 1018–21, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306238>.

<sup>5</sup> Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1996), 110–11.

<sup>6</sup> “Gender Roles in Latinx Culture,” *The Weather Vane* (blog), February 18, 2021, <https://www.theweathervane.org/opinion/gender-roles-in-latinx-culture/>.



submit to the decisions made by men and abide by them, even when it is clear that some of those decisions are not the best for the family. Women must stay quiet and submissive.

Gender roles are also applied at church and places of work under Latinx leadership.<sup>7</sup>

Although Latinx women are often silenced and their contribution to promoting faith and spirituality is not recognized, their voices and actions represent a valuable contribution to Latinx theologies. Latinx women in the U.S. have struggled with deep-rooted paternalistic and sexist attributions from their Latinx cultures and from within and outside of the church for years.<sup>8</sup>

These patriarchal structures influence the effectiveness of church ministry because women serve from “under” from their place in the margins. Women are not allowed to become leaders nor to practice what they have learned at the ministerial academy because it does not align with the patriarchal traditional way of doing ministry. Usually, the only areas women are entrusted to lead are in children's ministry and hospitality, wasting other valuable resources these women have to offer to the church.<sup>9</sup>

This research focuses on congregations of the Church of the Nazarene in Latinx faith communities. As a sample for this research, the Southwest Latin American District, a Spanish-speaking district, was studied to offer an example of the position of Latinx church operations in the Church of the Nazarene and how these churches are affected by Latinx culture.

An estimated fifty percent of this research comes from first-hand interviews because there is not much-written material on Latinx women in the Ministry in the U.S. in the Church of the Nazarene in the Southwest Latin American District.

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<sup>7</sup> Edwin David Aponte and Miguel A. De La Torre, *Introducing Latinx Theologies*, Revised edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2020), 137.

<sup>8</sup> Aponte and De La Torre, 137.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Luisa Ledesma, interview by author, June 18, 2023. To ensure confidentiality and privacy of research participants, some of the names of other interviewees are pseudonyms.

The Southwest Latin American District of the Church of the Nazarene operates under patriarchal leadership. Women who are called to ministry are not able to fully develop their call as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The leadership of this district, attempting to comply with the established requirements of the church of the Nazarene, superficially promotes the stand of the Church of the Nazarene related to women in ministry, which states that “The Church of the Nazarene supports the right of women to use their God-given spiritual gifts within the church and affirms the historic right of women to be elected and appointed to places of leadership within the Church of the Nazarene, including the offices of both elder and deacon.”<sup>10</sup> However, when women respond to their call to ministry, the district’s leadership does not honor the spirit of the standards of the Nazarene church, denying women the right to participate fully in all aspects of ministry, including lead pastor and administrative positions. Preventing women from fully exercising their God-given gifts and talents hinders their ability to develop their ministerial potential fully and deprives the communities where they serve from the benefits of their gifts and talents in the service of God in their community.

## INTRODUCTION

For us to understand the factors that shape spiritual formation for Latinx women in ministry in the Latinx community, we need to understand the context in which they live. To appreciate the contributions they can make, we need to confront the challenges they face. So, we will begin with a survey of the history of Latinx ministry in the Southwest Latin American

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<sup>10</sup> Church of the Nazarene. *Manual 2023* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2023), para. 501. Accessed September 7, 2023. <https://nazarene.org/manual>.

District of the Church of the Nazarene, diagnosing the biggest obstacles that Latinx women face. After that, we will turn to how this contrasts with Scripture and Nazarene doctrine and theology. We will finish with an exploration of how women are already using their voice “from below,” analyzing their need to be empowered by the institutional structures of the church of the Nazarene in the Southwest Latin American District.

### **Survey of History of Latinx Ministry in the SWLAD Church of the Nazarene**

The Latinx community has been a part of the Church of the Nazarene since its initiation. The history of establishing and developing the Hispanic<sup>11</sup> Church of the Nazarene in the U.S. goes back to 1904 when Maye McReynolds started the first Hispanic Mission in Los Angeles under the auspices of the First Church of the Nazarene in L.A. The goal of this mission was to evangelize Mexican descendants in California.<sup>12</sup> McReynolds had a heart for reaching the Hispanic population and was willing to immerse herself in the culture to learn their language. Many converted to Christ through the ministry of McReynolds, including a Hispanic woman named Santos Elizondo, a woman from Chihuahua, Mexico.<sup>13</sup>

The Church of the Nazarene continued reaching out to Hispanic communities. In 1907, evangelization to Hispanic communities began in El Paso, Texas, when Santos Elizondo started a mission in El Paso and across the border in Juarez, Mexico, evangelizing the two sides of the

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Hugo Lopez, Jens Manuel Krogstad, and Jeffrey S. Passel, “Who Is Hispanic?,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed January 28, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/05/who-is-hispanic/>.

<sup>12</sup> Stephanie Rountree, “Women in the Early Nazarene Mission Among Spanish Speakers: Maye McRey” *Asbury Journal*, 77 no. 1, (2022): 6 accessed September 9, 2023, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol77/iss1/6/>.

<sup>13</sup> “Nuestra Historia: Misiones Hispanas USA-Canada,” Wesleyan Holiness Digital Library, accessed October 11, 2023, <https://whdl.org/browse/resources/13791>.

border.<sup>14</sup> It began expanding to other states with a high concentration of Hispanic communities. Santos Elizondo was a pioneer woman with a minority voice who contributed tremendously to implementing holistic Protestant Nazarene missions among the Spanish-speaking Latino<sup>15</sup> communities in the U.S.

As the First Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles, CA started producing small new churches that were growing, the district leaders realized they needed help guiding the new churches that were growing faster than they could handle. The district requested assistance from the foreign missions department to supervise the domestic mission field and provide funds to support it. In response to this request, Rev. E. Y. Davis answered the call and moved to California to supervise the local mission field.<sup>16</sup> Rev. Davis realized the need for a Spanish district to focus on the newborn Spanish churches, and in 1930, the Western Latin District of the Church of the Nazarene was organized with five Spanish-speaking churches: Los Angeles, Pasadena, San Diego, Ontario, and Ensenada, Mexico, with a total of 221 members. The Western Latin District celebrated its first district assembly in June of 1930.<sup>17</sup>

The Ministry of the Church of the Nazarene to Hispanic communities continued throughout the years. The U.S. was populated by massive immigration coming from Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>18</sup> In response to this vast wave of immigrants, the English-

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<sup>14</sup> Rountree, "Maye McRey," 22-121.

<sup>15</sup> Viviana Rojas, "The Gender of Latinidad: Latinas Speak About Hispanic Television," *The Communication Review* 7, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 125–153, <https://doi.org/10.1080/>.

<sup>16</sup> "Nuestra Historia," 19.

<sup>17</sup> "Nuestra Historia," 19.

<sup>18</sup> Roberto Hodgson, "History of the Hispanic Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada," *Didache, Faithful Teaching* 16:2 (Fall/Winter 2016), ISSN: 15360156 (web version) – <http://didache.nazarene.org>

speaking districts across the U.S. adopted a new vision of evangelization catering to Hispanics and other ethnic groups according to their culture.<sup>19</sup> During those two decades, the movement of multi-congregational and multicultural populations developed, resulting in the most significant growth of Hispanic churches in the U.S., starting more than 150 new congregations in a decade.<sup>20</sup>

Being witness to an increase in attendance in the established churches of the Western Latin District, the advisory board requested the division of the district into two to be able to serve better all the Hispanic churches that were spread throughout the southwest part of the U.S. After approval from the General Superintendent in jurisdiction, on July 1, 1985, the Southwest Latin American District of the Church of the Nazarene in the U.S. was born. The first assigned district superintendent was Rev. Moisés Esperilla, who immediately invited male pastors from Mexico and South America to care for the new churches since the district did not have enough Hispanic pastors ready to take the lead pastoral roles.<sup>21</sup> These pastors, along with the new migrants from Mexico and South America, brought with them the patriarchal structures that today, thirty-nine years after the district's initiation, still rule the Southwest Latin American District.<sup>22</sup>

This district was established to minister to the Latinx immigrant communities, to bring people to Christ, to care for the marginalized, to provide spiritual formation and spiritual direction through the doctrine of holiness, and to be a place of gathering where people without families could feel at home.<sup>23</sup> The district currently includes twenty-one Spanish-speaking

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<sup>19</sup> Hodgson, "History, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Hodgson, "History, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> "Nuestra Historia," 25.

<sup>22</sup> Maria Luisa Ledesma, interview by author, June 18, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Juan Lelli, interview by author, September 1, 2023.

immigrant congregations in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.<sup>24</sup> Immigrant churches in the U.S. are those churches that were established with the immigrant population in mind. Many immigrants in the U.S. left their extended families in their cities of origin. For these people, the church becomes their family. The church becomes the epicenter where traditional ideas are preserved, and community activities occur. For the immigrants, “the church is a place to gather with others from the same background and embrace familiar things, including cultural expectations of gender roles.”<sup>25</sup> In general, immigrant churches have male lead pastors who only allow women to serve in the ministry of hospitality, such as setting up the gathering building, cooking, serving the traditional food, and cleaning. <sup>26</sup>Tight-knit communities come out of the incorporation of cultural traditions.

What is wrong with this model? If we analyze the pattern, we can see a male pastor and only males serving in the church’s ministries, holding the position of elders, deacons, board members, ushers, and teachers, to mention a few. Where are the women? Women cook, clean, set up the building for activities, and greet and serve food. Are women preaching? Leading? Planting churches? Mentoring? or coaching? The answer is no.<sup>27</sup> Women are invisible and rarely are they front and center. The Latinx culture's gender roles have been established for years, and first generations of Hispanics in the U.S. who are in favor of these gender roles are not about to let

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<sup>24</sup> Lelli.

<sup>25</sup> Grisel Medina, “A Culture of Silence: Patriarchy in America’s Immigrant Churches,” CBE International, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/culture-silence/>.

<sup>26</sup> Medina, “Silence.”

<sup>27</sup> Medina, “Silence.”

them disappear;<sup>28</sup> they do whatever they need to do to keep those roles and use some Bible passages to support those gender roles. However, if we analyze their interpretation, those Bible passages do not apply to this issue. Regardless, they take advantage of the ignorance of the new immigrants who are struggling to survive in their newly adopted country and whose primary concern is not to learn biblical interpretation.

Latinx women are diligent workers, faithful to their call to ministry, and highly dedicated, but they are pressured to give in to the status quo.<sup>29</sup> They learn to be silent and accept their situation with a sense of resignation that this is how things will always be in the church for them.<sup>30</sup> Men have led the Southwest Latin American District since its inception. Some leaders were brought from Mexico and South America since there were not enough Latinx pastors in the new district to lead the churches. Those pastors came with their culture of patriarchal leadership ingrained, and this was reflected in their preaching and teaching in the churches they were assigned to lead.

At a time when more women than men in the Southwest Latin American District are reporting calls to ministry,<sup>31</sup> it is time to analyze the status of ministers in this district genuinely. The current situation is that first-generation male pastors are retiring; some of them are over 90 years of age and are still leading churches because not enough men are reporting a call to

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<sup>28</sup> Pew Research Center, “3. Hispanic Identity and Immigrant Generations,” *Pew Research Center’s Social & Demographic Trends Project* (blog), May 14, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2021/05/14/hispanic-identity-and-immigrant-generations/>.

<sup>29</sup> Medina, “A Culture of Silence.”

<sup>30</sup> Letty Flores, interview by author, October 9, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Lelli, Personal Interview by author.

ministry, and the churches in the Southwest Latin American District are not ready to accept a female lead pastor;<sup>32</sup> this is the current reality of this district.

In 2008, Rev. Dr. Roberto Hudgson became the third District Superintendent of the Southwest Latin American District. As a new DS, he saw the need for the district to prepare its pastors. One of the most significant contributions Dr. Hudgson made was establishing the Center of Ministerial Studies, an alternative program of study approved by The Church of the Nazarene for those unable to attend college to earn their ministerial education.<sup>33</sup> Without gender distinction, Dr. Hudgson encouraged men and women to enroll in the modular courses. By this time, several men and women had come forward to the district's leaders and expressed their call to ministry but could not attend regular classes in a college, university, or seminary. At this time, all the pastors in the district were men.

Dr. Hudgson concluded his tenure as District Superintendent in the year 2013. He did not get to see the fruits of his labor in the district; however, he knew he left the district going in the right direction.<sup>34</sup>

As the women taking the modular courses started learning about the history of the Church of the Nazarene, including the impact of women ministers and their contribution to the growth and expansion of the Kingdom of God here and now, they started inquiring about the requirements to become ordained elders. They learned through their research that the Church of the Nazarene believes God calls men and women equally to all pastoral and leadership roles. As

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<sup>32</sup> Geoff Surratt, "Why Women Can't Lead in Your Church," *ChurchLeaders* (blog), June 7, 2018, <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/326863-women-leaders-in-the-church-why-women-cant-lead-in-your-church.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Roberto Hodgson, interview by author, October 11, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Hodgson.



a result of this movement, in 2016, Diana Patricia Donnelly became the first woman to be ordained elder in the Southwest Latin American District. Her preparation was not easy; she was walking in uncharted territory.<sup>35</sup> The men in the district leadership put many obstacles in her way. However, her research and extensive knowledge of the Nazarene Church's *Manual* convinced the leaders that the manual needed to be honored even in a Latin District.

Rev. Donnelly opened the door for all the women in the district who had received the call to ministry but, until then, had not had an opportunity to explore their call. Following Rev. Donnelly's steps, several women started fulfilling the requirements for their ordination. The district started granting local and district licenses to all women who met the requirements.<sup>36</sup> As they completed their program of study and the required ministerial practice, along with meeting the three years of district license, these women pressed forward requesting ordination. Eight years have passed since the first women ordination in the district, and only four other women have been ordained for a total of five. Two of those five women have left the district; one is unassigned because the churches do not want women as their lead pastors.<sup>37</sup> Only two of the five ordained women are serving as lead pastors.

Currently, the district has seventeen ordained elders, fourteen males and three females. The district currently has seventeen district-licensed ministers, eight of whom are females.<sup>38</sup> As we can see, the number of female pastors who hold district licenses is increasing; however, if the district does not do its part to promote women's ministry, churches will continue rejecting the

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<sup>35</sup> Diana Patricia Donnelly, Personal Interview by author, September 6, 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Donnelly.

<sup>37</sup> Surratt, "Why Women Can't Lead in Your Church."

<sup>38</sup> Lelli, Personal Interview by author.

idea of accepting women as their lead pastors. Several women have completed the requirements for ordination while serving faithfully in the areas they are allowed to serve, but ordination is not granted under the claim that they are not capable of leading a church. If the district does not trust these women to lead a church, they will never be ready.<sup>39</sup> To prove their readiness to the district, all women (not men) must open a preaching point and prove that they can lead; the preaching point must grow to be declared a mission-type church, eventually becoming an organized church. By then, these women can prove they are capable of leading.<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately, some of them get discouraged and leave the district and the church as their call to ministry may be in an area of teaching and not merely preaching. There are other women who, encouraged by the district, have completed a bachelor's degree in theology from the Nazarene Seminary in Costa Rica but are not allowed even to lead a Sunday School class or a Bible study. Because they are women, they must first submit to the teaching of the male lead pastors and learn from them. Only once the male lead pastor feels they are ready are they entrusted to assist a Sunday School teacher. This requirement creates a problem because, following the teachings of the Nazarene church, once a person meets the requirements of holding a district license for three consecutive years, completing three years of full-time ministerial service or six years of part-time service, and the educational requirement of a valid ministerial education course of study, as long as they are in good standing, the person is ready for ordination.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ledesma, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>40</sup> Ledesma. This opinion is also shared by the other women I talked to, namely, Rev. Diana Donnelly, Rev. Lucy Estrada, and Pastor Letty Flores.

<sup>41</sup> *Manual*, para. 534.3, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://nazarene.org/manual>.

For many years, parishioners accepted this leadership style, assuming it was the norm of the Church of the Nazarene. Eventually, there was an awakening led by younger worshipers, and a second generation of Latinx was raised in the district's children's church and youth ministries. This new generation of Latinx was raised in the U.S. and had embraced the idea of equality between men and women, which led them to start questioning the exclusion of women in leading positions in the church.<sup>42</sup> As a result of this awakening and in an attempt to keep everyone in harmony, the district started including more women in hospitality, music, and children's ministries.

As young Latinx women receive calls to ministry in the Southwest Latin American district, they are excited to obey God, honoring their call by enrolling in Nazarene universities and seminaries, where they learn the history of the Church of the Nazarene.<sup>43</sup> They learn how, from its very beginning, the Church of the Nazarene has recognized from history and Scripture that God calls women to preach, to pastor, and to other positions of leadership in the church.<sup>44</sup> They then learn that the Nazarene Church supports equal rights for both men and women in all church offices, including the offices of elders and deacons,<sup>45</sup> which makes these women start questioning why their beloved district does not practice this principle.

As these women advance in ministerial education, they notice how their district can benefit by putting all their gifts and talents to the service of the congregations where they serve. Eagerly, they return to the district's leaders to share their learning experiences and how they

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<sup>42</sup> Donnelly, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>43</sup> Donnelly.

<sup>44</sup> Rebecca Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene: The First Generation* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2014), 70.

<sup>45</sup> "Manual | Church of the Nazarene," para. 105, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://nazarene.org/manual>.

would like to practice what they have learned in their local churches. The response they get from the district leaders is not what they want to hear. The leaders respond, “Wait until we have an opportunity to evaluate you and make sure you are not going to share something out of our norm and disturb the minds of our parishioners.”<sup>46</sup>

This evaluation can take up to five years because all the male leaders are busy taking care of other areas of ministry that are more important than listening to a newly called woman minister to something they are learning at a “modern” seminary.<sup>47</sup> When the time comes for the evaluation, women ministers are trained on “how the district does ministry”<sup>48</sup> and what spiritual practices or rituals are accepted and approved. This training is led by a senior male pastor whose primary purpose is to preserve the patriarchal leadership in their churches so that males can have absolute control of how ministry is carried out.

Frustrated by the rejection they receive from the district leaders, these women either leave the church altogether or transfer to other districts that welcome them with their gifts and talents and put them to the service of the church and the communities where they minister.<sup>49</sup> As these women leave the Southwest Latin American district, they report experiencing a sense of liberation from the oppression of male district leaders.<sup>50</sup> It is hard to do ministry in a hostile environment where you do not have a voice and are not valued.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ledesma, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>47</sup> Ledesma.

<sup>48</sup> Ledesma.

<sup>49</sup> Donnelly, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>50</sup> Lucy Estrada, Personal Interview by author, March 12, 2023.

<sup>51</sup> Donnelly.

Bringing awareness to the Southwest Latin American District will be the initial step towards the liberation of female ministers from the Latinx patriarchal structures that currently govern the district and keep women oppressed and marginalized. It would include awareness that women and men are equally called to ministry and that God calls and equips the people He calls.<sup>52</sup> Awareness that throughout history women have been a vital part of ministry and can continue to be if our local churches are open to accepting and honoring their God-given call to ministry. Our local churches and the district will benefit from all these women's gifts, which will contribute to our communities living the Kingdom of God, here and now, while advancing to the not-yet. It will be amazing how one simple change in handling the district's day-to-day operations can change the world of these women who have been called to ministry but are not allowed to practice their God-given gifts freely. It will be fantastic to see our communities changed from a controlling environment to a free and welcoming environment where everyone is respected as children of God and can exercise their full potential as human beings and as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Latinx Culture's contribution to the rejection of women in ministry**

In the history of Latinx cultures in the U.S., men have been the leaders of families and communities, including churches. Latinx in the U.S. either were born in a Latin American country or are descendants of people from a Latin American country.<sup>53</sup> As part of the Latin American culture, Latinx practice a patriarchal leadership style, where men are superior to

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<sup>52</sup> Letty Flores, Personal Interview by author, October 9, 2022.

<sup>53</sup> Yara Simon, "Latino, Hispanic, Latinx, Chicano: The History Behind the Terms." A& E Television Networks. Accessed September 7, 2023. URL <https://www.history.com/news/hispanic-latino-latinx-chicano-background>

women; they are the decision-makers, and women must submit to their leadership without questioning anything. This leadership style has been ingrained in the Latinx culture for generations. When immigrants come to the U.S. from a Latin American country, they bring with them their culture.

Gender roles are defined and deep-rooted in Latinx culture and are protected as a significant component of their identity.<sup>54</sup> Men are expected to be the providers and leaders of the families. Women are expected to stay home, care for their children, clean the house, and cook for the family. Women are seen as inferior to men and are not allowed to speak their viewpoints in family gatherings. Men are the family's leaders and decision-makers, and women cannot express their opinion, agreement, or disagreement; they are limited to obeying their fathers, husbands, and brothers.<sup>55</sup>

Latinx cultures tend to be very conservative and faithfully observe gender roles. Women have been trained to obey the established rules. Any time home leaders see something unusual happening in the behavior of a member of the family, they start questioning it. It is imperative to keep a good reputation as a home leader so they protect their patriarchal ruling figure and defend it against anyone who may want to influence a family member in the opposite direction.

The same principle is observed in the church. Leaders are very protective of their teachings so that no outsider comes and contaminates their congregations. Any time they suspect a person or a group of any practices out of the norm, they label them liberal and give them the option to either conform to their established leadership rules or leave the church. Any time a new leader is elected, they are informed that they must submit to the established leadership style,

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<sup>54</sup> Medina, "A Culture of Silence."

<sup>55</sup> Aponte and De La Torre, *Introducing Latinx Theologies*, 67.

embrace it, and defend it without questioning it.<sup>56</sup> Remaining faithful to the Latinx culture also gives leaders the right to control how they administrate and manage the church. No matter how much ministerial preparation a woman has, she does not have credibility because even in the twenty-first century, the hierarchal and patriarchal leaders are not willing to let go of what no longer works in the current culture and time. All they care about is protecting the traditions without evaluating the reality of how the church is losing by not allowing women to practice what they have learned during their ministerial preparation.

The voices of Latinx women, often silent, are a component of Latinx theology. It is obvious that throughout history, Latinx women in the U.S. have provided leadership in all areas of life, from raising their children, leading their household, and managing to stretch the money they receive from their husbands to cover all the needs of the family, to lead their small businesses and successfully raising their families; some of them do these things as single mothers. The institutional church rarely recognizes this.

Latinx women in the U.S. must deal with “deep-rooted paternalistic and sexist ascriptions from Latin American cultures.”<sup>57</sup> Latinx women are continually exposed to this leadership style at home, work, and church.

This reality of patriarchal leadership is lived daily in the Southwest Latin American District of the Church of the Nazarene. Currently, the district has 21 organized churches; nineteen of these churches are led by men and only two by women.<sup>58</sup> The district leaders fear that women will come with their liberal ideas and try to change established ministerial practices.

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<sup>56</sup> Ledesma, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>57</sup> Aponte and De La Torre, *Introducing Latinx Theologies*, 108.

<sup>58</sup> Lelli, Personal Interview by author.

The fear of the district leaders is such that they are excluding the Foundations of Women's Ordination class in the approved modular educational program course of study, a requirement established by the Church of the Nazarene for those preparing for ordination. When I inquired about it, I was informed by the program's director, Rev. Dr. Juan Lelli, that they plan to implement it when the new modular materials become available in 2025.<sup>59</sup>

In 2018, Dr. Jesse C. Middendorf, a general superintendent emeritus in the Church of the Nazarene, stated in a video titled "Thinking Out Loud: Women in Ministry"<sup>60</sup> that the Church of the Nazarene's policy requires all candidates for ordination, as part of the required program of studies, to take courses in "the ordination of women." Five years after this video was published, the Southwest Latin American district still does not comply with this policy.

### **Contrasting The Current Status of the Southwest Latin American District with Scripture**

Contrary to current Southwest Latin American district practices, Scripture advocates and supports liberation and freedom. We read passages of liberation and freedom throughout the Old Testament and New Testament. Luke 4:18 states, The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free. Based on this passage, all Christ followers have a responsibility not to be indifferent to any form of injustice and oppression regardless of the motives. To be authentic disciples of Jesus Christ, we must be willing to speak against injustice; otherwise, we will not be good reflections of Jesus.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Lelli.

<sup>60</sup> Jesse C. Middendorf, "Thinking Out Loud: Women in Ministry" (video), <https://www.facebook.com/NTSPRAXIS/videos/1929829710382631/?mibextid=zDhOQc>.

<sup>61</sup> Caitlyn Schaffer, "Sr. Holy: A Calling From the Lord," *Ask a Sister: Interview Wisdom from Catholic Women Religious*, January 1, 2018, <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/relgsister/5>.



## How does Scripture support the ministry of women?

From the beginning of time, we see through the Old Testament, starting in the book of Genesis, how women were instruments in God's plan for humanity: "So, God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" Gen. 1:27. Even after the fall of Adam and Eve, God continued using women to accomplish His plan of redemption. Christ's redemption purpose is to set people free from the curse of the fall. Therefore, those who are in Christ are new creations, 2 Cor. 5:17. As is stated in the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene, "As part of the redemptive community, no human being is to be regarded as inferior based on social status, race, or gender, Gal. 3:26–28."<sup>62</sup> Let us look back to see how God used women's lives throughout humanity's history to change entire nations.

Women were trusted to serve in various roles, such as judges, prophets, doctors, and more. Throughout the Bible, we encounter women who stepped out of the established norm of society and became extraordinary leaders.<sup>63</sup>

In the book of Exodus 2:1-10, 15:19-21 we read about Miriam, the sister of Moses. She took on the leadership role from an early age, with a great responsibility to keep an eye on her baby brother, Moses, as their mother put him in a basket and sent him downriver. I am sure it was not an easy decision for their mother; however, having Miriam as part of the plan contributed to facilitating and easing the process.<sup>64</sup> I cannot imagine the mix of feelings going

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<sup>62</sup>*Manual*, para. No 501.

<sup>63</sup> Chara Donahue "10 Women in the Bible That God Used to Save and Lead Others," iBelieve.com, accessed September 12, 2023, <https://www.ibelieve.com/faith/women-in-the-bible-god-used-to-save-lives-and-lead-others.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Chara Donahue "10 Women."

through Miriam's mind. Knowing it was the best for her brother, she dared to approach Pharaoh's daughter and offered to find a Hebrew nursemaid to care for the baby without saying that the nursemaid was her mother. What a great responsibility for a young girl.

In the Old Testament, we read about Deborah, one of the most influential women in the Bible, who was the first female judge. Deborah is known for her wisdom, courage, faith, and actions. We read her story mainly in Judges 4 and 5. Her impressive resume includes that of judge, warrior, poet, singer, and songwriter.

In the New Testament, we read about Mary Magdalene, a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ who was with Him at His crucifixion (Matthew 27:55-56). Jesus had freed Mary Magdalene from seven demons, and as part of her appreciation, she decided to follow Him as one of a group of female disciples who followed Jesus (Luke 8:1-3). There is much controversy about who Mary Magdalene was; some said she was a prostitute, and others say she was Jesus' wife.<sup>65</sup> However, there is no evidence in the Bible about these statements.

The fact that God chose Mary Magdalene to be the person to deliver the good news of Jesus' resurrection to the disciples shows that women were essential to the spread of that first Gospel message. Through the redemption of Christ, women got their voices back. Mary Magdalene was chosen to go and tell. She was commissioned to preach. Jesus did not put any limits or restrictions on her. Instead, He ordained Mary Magdalene to be a carrier of his Gospel.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> "The Real Reason Why Mary Magdalene Is Controversial," *Time*, (March 30, 2018), <https://time.com/5210705/mary-magdalene-controversial/>.

<sup>66</sup> "Why Was Mary Magdalene the First Witness of the Resurrection?," Crosswalk.com, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/women/mary-magdalene-witness-of-christ-s-resurrection.html>.

Women are no longer to be submissive. They are no longer destined “to suffer in silence in the face of abuse; they are no longer expected to blend into the background.”<sup>67</sup> Through Mary Magdalene, Jesus called women to be His missionaries and preachers. Jesus did not select Mary Magdalene simply because she was the only person available then; He illustrated what Paul wrote later in his letter to Gal. 3:28: In Christ there is “neither male nor female.” When Jesus was raised from the dead, He entrusted his faithful disciple Mary Magdalene to go and tell of His resurrection.

Mary Magdalene lived a life apart from God before she encountered Jesus. Her encounter with Jesus changed her life radically; “she went from a life oppressed by seven or more demons to participating in Jesus’ ministry and witnessing the greatest miracle of all time, the resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>68</sup>

Women ministers in the Southwest Latin American District of the Church of the Nazarene can aspire to do the same: to break the chains of oppression, rejection, and control and exchange them for love, kindness, and patience and freely share the message of finding freedom in Christ. It is hard to preach this message when they live under oppression, rejection, and control of a patriarchal leadership style.

### **What is the stand of The Church of the Nazarene on Women in Ministry?**

The Church of the Nazarene in the U.S. is a holiness tradition denomination initiated in 1908 when two churches joined, the New England-centered Association of Pentecostal Churches

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<sup>67</sup> “Why Was Mary Magdalene the First Witness of the Resurrection?”.

<sup>68</sup> “Who Was Mary Magdalene in the Gospels? Apostle, Evangelist,” Women in the Bible, accessed February 13, 2024, [https://womeninthebible.net/bible-people/mary\\_magdalene\\_gospels/](https://womeninthebible.net/bible-people/mary_magdalene_gospels/).

and the West Coast Nazarenes, and together agreed to bear the name of The Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene.<sup>69</sup> In 1919, the “Pentecostal” part of the name was removed due to its increasing association with the practice of “speaking in tongues,” something the Nazarenes were not interested in being part of.<sup>70</sup> Even before formally being recognized as part of the Church of the Nazarene, the mother church in Los Angeles, California, founded by Dr. Phineas F. Bresee, initiated in 1895 when Bresee and Dr. J. P. Widney wanted to start a church with an emphasis on living out the holiness of the Gospel among the poor of Los Angeles.<sup>71</sup> From the founding as one church under the name of The Church of the Nazarene, women were a vital part of the church ministry, and their ministerial rights were officially recognized. An oft-repeated folklore tells us that Phineas Bresee, one of the principal founders of the denomination, was fond of saying, “Some of our best ‘men’ are women!”<sup>72</sup> The fundamental principles of the Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles were established in 1898 before the congregation formally became the Church of the Nazarene with the posture to recognize the equal rights of both men and women to all offices of the Church of the Nazarene, including Ministry.<sup>73</sup>

### **How women are already using their voice “from below”**

Generally, women in U.S. Latinx communities are expected to be the spiritual guide to their male siblings. This practice comes from the traditional Latinx cultural background where

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<sup>69</sup> "Church of the Nazarene | Description, History, Beliefs, & Facts | Britannica," September 11, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Church-of-the-Nazarene>.

<sup>70</sup> Melissa Petruzzello, “Church of the Nazarene | Description, History, Beliefs, & Facts | Britannica,” accessed September 9, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Church-of-the-Nazarene>.

<sup>71</sup> “About Us,” Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene, accessed September 9, 2023, <https://la1stnaz.org/about-us/>.

<sup>72</sup> Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene*, 65.

<sup>73</sup> Laird, 70.

roles of caring for the children's education and homemaking are assigned to women, and roles of providers are assigned to men. Once a woman gets married and starts a family, she is expected to be the spiritual guide to the new family and her husband's family if there is no longer a female figure in his family.

The faith and spirituality of Latinx women in ministry in the Southwest Latin American District are two strong pillars that hold them together, regardless of the obstacles and challenges they encounter as ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For some women, faith and spirituality are their only weapons to fight against gender discrimination, abuse of authority, oppression, and rejection.<sup>74</sup> Throughout history, oppressors have used the Bible as a weapon, but it has also served as inspiration, encouragement, and a guiding light to the oppressed.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the attempts of the dominating culture to put all Latinx under one category, their cultures and experiences are diversely layered.<sup>76</sup> One commonality most Latinx have is the firm faith inherited from their ancestors and carried on by the women in their families, matriarchal figures such as grandmothers, mothers, *comadres* (co-mothers), *madrinas* (Godmothers), aunts, sisters, daughters, granddaughters, and any female figure in the family. These women are responsible for passing along their faith, religious traditions, beliefs, practices, rituals, and spirituality.

These women are seen as “live-in ministers.”<sup>77</sup> The grandmothers become the priestesses and theologians of the families. They not only pass on the Gospel, but they also nurture their

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<sup>74</sup> Lucy Estrada, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>75</sup> Kat Armas, *Abuelita Faith: What Women on the Margins Teach Us about Wisdom, Persistence, and Strength* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 31.

<sup>76</sup> Armas, 14.

<sup>77</sup> Armas, 33.

families with an intense sense of the ability of the Holy Spirit to provide guidance and comfort in their Christian walk and those called to ministry as they answer their call.<sup>78</sup> These Matriarchal figures may not be actively practicing organized religion, but their faith is rooted in their hearts, and when everything else fails, their faith remains and becomes stronger.<sup>79</sup>

In the Latinx heritage, women pass faith and spirituality down through generations: “Spirituality is the soul of our relationship with our creator; it is a vital part that we must keep nourishing so that we remain strong amid difficulties and challenges we encounter in life.”<sup>80</sup>

In the Latinx culture, women go out of their way to ensure they pass down their faith to new generations as expected, just as it was passed down to them. Some women seek to raise their children in organized religion. Those who are Roman Catholic take their families to mass every Sunday. Protestants take their children to Vacation Bible School, Sunday School, and midweek Bible Studies. Some women cannot take their children to mass, church services, and Bible studies because they are too busy working to bring food to their tables. These women rely solely on what they know and share with their children in the form of Bible narratives, the stories of love, hope, and triumph, keeping their families together and strong when they encounter difficulties in life.<sup>81</sup> Because women in Latinx culture are expected to be in the kitchen, cooking, and cleaning, most of the faith’s teaching and sharing takes place around the kitchen table. After a long day of work, grandmothers and mothers always look for time and space to teach their

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<sup>78</sup> Armas, *Abuelita*, 33.

<sup>79</sup> Armas, 34.

<sup>80</sup> Armas, 14.

<sup>81</sup> Armas, 32–39.

children their faith and spirituality, even if that happens while preparing a meal or washing dishes.

Women who receive a call to ministry and decide to pursue it go beyond what is expected of them as women in their families. They start an intentional, rigorous time of prayer and meditation; staying in touch with God and acknowledging the presence of the Holy Spirit in all their affairs is a must: “Spirituality is the soul of our relationship with our creator; it is a vital part that we must keep nourishing so that we remain strong during the challenges we encounter as women called to ministry.”<sup>82</sup>

Having a clear definition of their call makes the difference; once they know for sure they have been called to ministry by God, they start praying for guidance and discernment, a practice that is constant across all ages of women in ministry in the Latinx communities in the U.S.<sup>83</sup> When a woman in the Southwest Latin American District receives a call to ministry, most of the time they know what to expect. If they say yes, they will enter in an environment of gender discrimination, rejection, oppression, and a long, challenging journey ahead of them. “For us Latinx women to respond to a call to ministry, we first make sure it is truly a call from God and not a result of our emotions because the road ahead of us is uncharted territory, at least for my experience, and the only way to survive is if you truly have been called by God.”<sup>84</sup>

Saying yes to their call to ministry has short-term and long-term benefits:

We experience and enjoy the short-term benefits, which become the motor that keeps us going on our journey, regardless of all the challenges we encounter. The smile on the face of an older person who feels lonely and whose only touch with

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<sup>82</sup> Lucy Estrada, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>83</sup> Loida I. Martell-Otero et al., *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013), 122.

<sup>84</sup> Flores, Personal Interview by author.

humanity is seeing the *pastora* [female pastor] once a week, mostly to listen to and pray with them. There are smiles on the faces of children who listen to the biblical narratives and look forward to next week to see what kind of artifact they will make that goes with their weekly Bible study. What about the tears that come to the eyes of those rejected by society, either because they have AIDS or, perhaps, they have committed a crime against society? Knowing that—regardless of their crime—there is someone who genuinely cares for them and feels their embrace is more meaningful than any sermon anyone can preach to them while keeping their distance for fear of getting contaminated.<sup>85</sup>

The long-term benefits of saying yes to their call to ministry for Latinx women in the Southwest Latin American District could take years to realize. “Perhaps we do not live to see the long-term benefits, but by answering positively to our call to ministry and enduring all the challenges, we are opening ways for new generations to come, just like the courageous women in the Bible did for us.”<sup>86</sup> These women know that, by raising their daughters in the church, there is the possibility that they, too, get called to ministry. As mothers and grandmothers, women ministers in Latinx communities want to prepare the way for their daughters and granddaughters to make a smooth entry to the world of ministry with fewer pressures and expectations, with more respect and acceptance, with the hope that one day, women and men will be treated equally in the Southwest Latin American district of The Church of the Nazarene. These women have a story to tell, celebrate, and proclaim on any platform they can. It is time to rise above all negativity and step into the life God has created for them to serve the church and participate in God’s mission, experiencing the kingdom of God here and now amid suffering and joy.<sup>87</sup>

### **Need for empowerment.**

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<sup>85</sup> Flores.

<sup>86</sup> Donnelly, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>87</sup> Tara Beth Leach, *Emboldened: A Vision for Empowering Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 32.



What needs to happen to bring to the surface the voices of these women currently ministering in the Southwest Latin American district “from below”? How can these women be empowered to use their voices to openly proclaim the kingdom of God in a free environment in the institutional structures of the Southwest Latin American District?

*Kairos* is a biblical term referring to the proper time to act, that is, the time of God. I believe *kairos* has arrived for the Southwest Latin American District. It is time to change agents. Many Latinx women have lived their lives with accepting tendencies. Often, we hear friends or relatives say “*asi lo quiso Dios*” (“that is the way of God”).<sup>88</sup> They have learned to merely react to what has happened in their past with an attitude of submission; in accepting this attitude, some women avoid taking responsibility.

However, there are other Latinx women who, regardless of their circumstances, dare to believe that God is still on the throne and in control. They grasp with all their strength the promises they find in the Bible; they dream of the day these promises become a reality in their lives or their daughters’ lives. Deep down, they also know they may not live long enough to experience that freedom the Bible speaks about. So, they remain *en la lucha* (“in the struggle”), believing that one day, the just judge will give them the crown of justice.<sup>89</sup>

Until then, they continue fighting in secret with the only weapons they have, their faith and their spirituality, praying to God for their deliverance from the oppression of those in charge, praying for a world of equality where their sons and daughters can be treated equally as children of God, regardless of their gender. They are praying for a world that reflects the kingdom of God

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<sup>88</sup> Juan Francisco Martinez, *Walk with People Latino Ministry in the United States* (Wipf & Stock, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), Chapter 6, sec. 1879, Kindle.

<sup>89</sup> Lucy Estrada, Personal Interview.

here and now. They are praying for the chains of oppression to be broken. They pray for a place where we can live in a genuine Christian community, loving and accepting everyone.

It is time to move from gender hierarchy to gender equality, bringing awareness to our local churches, our children, youth, and adults that God sees us, both men and women, as his children, equally capable of serving and leading in any area He calls us to serve.

A wholesome understanding and consensus of Latinx women ministers in the Southwest Latin American district will assist district leaders in evaluating their contribution to spiritual formation and their value as clergy figures to current and new generations.

This can be attained by initiating open table discussions where the district leaders and lead pastors meet once a month and ask women ministers questions regarding how they carry out their ministerial assignments in the church and in the community—asking them to share their testimony of how God has guided them through the ups and downs of life, to be there for those people under their spiritual care. Asking questions about their ministerial formation classes, what are they learning? How are they applying it to their current ministry assignment? What was the most rewarding experience they had? What is their most challenging experience? And why? Giving these women a place at the discussion table gives them the confidence to be themselves and the grace to accept that they are not perfect but work in progress, willing to learn and to be guided with love, care, and grace. Closing the meeting with a prayer of encouragement as they return to their ministerial assignments will give these women ministers the confidence of the support from their district.

Once those in leadership positions are aware of the cultural and spiritual enrichment women bring to their faith communities, Church leaders can begin to understand how we, as the Church, can benefit from their gifts and leadership. Hopefully, the doors will open with more

opportunities for leadership positions for this segregated group of ministers who, aside from their gender and cultural differences, have been called to minister and guide the people of God.

## **Conclusion**

Unless there is a change in the leadership of the Southwest Latin American district in the Church of the Nazarene, which allows them to understand the vital part women play in all areas of ministry and all their potential to reach entire communities for Christ, this district has the potential to disappear as older lead male pastors are reaching their retirement age.<sup>90</sup>

In a time when more women than men in the Southwest Latin American District are reporting calls to ministry,<sup>91</sup> it is time to genuinely analyze the current situation of the ministry of this district.

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<sup>90</sup> Lucy Estrada.

<sup>91</sup> Lelli.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, we will explore the problem identified in chapter one. We will investigate the research on the history and the experiences related to interviews taken from clergywomen actively serving in the Southwest Latin American district. The history research is based on Latinx theologies, Latinx men and women relationships, and the influence of culture in Latinx theology. We will then analyze where Latinx women ministers in the Southwest Latin American district of The Church of the Nazarene already serve their communities using their spiritual gifts. We will then conclude by observing how the faith and spirituality of these women keep them strong and going when everything else fails.

Familiarizing ourselves with the theological background of Latinx women in ministry in the U.S. in the Southwest Latin American District in the Church of the Nazarene allows us to have a better appreciation of their *luchas diarias*, (their daily struggles) as they work to survive in a world where patriarchal hierarchy is the norm and reality. Latinx people may be practicing members of a Christian denomination such as the Nazarene Church, but their Cultural DNA is still ingrained in them. Most first-generation Latinx people in the US have developed a mix of spiritual exercises that reflect practices from their current theology and practices from their Latinx heritage. While Latinx women continue *En la lucha* (in the struggle) to liberate themselves from their oppression, their Latinx religious practices continue to be a substantial part of their Christian identity.

### **Latinx Theologies**

Many components make up Latinx theology. From an outsider's point of view, it may be complicated to comprehend Latinx theology unless we look back to the Latinx origin, their culture, their heritage, the life challenges they endure, and how their faith has helped them overcome the daily obstacles they encounter. Latinx have adapted their faith in God to fit into their daily life; their deep faith and spirituality usually keep them afloat. Their faith and spirituality help them raise their children with the belief that God watches over them. This assurance of God in their lives encourages their children to endure the criticism or bullying they go through at school because they look different, because they speak with an accent, or worse yet, because they do not speak English. This approach works until their children start creating their conception of God or until reality tells them differently.<sup>92</sup>

### **The role of Latinx culture in Latinx Theology**

Latinx spirituality is rooted in Latinx culture and traditions. The Latinx culture is broad and multicultural; it comprises people from diverse social, economic, and geographic backgrounds who share the Spanish language, heritage, or migration patterns in common and live in the United States of America.<sup>93</sup> They all contribute to the Latinx culture as a whole. Latinx people can be very different depending on their national origin. However, they share certain things in common. Their spirituality is one of the most vital components of their culture.

Most Latinx's faith is Christian, either Roman Catholic or Protestant.<sup>94</sup> They come from a variety of backgrounds and traditions. Most first generations of Latinx come from the Roman

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<sup>92</sup> Armas, *Abuelita Faith*, 33.

<sup>93</sup> Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*, Second edition (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2023), 87.

<sup>94</sup> "Religious Landscape Study," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), accessed October 4, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/>.

Catholic faith; in some cases, in their native land, they have implemented a new way of worshiping, a combination of Roman Catholic practices mixed with native worship exercises from their ancestors.<sup>95</sup> It is difficult to walk away from their heritage, so they find a way to keep their native practices alive. Once they migrate to the United States, they bring their faith, traditions, and spiritual practices with them.

From the beginning of Latinx communities in the United States, their spirituality has been dominant in the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant Churches interchangeably throughout the years under the umbrella of Christianity. The highest percentage of Christian Latinx Protestants identify with the Pentecostal tradition.<sup>96</sup>

Some of the first generations of Latinx communities in the U.S. and those who recently migrated from other countries feel left out in the margins. Most of them left their country of origin in an attempt to liberate themselves from the oppression, poverty, and marginalization they experienced in their home countries. As time and place of residence changed, they could no longer identify with later generations that had acquired a new way of worshiping. They read the Bible “from the margin.”<sup>97</sup> They feel not included in the dominant culture; they read the Bible as a source of strength and often seek an explanation for their hurting experiences.<sup>98</sup> The Bible becomes a place where they find comfort. Reading the Bible from the Latinx margin is more liberating and empowering. After all, Jesus gave an example; he invited his disciples to view the

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<sup>95</sup> Mark T. Mulder, Aida Ramos, and Gerardo Marti, *Latino Protestants in America: Growing and Diverse* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), Chap. 2, loc. 837, Kindle.

<sup>96</sup> Juan Francisco Martinez, *Walk with People Latino Ministry in the United States* (Wipf & Stock, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, n.d.), loc. 932.

<sup>97</sup> Justo L. González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 36.

<sup>98</sup> González, 37.

Word from the margins. Jesus continually taught his followers that it was necessary to understand and live their lives and experience the world through the eyes of the marginalized: women, eunuchs, children, poor, slaves, and physically and mentally challenged people, to be part of his reign, Luke 4:18, Matthew 19:21, Matthew 5:3–6.

The Latinx Culture has changed throughout the years, from first generations that have their original culture to new generations implementing a new culture,<sup>99</sup> a mix of what they have learned from their parents and what they have learned from American culture. The beauty of the Latinx culture is that it is a blend of many flavors.<sup>100</sup> Given that newer generations have designed their new version of Latinx culture, some of the styles of worship from the first generation are no longer applicable to second and third generations.<sup>101</sup> Some Latinx from the first generation feel lost in their own culture and do not accept the new worship styles where the traditional piano worship music has been replaced with drums and guitars.

### **Relationships Between Men and Women in Latinx Culture**

The phenomena of gender relationships also influence Latinx theology, including social norms and stereotypes that honor men and undermine women. Machismo and Marianismo are the sociocultural scripts given to male and female gender roles in Latinx culture.<sup>102</sup> They create

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<sup>99</sup> "Young Latinos: Born in the U.S.A., Carving Their Own Identity," NBC News, accessed October 7, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/young-latinos-born-u-s-carving-their-own-identity-n908086>.

<sup>100</sup> Daniel A. Rodriguez and Manuel Ortiz, *A Future for the Latino Church: Models for Multilingual, Multigenerational Hispanic Congregations* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), Chapter Introduction, loc. 159, Kindle.

<sup>101</sup> Rodriguez and Ortiz, chapter 2.

<sup>102</sup> Alicia Nuñez et al., "Machismo, Marianismo, and Negative Cognitive-Emotional Factors: Findings From the Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos Sociocultural Ancillary Study," *Journal of Latina/o Psychology* 4, no. 4 (November 2016): 202–17, <https://doi.org/10.1037/lat0000050>.

barriers to women's education and independence, preventing them from actively participating in social, economic, and political circles.<sup>103</sup>

Many first-generation Latinx people were raised in an environment that observes these gender roles. Machismo is sometimes used as a synonym for sexism. Its original meaning describes strong and aggressive masculine pride. Machismo includes positive and negative characteristics of masculinity, which include bravery, honor, dominance, aggression, sexism, sexual competence, and reserved emotions.<sup>104</sup> Domination and protection are two characteristics of what constitutes a real man, a “macho,” in the Latinx culture.<sup>105</sup> These men are expected to be dominant and protective of those under them, specifically females, starting with the females in their family. Men learn machismo behaviors early in life by watching their parents' relationship, how their parents treat them, and how they see their sisters being treated differently. Men with a macho mentality reserve their emotions because, if displayed, it could be a sign of weaknesses, which does not align with the ideal of a strong man. Suppressing emotions leads them to suffer from mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, and anger.<sup>106</sup>

The complement of machismo is marianismo, which is a set of morals and expectations relating to female gender roles. Marianismo defines women as “nurturing figures and spiritual pillars of the family.”<sup>107</sup> It stresses the role of women as family-centered. Women are encouraged

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<sup>103</sup> “Promoting Healthy Masculinities Is Key to Gender Equality. But How Do We Achieve This?,” Global Fund for Children, March 5, 2021, <https://globalfundforchildren.org/story/promoting-healthy-masculinities-is-key-to-gender-equality-but-how-do-we-achieve-this/>.

<sup>104</sup> Jose M. Fragoso and Susan Kashubeck, “Machismo, Gender Role Conflict, and Mental Health in Mexican American Men,” *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 1, no. 2 (2000): 87–97, <https://doi.org/10.1037/1524-9220.1.2.87>.

<sup>105</sup> Miguel A. De La Torre and Edwin David Aponte, *Introducing Latino/a Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2001), 58.

<sup>106</sup> Fragoso and Kashubeck, “Machismo,” 87-97.

<sup>107</sup> Nuñez et al., “Machismo, Marianismo,” 202-217.



to be passive and are expected to self-sacrifice while continuing to respect patriarchal values. These prescribed female gender roles are based on the Virgin Mary.<sup>108</sup>

It is believed that machismo and marianismo are a result of Christian Roman Catholic influence during the colonization of Latin America.<sup>109</sup> When the Spanish arrived in Latin America, they brought their faith and devotion to the Virgin Mary, which became a model for women. It created many expectations for women to be imitators of the Virgin Mary in purity, obedience, submissiveness, and the carriers of the faith. Some expected traits of ideal Latinx women from a marianismo upbringing are to be subordinate, pure, a good wife, a good mother, virtuous, humble, quiet, not speaking her opinions, and devoutly spiritual to oversee the family's spirituality.<sup>110</sup>

In a family where machismo is practiced, men are expected to be the providers, while women are expected to stay home and take care of the family. Women are not allowed to make any decisions. They must ask their husbands' permission to visit their parents and family. Patriarchal society does not allow women to have male friends. In a household run by a macho man, women are not allowed to work because it is seen as public evidence that the macho of the house is not able to provide for his family.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Rosa Gil, M. *The Maria Paradox: How Latinas Can Merge Old World Traditions with New World self-esteem*. New York: Perigee Books, 1997, 139.

<sup>109</sup> Nuñez et al., "Machismo, Marianismo," 202-217.

<sup>110</sup> "Understanding 'Marianismo' Culture in the Latinx Community," Verywell Mind, accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-marianismo-6749521>.

<sup>111</sup> De La Torre and Aponte, *Introducing*, 58.

Family honor is always attributed to the macho, while shame is attributed to the women. To keep the honor in the family, women submit to their husbands in all areas of their lives. Women are not allowed to have friends outside of the family because it is believed outsiders may influence them negatively. Being a male is a privilege in the Latinx communities where macho leadership is still practiced. Latinx machos enjoy the privileges that come with their gender. They take advantage of the power that comes with maleness and the benefit that comes from customs and traditions that limit women from participating in some activities.<sup>112</sup> This explains why male Latinos prevail over female Latinas<sup>113</sup> in the marketplace, in the church, in the community, and within the family structure.

Latinx women within machismo and marianismo cultures struggle against sexism. As a response, they attempt to find liberation by creating a new social structure in which all can achieve the fullness of life and liberation inside a community that is based on justice, not machismo and marianismo.<sup>114</sup>

Machismo and marianismo are still practiced among many in the first generation of Latinx in the U.S. For the most part, machismo and marianismo have been practiced for many generations in Latin American countries. As people immigrated to the U.S., they brought this practice. The second and third generations of Latinx in the U.S. are being educated in an education system that treats men and women equally regarding their abilities and capabilities to accomplish any task. Therefore, these newer generations generally no longer honor the macho

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<sup>112</sup> De La Torre and Aponte, *Introducing Latino/a Theologies*, 59.

<sup>113</sup> VIVIANA ROJAS, "The Gender of Latinidad: Latinas Speak About Hispanic Television," *The Communication Review* 7, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 125–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714420490448688>, 125-153.

<sup>114</sup> De La Torre and Aponte, *Introducing Latino/a Theologies*, 59.

mentality and treat their women differently as those who have the same authority and value in the family.

### **Latinx Women**

Latinx women are heads of households, spiritual and community leaders, and “the backbone of the Latinx church; their daily reality requires Latinx theologies to address fully their needs in the future and includes a thorough investigation into how the Latina perspective affects every aspect of theological discourse.”<sup>115</sup>

Even though Latina women's voices are often silenced, they make an invaluable contribution to Latinx theology. Women's leadership in Latinx communities is not recognized by official leadership structures or within the established church.<sup>116</sup> Latinx women in the U.S. must “contend with deep-rooted paternalistic and sexist ascriptions from Latin American cultures.”<sup>117</sup> Regardless of race or ethnicity, sexism has continuously been a social structure that “assumed men to be inherently superior to females, with the very structures by which society and the church function arranged to perpetuate this assumption.”<sup>118</sup> Following this principle, some Christian traditions teach that God made “man” in God’s own image while “the woman is a deficient copy, made in the image of man,”<sup>119</sup> giving men divine authority to rule over women.

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<sup>115</sup> De La Torre and Aponte, *Introducing*, 136.

<sup>116</sup> De La Torre and Aponte, *Introducing*, 137.

<sup>117</sup> De La Torre and Aponte, *Introducing*, 137.

<sup>118</sup> Aponte and De La Torre, *Introducing Latinx Theologies*, 136.

<sup>119</sup> Aponte and De La Torre, 136.

As a selected group, men maintain their superiority, justifying their right to dominate and tame those they consider inferior, often to improve their social position.

Established mainly by men, laws, traditions, and church doctrines support these assumptions of society regarding the nature of gender to create “a power structure that becomes normative and legitimate in the minds and hearts of the community, including women abuse by the system.”<sup>120</sup> In false consciousness, many women learn to identify reality through the eyes of men, and without realizing it, they become the most vocal defenders of the status quo, suppressing their oppression and unconsciously supporting and promoting the oppression of women of current and future generations. Despite this oppressive context, many Latinx women in the U.S. have acquired “other strategies of survival that coexist covertly with dominant paternalistic and patriarchal interpretations.”<sup>121</sup>

The phenomenon of sexism that Latinx women face is not just part of history; Latinx women still contend with oppression and discrimination daily. Latinx women deal with the internal sexism of their communities as established by machismo ruling. Listening to the voices of Latinx women is to listen to concerns for issues and trials affecting the day-to-day existence of their communities.

As we can see, the Latinx culture plays a significant role in Latinx spirituality. Although Latinx people come from different backgrounds, what they have in common makes them unique, and together they make the Latinx culture. Their spirituality has been formed and shaped by various ancestral rituals, traditions, geographic locations, language, exposure to the gospel, and social and economic status, to mention a few trends.

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<sup>120</sup> Aponte and De La Torre, 137.

<sup>121</sup> Aponte and De La Torre, 137.

## **Core Basis of Ministry**

Women in ministry in the Southwest Latin American district possess the core basis and values to become ministers. They report a relationship with God, a call from God, and a strong spirituality that they live out through spiritual practices that keep them afloat.

## **Spiritual Practices of Latinx Women Ministers in the Southwest Latin American District**

“Spirituality is the soul of our relationship with our creator; it is a vital part that we must keep nourishing so that we remain strong during the challenges we encounter as women called to ministry.”<sup>122</sup> A clear definition of their call makes the difference; once they know they have been called to ministry by God, Latinx women pray for guidance and discernment of where, what, and who. Once their call has been confirmed, Latinx women believe that the Holy Spirit empowers them and provides them the resources needed to carry out the ministry they have been called to be the transforming agents of their suffering communities.<sup>123</sup>

Evangelical Latinx women have chosen to live as if the kingdom of God is here and now rather than wait for the reign to come. They feel empowered by the Holy Spirit, which fills them with hope and grace as they confront the hopeless situations they encounter in their daily walks. They are confident and know that as they encounter “valleys of death,” God is with them, inviting them through the Holy Spirit to join in and not to escape but to stay and create sacred spaces of life for all creation, specifically for the neglected, the outcast, and the ones without a voice.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Lucy Estrada, Personal Interview.

<sup>123</sup> Martell-Otero et al., *Latina Evangélicas*, 122.

<sup>124</sup> Martell-Otero et al., 123.

Latinx women in the Southwest Latin American district of the Church of the Nazarene have an intense spirituality based on private and public prayer. Prayer is essential to their spiritual disciplines: individual, family, and community of believers' prayer.

### **Individual Spiritual Exercises**

Pastor Letty Flores is an associate pastor in a Latinx Nazarene church in the Southwest Latin American District. For Pastor Flores, her prayers, starting in the morning and continuing throughout the day, are prayers of thanksgiving, recognizing who we are, why we were created, and our purpose in this world. "As we encounter our giants throughout the day, it is vital to remember the sacrifice Christ did on the cross for me, for my oppressors, and for everyone."<sup>125</sup>

Pastor Flores has found refuge in Scripture, prayer, family, and some sisters in the faith who have listened to her in times of discouragement and have lovingly ministered to her—always focusing on the Word of God. "I cling to the promises of the Lord," such as Dt 31:6, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."<sup>126</sup>

"My husband is a great blessing to my life, a quiet and sagacious man who raises my arms when my strength declines, and so in the same way I do with him; God is always good."<sup>127</sup>

Reverend Diana Patricia Donnelly is the first woman ordained elder in the Southwest Latin American District of the Church of the Nazarene; she left the district in November 2021 to join the Arizona District as she was looking for a district that would allow her to put her God-

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<sup>125</sup> Flores Lety, Personal Experience in the Latin American District in the Church of the Nazarene., September 9, 2023.

<sup>126</sup> Flores, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>127</sup> Flores.

given gifts and talents to the services of others without having to jump through so many hoops. On June 25, 2023, Rev. Donnelly and her husband, Rev. Darrell Donnelly, started a new Latinx church named *Camino de Gracia* (Journey of Grace) under Crossroads Nazarene Church in the Arizona District.

Rev. Donnelly believes that prayer is the main foundation of her spirituality as a Nazarene. Not a prayer of asking for things, but a prayer of intimacy with God, listening in silence to his voice and confirming his purpose in her life while walking in obedience so that the purpose of God is fulfilled in her ministry.<sup>128</sup>

Rev. Lucy Martinez Estrada reports that prayer keeps her afloat; she is one of the remaining four ordained elder women in the Southwest Latin American District. Rev. Estrada reports that her prayer time is when she contacts her Creator. In the intimacy of prayer, God reveals his plans for her, encouraging her to stay in the race, and at the right time, she will harvest the fruits of her labor. Contemplative prayer is Rev. Estrada's praying style, where she prays using Scripture. "I read a passage of the Bible, listening quietly, expecting a revelation from God through the Holy Spirit, a revelation for the day, a sense of His presence and encouragement. I read the passage several times until I can freely place myself in the scene and allow the Holy Spirit to minister to my heart quietly."<sup>129</sup> Rev. Estrada starts her days with an hour of contemplative and meditative prayer in solitude. It sets the tone for her day. Rev. Estrada has learned to rely on her faith and spirituality for everything. When she needs to make a decision, she asks the Holy Spirit for discernment and will not decide until she feels comfortable that the Holy Spirit has granted her discernment on how to proceed.

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<sup>128</sup> Donnelly, Personal Interview by the author.

<sup>129</sup> Lucy Estrada, Personal Interview.

Rev. Estrada's future in ministry in the Southwest Latin American District is uncertain. She left her church in December 2022, six months after being installed as the lead pastor at *Iglesia Latino Americana* (Latin American Church) in El Paso, Texas. From the beginning of her time as a lead pastor of this church, Rev. Estrada was expected to care for the congregation's spiritual needs, but she was not allowed to make any decisions on the administration side because "she was a woman."<sup>130</sup> After installing Rev. Estrada as the lead pastor of the church, the district leaders also installed a church board made up of family and close friends of the district's leaders and gave them specific instructions to report directly to the district and not to the lead pastor since "the lead pastor was a newly ordained woman and did not know anything about administration."<sup>131</sup>

Rev. Estrada served diligently, focusing on the people who attended her church and not on her oppressors. The day came when she could not take it anymore after being disrespected by demands of the district leaders to perform as a lead pastor but without the authority and support to lead the congregation. Rev. Estrada felt she was set up for failure by not receiving the support she needed from the district. She informed the district of her decision to leave the church as she could not perform under those conditions; the district informed her that they would contact her to discuss the situation. Ten months have passed since then, and Rev. Estrada has not heard back from the district.

Rev. Estrada called the congregation for an extraordinary meeting, explained the situation, and informed them that she was leaving the church but would start having worship gatherings, prayer meetings, and Bible studies in her Las Cruces, New Mexico home. They were

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<sup>130</sup> Lucy Estrada.

<sup>131</sup> Lucy Estrada.



welcome to join her or attend the English Nazarene Church in El Paso, TX. Rev. Estrada wanted to make sure they would not be left unattended. With prior knowledge of the way the district had been operating, every single person, except the church board, decided to go with her, some of them even willing to drive an hour from El Paso to Las Cruces to attend her worship gatherings, prayer meetings, and Bible studies at her home.

Since then, the attendance at her home worship service has kept increasing. She received a church with ten adult members in El Paso, TX. She now has an average attendance of thirty-five adults, sixteen young people, and seven children, representing an increase of forty-eight in attendance in three months. Sometimes, she asks herself if she made the right decision; in the quietness of prayer, God reveals to Rev. Estrada that she is doing the right thing. Rev. Estrada reports she found freedom once she walked away from the toxic environment that was hindering her ministry and moved into an environment of faith, love, respect, acceptance, and tolerance.<sup>132</sup>

### **Spiritual exercises in the community**

The community of believers where we expect to find love and care is where we can practice loving each other regardless of our differences. The community of believers is where people can show support and appreciation for everyone. A community is where people practice their love and compassion for others. The formative purpose of a vital Christian community is to discover the humanity, dignity, and image of God in others;<sup>133</sup> it will constantly remind us of our humanity, vulnerability, and fragility and will keep us humble. Analyzing our part in building or

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<sup>132</sup> Lucy Estrada.

<sup>133</sup> Jon Huckins, *Mending the Divides: Creative Love in a Conflicted World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 165.

hindering the kingdom of God every day will keep us aware of intentionally seeking God's guidance and complying with God's desire for the church to be united as one body.

For Pastor Flores, prayer meetings are an essential part of her ministry. "It is in prayer that we pour out our heart, our real self, sometimes in a position of vulnerability but always trying to show our humanity to our sisters and brothers who may be in the same situation and can experience healing through community prayer."<sup>134</sup> Community prayer has become vital to the church's spirituality, where Pastor Flores is an associate pastor. Finding women in ministry to unite in prayer is difficult in the Latinx culture. Pastor Flores mentioned, "The hardest part is to identify women who are in the same situation as you and have them come to the point to trust that you are trying to be in solidarity with them; that you, too, are a victim of gender discrimination and you are not a spy."<sup>135</sup>

Rev. Estrada considers times of fellowship while breaking bread with the church community a spiritual exercise that strengthens our spirituality. "As humans, we all go through disappointments, illnesses, and challenges that bring us down. Sharing our life with sisters and brothers in Christ through fellowship makes our loads more bearable."<sup>136</sup>

Rev. Donnelly strongly desires to go out with the community of believers to the neighborhoods where they can be the feet and hands of Jesus. "This will be a great spiritual exercise; emptying of ourselves and giving room to the needs of others will keep us human and humble."<sup>137</sup> Rev. Donnelly has a tremendous passion for assisting those in need. She observes

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<sup>134</sup> Flores, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>135</sup> Flores.

<sup>136</sup> Lucy Estrada, Personal Interview.

<sup>137</sup> Donnelly, Personal Interview by author.

that sometimes churches are unwilling to explore their community because they lack the resources to meet the neighborhood's needs. However, she tells them it is not about providing material things all the time but a spirit of love and care. Sometimes, they need someone to listen to them; sometimes, they need a hug or a word of prayer or encouragement.

After analyzing the situations of Pastor Flores, Rev. Estrada, and Rev. Donnelly, I have concluded that it is time to move from a theory-oriented to a practice-oriented spirituality. What is needed to make this move? It is better to know God than to know about God. In authentic fellowship and spiritual companioning, "practice-oriented spirituality is nurtured by congregations that provide the spiritual disciplines to enter a relationship with the living God."<sup>138</sup> Accomplishing the move requires solitude and community, an integration of both personal prayer and communal prayer; this move will provide people with "roots and wings."<sup>139</sup>

### **Contributing to new generations as models of spiritual formation and spiritual direction**

Pastor Letty Flores, Rev. Lucy Estrada, and Rev. Diana Donnelly were asked the following question: "What advice would you give to women who have recently received a call from God to ministry in the Latinx communities in the U.S. in the Southwest Latin American district?"

Pastor Flores responded:

In my short time in ministry, I have been learning little by little and by the grace of the Lord; first, it is not easy on many occasions to continue seeing so many challenges that arise in the lives of those called to the ministry, especially as a woman. However, one of the challenges is being obedient to God's call, not looking to the sides, but looking to the front and always going one step forward in faith because sometimes you will see results

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<sup>138</sup> Angela H., Reed, Richard R. Osmer, and Marcus G. Smucker. *Spiritual Companioning: A Guide to Protestant Theology and Practice*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015, Chapter Introduction, Loc. 168, Kindle.

<sup>139</sup> Angela H., Reed, Richard R. Osmer, and Marcus G. Smucker. *Spiritual Companioning* Chapter Introduction, Loc. 179, Kindle.

that are contrary to what we would like to find in the church or many times in our circle of friends. The best decision we can make as pastors is to keep our eyes on the cross, which reminds us of the infinite love of the one who has called us. Being obedient brings infinite blessings, freedom, and protection to our lives, but above all, obedience can lead us to eternal life in the presence of our heavenly Father.<sup>140</sup>

According to Pastor Flores, the most important thing is to communicate with God through prayer and to remember everything He has done for us.

We have value; we were bought with his precious blood. Be prepared to fight the good fight; educate yourself to help others resist and persist. We should know our doctrine deeply. We must know what we will profess; a good understanding of our faith impacts our lives and those we minister to. We should work on our emotional intelligence and treat others with the same love we treat ourselves. We must start by treating ourselves with respect and love because we cannot give what we do not have. We need to take some time in silence, in solitude, in contemplative prayer, connecting to our Creator in the intimacy of our hearts and minds.<sup>141</sup>

Joining in the intimacy of our being, where there are no divisions or distinctions, we become one in totality within ourselves, God, and others, including the entire creation.<sup>142</sup> The spirit dwells in the heart of God; it is there where the human heart speaks to God's heart and where spiritual formation happens in the place of the heart.

For Rev. Estrada, the best advice is to stay faithful to God and to us and not do anything against our convictions and moral values. Our essence as women of faith is being genuine and faithful to the Word of God, not trying to dilute it to keep everyone happy. Sometimes, we must defend what we stand for, even with higher authority figures in our denomination. Always remember who you are and who called you to ministry."<sup>143</sup> "The one who calls you is faithful and will do it." 1 Thess. 5:24

Rev. Estrada is very firm about her belief in who she is and whose she is. Her values are not negotiable.

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<sup>140</sup> Flores, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>141</sup> Flores.

<sup>142</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, Michael J. Christensen, and Rebecca Laird, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit*, 1st ed (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 149.

<sup>143</sup> Lucy Estrada, Personal Interview.

Rev. Donnelly's reply is.

Listen to what God wants from you regarding your call; be patient and wait for God's time. As women, we are human beings like anyone, and we recognize that we always deserve respect and consideration. Not only in ministry but in all our affairs. Value and love ourselves first as God's perfect creation, and learn from the wise women of the Bible as they speak to us through the Bible narratives. Have a spiritual director and a ministry mentor who will be your companions in your journey. It is essential to pray for discernment and wisdom from God and have a good balance in your life as a daughter of God, family, health, and ministries.<sup>144</sup>

Faith and spirituality are two strong pillars in the lives of Latinx women ministers in the Southwest Latin American district of the Church of the Nazarene. During difficult times, as they prepare to honor their call from God, these women in ministry suffer in silence from oppression, abuse of authority, gender discrimination, and rejection. Their faith and spirituality are what keep them going, knowing that God is the one who calls them to ministry and God will provide the perfect time and place for them to serve. Sometimes, they may be serving as pulpit pastors and then realize that God has other plans for them. Some of them have become spiritual directors to their "sisters," encouraging them to stay in the race, even when they are being rejected.<sup>145</sup>

District leaders may prevent women from becoming lead pastors at churches, but the call to be a pastor cannot be taken out of a woman's heart.

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<sup>144</sup> Donnelly, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>145</sup> Donnelly.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, we will explore the resources available to address the problem presented in chapter one. We will go over a summary of Liberation Theology as an introduction and backbone of Mujerista Theology. We will then delve into Mujerista Theology, exploring perspectives that align as solutions to the problems Latinx women in ministry within the Southwest Latin American District are experiencing.

We will explore existing theological resources that can empower Latina pastors in their spiritual formation and help them come to serve from the surface as they are currently serving from “below.” It includes Liberation Theology and Mujerista Theology. We will analyze these theologies as they best portray a solution to the current need of the women ministers in the Southwest Latin American District in the Church of the Nazarene. The idea is to find a theology that best depicts these groups of women who are living under oppression under the patriarchal leadership structures that consider women inferior to men in all aspects of life, including ministry. These women are not able to receive proper spiritual formation due to their Latina culture, which overrides the norms established by the Nazarene Church related to the spiritual formation of their clergy.<sup>146</sup>

### **Liberation Theologies**

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<sup>146</sup> Lucy Estrada, Personal Interview.

Emerging in the late twentieth century, liberation theologies are concerned with transforming and liberating social existence as a religious mission.<sup>147</sup> It is contextually tied to the experiences and everyday needs of existing communities. Liberation Theology is a religious awakening that was initiated in Latin America by Gustavo Gutierrez, a Roman Catholic priest and theologian born in Lima, Peru, where he lived among the poor and experienced firsthand the pain and suffering of the people of the margins and “their struggles to affirm their human dignity and claim their true identity as sons and daughters of God.”<sup>148</sup> It was too much for him to deal with day by day, so he decided to put down with pencil and paper his experience of the daily life of survival of those living in poverty and under oppression, bringing awareness to the world of the daily struggles of the people of South America. Gutierrez had enough of experiencing injustice to the most vulnerable. He articulated the intersection of the struggles of the people of South America and the story of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; Gutierrez got to the point that he no longer could live peacefully, knowing that life and death were the daily struggles of his people, the people God had entrusted him to care for.

In his early writings, Gutierrez realized that “a theology that does not come out of an authentic encounter with the Lord can never be fruitful.” The study of the nature of God cannot flourish unless it starts from an encounter with God. To encounter God means to be encountered by him first. “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you should go and bear fruit” (John 15:16). We must abide in Jesus and walk in the Spirit to bear fruit. That is, if we truly have experienced an encounter with God, we can no longer be indifferent to injustice;

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<sup>147</sup> Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn, eds., *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>148</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), Preface.

also, if we genuinely have experienced an encounter with God, we will strive to live in a community and care for the communities of people, working together for the same purpose, that is, bearing fruit.

Although his first publication of *We Drink from Our Own Wells* was in 1983, Gutierrez wrote in 1971: “Where oppression and the liberation of man seem to make God irrelevant, a God filtered by our longtime indifference to these problems, there must blossom faith and hope in Him who comes to root out injustice and offer, in an unforeseen way, total liberation.”<sup>149</sup> Only God can grant his people complete liberation.

Since the beginning of Liberation Theology, the question of being spiritual has been a profound concern. Liberation Theology is preceded by the spiritual experience of followers of Christ who are devoted to the process of liberation.<sup>150</sup> Their daily life experience is at the heart of the movement of those seeking to state their human dignity and status as daughters and sons of God.

The injustices of oppression, abuse of authority, and discrimination that Gutierrez experienced in South America are the same injustices Latinx women in ministry in the U.S. in the Southwest Latin American District in the Church of the Nazarene encounter daily, in a different context. The sad part is that church leaders who are expected to care for the spirituality and well-being of their flock are the ones being the oppressors.

Latinx women ministers advocate for those without a voice. Praying to God to provide justice and freedom to the oppressed is the first step, but more must be done. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to be His hands and feet to humanity, advocating for the marginalized

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<sup>149</sup> Gutiérrez, *Wells*, 1.

<sup>150</sup> Gutiérrez, *Wells*, 123.



communities, who are often voiceless. Once we do everything humanly possible, God does his part—the impossible—and together, we can witness and celebrate the life-giving Spirit of Christ healing, reconciling, and giving hope for a life of freedom. Gutierrez invites us to open our hearts, one more time, to the Spirit of Christ, who gives us life to provide the ground for healing and reconciliation.

Gutierrez states that drinking from our own wells is “like the living water that springs up in the very depths of the experience of faith.”<sup>151</sup> It is living our lives in the Spirit of Jesus in the context of our reality: what we can hear, touch, and see amid our ministerial contexts. Based on their personal experience with Jesus, each person can “drink from their own well” as a result of their experiences of being part of people’s lives, traveling as a whole, searching for freedom and the fullness of life, and increasing our spiritual experience of accompanying the people of God, passing through their desert on their way to liberation. As we do it, we find joy in having fellowship with one another, in the love of Christ, our savior.

In Liberation Theology, “God is seen as the God of the living who enters into humanity’s history to dispel the forces of death, wherever they are at work, and to call forth the healing and reconciling forces of life.”<sup>152</sup> Those living in oppression have come to recognize the evil structures that victimize them. It is from their personal experience that the oppressed, poor, and marginalized have come to realize that the God they have worshiped through generations is not a God who wants to see and keep them oppressed but, rather, a God who wants to liberate them from those forces of death and offer them life in all its dimensions.

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<sup>151</sup> Gutierrez, *Wells*, Preface.

<sup>152</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), loc. 125.

## Mujerista Theology

Under the umbrella of liberation theologies comes Mujerista Theology. The three primary goals of Mujerista Theology are “to provide a platform for the voices of Latina grassroots women to develop a theological method that takes seriously the religious understandings and practices of Latinas as a source for theology, and to challenge theological understandings, church teachings, and religious practices that oppress Latina women; that are not life-giving, and, therefore, cannot be theologically correct.”<sup>153</sup> The overall goal is to create a platform where dialog can take place where Latina women can connect and exchange their experiences and contribute to discussions on how to come up with new church teachings or theology that better portrays their daily struggles and, therefore, is relevant to their current situation of struggle in *lo cotidiano* (the everyday living). These women need a theology that takes into consideration their suffering from oppression and rejection that, in some instances, comes from the current theology in place.

The Southwest Latin American District can benefit from this platform to give not just women but everyone a voice and a place where they can be heard, where their daily challenges become part of their theology, and where they can experience the kingdom of God here and now while advancing to the not yet.

Liberation Theology has a strong presence and influence in Mujerista Theology. Mujerista Theology expresses religious understandings of Hispanic women using a liberating lens, which requires placing oneself in the center of our struggling communities, “bringing together elements of feminist theology, Latin American liberation theology, and cultural

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<sup>153</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 1996, 1.

theology.”<sup>154</sup> Three viewpoints critique and challenge each other, initiating new elements, a new reality, and a new variation of liberation theology.

Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, a Cuban American Roman Catholic theologian and activist, is the mother of Mujerista Theology. I will be using her ideas modifying them so that they fit better in our Protestant/Wesleyan context.

Isasi-Diaz describes how Mujerista Theology was born out of the need for a name that correctly identifies Latina women and their struggles as part of their culture. Latina women could not fully identify with Feminist Theology since the Latinx culture is so ingrained in their being and influences and affects everything they do. In the words of Isasi-Diaz, “A name is not just a word by which one is identified; a name also provides the conceptual framework, the point of reference, the mental constructs that are used in thinking, understanding, and relating to a person, an idea, a movement.”<sup>155</sup> Mujerista Theology was born as a result of a group of Latinas who live in the United States and who are intensely aware of how sexism, ethnic prejudice, and economic oppression subjugate Latinas. They started using the term “mujerista”<sup>156</sup> to refer to themselves and decided to use “Mujerista Theology” to explain their faith and its role in their struggle for liberation.<sup>157</sup>

Isasi-Diaz initiated roundtable conversations with other Latinx theologians who, like her, had experienced firsthand the daily struggles of Latinx women in the U.S. under a patriarchal

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<sup>154</sup> “Mujeristas: A Name of Our Own!! – Religion Online,” accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.religion-online.org/article/mujeristas-a-name-of-our-own/>.

<sup>155</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 1996, 59.

<sup>156</sup> Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz et al., “Roundtable Discussion: Mujeristas Who We Are and What We Are About,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 8, no. 1 (1992): 105–25, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25002173>.

<sup>157</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 1996, 59.

society. Mujerista Theology originated in the mid-1980s. This theology encourages the development of Latina women's moral agency and gives a public voice to their theological views.<sup>158</sup> Isasi-Diaz's goal of Mujerista Theology is to contribute to Latinx women's struggle for liberation and to remain in *la lucha* (the struggle). We cannot talk of liberation apart from salvation. We cannot talk of justice apart from grace. We cannot be people of God without being in solidarity with the oppressed.<sup>159</sup>

In a church setting, it is almost impossible for a minister to keep their sanity trying to preach a gospel of love, solidarity, and freedom while the minister is living under oppression from the church leaders. Women in the Southwest Latin American District are indirectly forced to act and portray themselves as if everything is well and everyone is in harmony.<sup>160</sup>

Mujerista Theology "is not a theology exclusively for Latinas, but a theology from the perspective of Latinas, that is, an intrinsic element of Latinx theology in the USA and that should be taken into consideration by all liberation theologies."<sup>161</sup> It is not a theology just for Latina women; it is a theology formed by Latina women for the entire church and entire communities, which can serve as a model for all other liberation theologies. Mujerista Theology seeks and finds liberation for all, not just some individuals.

As Mujerista Theology develops a method of theology departing from religion as the most basic level practicing the favoring option for the oppressed, it considers liberation a process in which the oppressed are central active characters participating in creating a different reality

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<sup>158</sup> Isasi-Diaz, 203.

<sup>159</sup> Isasi-Diaz, 203.

<sup>160</sup> Ledesma, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>161</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 1996, 1.

from the current oppressive reality.<sup>162</sup> The challenge of Mujerista Theology is to bring about radical change in the churches; without it, oppression cannot be eradicated. For Isasi-Diaz, developing Mujerista Theology is “developing a vehicle for the voices of Latinas that conduct them to have access to theology, an academic discipline that influences the values and norms that operate in Latino communities and USA society in general,”<sup>163</sup> that is, opening the doors for Latinx women’s voices to be heard. “I believe Mujerista Theology not only makes epistemological and hermeneutical contributions to theology in general but also works to uncover and undo the network of privileges that keep Latina women absent or, at best, marginalized in the women’s movement, in Latino communities, in the academy, in churches, and society.”<sup>164</sup>

Isasi-Diaz was inspired to develop Mujerista Theology after hearing from one of her students at Drew University how she felt about feminist theory; while she was not against it, she did not wholly identify with it. She was looking for something unique that she could fully identify with as a Latinx woman in terms of liberation, not an individual liberation, but the liberation of her people.<sup>165</sup> Isasi-Diaz was looking to develop a theology that would allow her to construct something in her own terms, not of a shadow of feminist theory, but something more specific where her identity could be considered along with the identity of other Latinx women. Mujerista Theology was developed based on Isasi-Diaz’s personal experience along with the experience of other Latina women theologians who saw the need for a theology that they could fit in and fully identify with. Those elaborating on Mujerista Theology are insiders of the

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<sup>162</sup> Isasi-Diaz, 1.

<sup>163</sup> Isasi-Diaz, 1.

<sup>164</sup> Isasi-Diaz, 1.

<sup>165</sup> Isasi-Diaz, 2.

communities from which Mujerista Theology arises. While there is a possibility of bias, there is also the fact that if Latinas who are not happy with the established patriarchal culture want to be part of the change for the better of an entire ethnic community, then it is fair to propose that they are acting upon their need of liberation.

### **Significant Perspectives of Mujerista Theology**

#### ***Lo cotidiano, the everyday life.***

*Lo cotidiano* (“the everyday life”) is a theological source of Mujerista Theology. It describes women’s experience of struggle in their daily lives, including forms of speech, class experience, and gender distinctions. It also includes the impact of work and poverty, the experience of authority, prayer, and religious celebrations. *Lo cotidiano* represents the understanding of Latina women on what is right and good and what is wrong and evil. It is a social category where women are not objects but subjects and agents of theology.<sup>166</sup> Departing from their daily realities is more credible than departing from existing theology that does not address their daily struggles and, therefore, is irrelevant to their context.

#### **Mestizaje and Mulatez**

*Locus theologicus* is where Mujerista Theology is made, as it is the center of who they are. Mestizaje and mulatez situate Latinos as a community in the U.S. Mestizaje-mulatez is a concept that initially refers to mixing Amerindian and African blood with European blood. Mestizaje-mulatez now also refers to “the present-day mixtures of people from Latin America

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<sup>166</sup> Isasi-Diaz, 73.

and the Caribbean, both among Latinx in the U.S. and with people of another ethnic/racial and cultural background in the U.S.”<sup>167</sup> Mestizaje-mulatez also refers to the mixing of cultures to create a new culture that includes elements from the African, Amerindian, and Spanish culture. Isasi-Díaz calls it the “locus theologicus” for Mujerista Theology.<sup>168</sup>

## Historical Project

Historical Project or preferred future encompasses the entire process of Mujerista Theology. It is the ideal outcome; it could be a long process as so many things need to happen to attain it. There are many steps to take, and the road to achieving it can become long and weary, but the desire to reach liberation from the oppression Latinx women have lived through for years will be the motor to keep them going and eventually reach the desired result, the historical project.

It contributes to society by developing and implementing ethical norms that guide society and its future. The hope is to build flexible and open relationships between all people and all institutions. There is no competition, but there will be a firm foundation that helps to create the type of society that is desired, which helps with everyone’s welfare, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable in the population. Only when these ideals are met can there be a genuinely democratic regime that enables all population members to participate in a society that will leave no one behind and carefully guard against a few of its citizens flourishing while the rest of the population is left behind.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004), loc. 1085.

<sup>168</sup> Isasi-Díaz, loc. 1094.

<sup>169</sup> Isasi-Díaz, loc. 76.

Mujerista Theology's historical project model offers hope to Latinx communities living under oppression, building open relationships with the church and community leaders where all people and all institutions are willing to do their best to contribute to the desired outcome. A stronger community where everyone is treated with respect, dignity, liberation, and welfare is their priority.

This project does not seek to define social structures but instead to designate theo-ethical understanding, values, norms, and virtues based on the religious beliefs and practices of grassroots Latinas who struggle for liberation in the U.S. It presents a vision of what could be considered concrete in providing an action in which to provide a commitment. It challenges the present systems used by the rich and powerful as fundamental and permanent. Mujerista Theology hopes to bring what is beyond limitations and expectations and change the status quo of promoting the privileges of the few at the expense of many. The hope is to provide concrete reality and not the understanding of truth to a particular situation.<sup>170</sup> This reality is based on Latina women's daily life experiences. The following three aspects of liberation are points of entry for Latina women into the struggle for liberation as concrete aspects of the historic project. These three different aspects of liberation are Freedom, Community, and Justice.<sup>171</sup>

## **Freedom**

Freedom has to do with believing in our history. We need to understand ourselves in the here and now rather than in the not-yet, the future. The main obstacles to liberation for Latinas are apathy and fear. Being an oppressed group in the wealthiest country in the world, Latinas see

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<sup>170</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues* Chapter Introduction, loc. 76, Kindle.

<sup>171</sup> Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia, *En La Lucha/ In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology*, Anniversary edition (Fortress Press, 2003), loc. 1031.



this as such an immense task that we often become apathetic in the process. Sometimes, we think the process is beyond our accomplishment and that being apathetic protects against frustration. Fear is a motivational factor that enables us to shake off apathy, and our subsequent struggle is with fear, fear not only of failing but of trying and not being able to accomplish what we set out to do but instead being swallowed up by the status quo.

A powerful myth in the United States tells all those who come here and everyone in the world that because we are the best of all societies, success depends on the individual. However, it depends on whether one is ambitious enough, whereas being educated depends on the individual's need for a good education and remaining ambitious enough to work hard and sacrifice oneself for one's goals.<sup>172</sup> This myth is constantly one of the most pervasive possible. It contributes significantly to the negative self-image of Latinas who cannot get ahead, not because they do not work hard enough but because of the social and economic realities that rob them in all areas of their lives. This is a negative self-image that is oppressive, and the fact that this fills us with fear makes the idea of becoming successful in our adopted country an insidious and fearful way to live.

## **Community**

Mujerista Theology utilizes community organizations to support their beliefs. Within community organizations, they are allowed to gather and question the present structures that are in place. They help them to move into places that allow them to bring together different political projects. This allows them to participate in different types of societies, which will help bring about the change they desire. Without the help of many of the community organizations,

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<sup>172</sup> Isasi-Diaz and Segovia, *En La Lucha*, Chapter 2, Loc. 1044, Kindle.

Mujerista Theology will be unable to bring about the change that Latina women so desire, and they will not be the agents of change for the history of their *proyecto historico* (historic project) or preferred future they desire.<sup>173</sup>

The communities must stand with Latina women in their beliefs. By supporting them rather than denying that the power structure is different, changes can be brought quickly and without as much stress to others in the process. By socialization and culture, Latina women are not separatists; they do not exclude others from their lives, away from *la lucha* (the struggle), nor do they struggle exclusively for themselves. They extend this same sense of community to those who desire to help them in their struggles.<sup>174</sup> They are not seeking to liberate themselves as individuals but as a community.

## Justice

Justice is based on the lived experiences that Latinas have in oppression. Justice, in Mujerista Theology, allows each person to participate in producing the results that it takes to sustain and promote human life. Justice is understood as a common good. However, reaching for the common good can never be done at the expense of others. Instead, the pursuit of the common good is judged by the participation of the most oppressed and poorest in the society in which they live. It does not place the rights of specific individuals over the rights of others.<sup>175</sup> Welfare

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<sup>173</sup> Isasi-Diaz and Segovia, *En La Lucha*, Chapter 2, Loc. 1109 Kindle.

<sup>174</sup> Isasi-Diaz and Segovia, *En La Lucha*, Chapter 2, loc. 1116 Kindle.

<sup>175</sup> Isasi-Diaz and Segovia, *En La Lucha/ In the Struggle*, loc. 1075.

is defined as more holistic rather than what are the necessities of life. To be a Christian is to be willing to struggle for justice; justice is expressed as practical solidarity.

Mujerista Theology uses the term *proyecto historico* (historical project) to refer to the liberation and the historical specifics needed to attain it. Even though it is not a blueprint for change, it is a historical project which will, over time, bring about change. This idea deals with how our churches are run and social, economic, and political societal institutions. This aims to help Latinx women understand the day-to-day struggles they go through to survive and eventually thrive in society. It also helps to identify the community and the ever-present struggles in their lives.<sup>176</sup>

Historic project is based on salvation and liberation, based on the belief that there is only one human history with salvation at its heart. History of salvation refers to what mujeristas believe are divine actions such as creation, incarnation, and redemption and their human responses. For Latina women, salvation means having a relationship with God based on loving God and loving their neighbor. This relationship with God affects every aspect of their lives; it embraces all human reality. As awareness of the injustice under which they live increases, their suffering increases too; they no longer accept a concept of salvation that does not affect their present and future reality. Salvation occurs in history and is directly related to their liberation. For Latinas, liberation involves becoming agents of their history, having what one needs to live, and striving toward human fulfillment. Historical events are never clearly nor completely under fulfillment of the kingdom of God, but they affect such fulfillment; they are “eschatological glimpses,”<sup>177</sup> part of the unfolding of the kingdom which they do not make it happen but which

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<sup>176</sup> Isasi-Diaz and Segovia, loc. 995.

<sup>177</sup> Isasi-Diaz and Segovia, loc. 1008.

requires them to take responsibility for making justice a reality in their world—realizing the Kingdom of God is their present reality, not the past. Their present is not related to the things that have happened to them but rather the things God has in store for them through their actions. To bring about change, Latina women must recognize their oppressive structures and denounce them to bring about change that they so desire.<sup>178</sup>

### **A Radical Change**

Mujerista Theology comprises ethics and systematic theology; it is a liberating praxis, a reflective action with liberation as its goal. Mujerista Theology is a process that enables and empowers Latina women to develop a strong sense of moral agency while explaining the value of who they are, what they think, and what they do. As a liberating praxis, Mujerista Theology strives to impact mainline theologies and establish theologies that support what is typical in church and society using the normative measurement of non-Latinas/os. Mujerista Theology engages in two split liberating praxes.

The first is establishing a good communication platform where Latinas come to “understand the many oppressive structures that almost completely determine our daily lives,”<sup>179</sup> enabling Latina women to understand that the goal of their struggle is not to participate and try to benefit from those structures but to change them radically. In theological language, Mujerista Theology assists Latinas in realizing and affirming God’s presence amid their communities and how God is revealed in their daily lives. Latina women must come to know the

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<sup>178</sup> Isasi-Diaz and Segovia, loc. 1014.

<sup>179</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 1996, 62.

reality of structural sin, what it is, and find ways to confront and defeat it as it conceals God's ongoing revelation from them and society.

Mujerista Theology helps Latinas identify their preferred future by guiding them to envision a radically different society. What values and norms must be included? In theological language, it means that Mujerista Theology helps Latina women understand the significance of eschatology in the life of every follower of Christ. The preferred future or historical project of Latina women breaks into their current oppression in many ways. Latina women must come to recognize the eschatological sight and rejoice in them while continuing *en la lucha* (in the struggle) to make those sights become their new horizon.

Mujerista Theology also enables Latinas to understand how much they have already acquired from the prevailing system in society, including the religious systems. It is helping them to internalize their oppression. Mujerista Theology enables Latina women to realize that radical structural change cannot occur unless radical change happens first in everyone. In theological language, Mujerista Theology helps Latinas convert, showing them the reality of sin. Furthermore, it helps them understand that "resigning ourselves to what others tell us is our lot and accepting suffering and self-effacement is not a virtue."<sup>180</sup>

Latinx women in ministry in the Southwest Latin American District are ready for this radical change. With a well-structured plan, these women can accomplish what it takes to become free from the oppression they have been enduring for years. Staying focused on their goal and taking one step at a time will provide a smooth process. It will be a painful but necessary process to return their real value as children of God, created in His image.

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<sup>180</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 63.

Helping these women see their reality and how it is not a reflection of who they were created to be will take the engagement of everyone, first at an individual level, then at a community level. First, they need to analyze the daily struggles they endure and the obstacles they encounter as they try to do ministry and realize that it is not aligned with what our loving God wants for them.

### **Main Elements of Mujerista Biblical Interpretation**

Unlike established theologies, Mujerista Theology does not use the Bible as the starting point; the reason given by Isasi-Díaz is that to become accessible and relevant to women's lives and experiences, the Bible needs proper interpretation—in this context, proper interpretation of women who live in oppression. Mujerista Theology promotes an intense spirituality, an intimate connection with our creator through prayer. Some Latinx women draw strength from the Bible stories of female characters who struggled with the same issues many years ago. In the words of Isasi-Díaz, “It is not that the integrity of the text is not important; it is that the need for survival takes precedence.”<sup>181</sup>

This makes Mujerista Theology different from other theologies; only those who have lived firsthand the consequences of a machismo and marianismo society can identify with this approach, fully understand it, and embrace it. Women in ministry in the Southwest Latin American District have lived firsthand this experience and have suffered the consequences. This approach from Mujerista Theology will play an essential role in their healing process by introducing the idea that God is not only in heaven, church buildings, temples, and houses of

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<sup>181</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 152.

worship but also in our daily challenges and successes, as we read in Isaiah 57:15. This could be the introduction to conversations around the kitchen table towards learning to see God in their daily affairs, in *lo cotidiano* (the everyday living).

## Spirituality

Isasi-Díaz describes true spirituality as one that has to do with how we live our lives, who we are, our character, what motivates us, our dispositions, our attitudes, our intentions, and how we perceive reality. True spirituality should result from living a reflective life, trusting that God is guiding us within, that God loves and admires us as his fine creation, a God who loves us unconditionally. Spirituality has to do with the person we are in the process of becoming our true selves as we consider that our actions also affect all the people within our communities.

Seeing God as an existing reality in our daily lives that influences our values and elections, “we become who we are immersed in the divine.”<sup>182</sup> The true meaning of spirituality for Mujerista Theology is always to recognize that our lives do not happen apart from the divine and apart from our relationships with each other; it is in our daily living that God is so close to us, encouraging us to remain in *la lucha* (in the struggle).

A significant influence of Mujerista Theology from the beginning is the beautiful voice of Miriam in the book of Numbers, “Has Yahweh indeed spoken only through Moses?” (Num. 12:2). Most people know that Miriam suffered severe punishment for daring to scold her older brother, Moses, for daring to state that Yahweh also spoke to and through her. Miriam invites mujerista theologians to “throw their lot with the people of God,” hoping that, just as in her case,

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<sup>182</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, Chapter 2, loc. 460, Kindle.

those with authority will catch up and eventually see that we do not have leprosy, that their declaration of cleanliness is not what defines our cleanliness, what they have to say is not what makes Mujerista Theology a valuable and significant task for us. Instead, it is the fact that Mujerista Theology is part of the struggle for survival, the struggle for the liberation of everyone; it makes it just and worthy of pursuing. “Doing Mujerista Theology is an intrinsic element of our struggle, of our lives, because indeed, for Latinas in the USA to struggle is to live, la vida es la lucha.”<sup>183</sup>

### **Mujerista Liturgy**

Las Hermanas (“The Sisters”) was a feminist organization established in 1971 to stand against the patriarchy and Eurocentrism of the U.S. Catholic Church. Las Hermanas movement was born from the desire to reorient the male-dominated structure of Catholic ministry and the Chicano civil rights movement. Las Hermanas were engaged in issues of moral authority, sexuality, and domestic abuse. It was done through their religious informed efforts in organizing and educating in grassroots communities. They contributed to shaping Latina/Chicana identity spiritually and politically.

Each year, Las Hermanas had a national conference where they got together to celebrate their ability to survive. The celebration also recognized the increasing number of grassroots Hispanic women who believe in the organization. The conference time was also utilized to analyze the issue of power. How was power being used to oppress them? How do they redefine power to become enablement and encouragement instead of control and domination? It was a time to discover their power as Hispanic women and how they claimed it as necessary, as life-giving. They also discussed their organizational power, how they used it, and how to reinforce it.

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<sup>183</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 1996, 83.



One of the issues that arose in their conference was the celebration of Mass as part of their conference. The issue was not that they did not believe in the Eucharist; the issue was the exclusion of women in ordained ministry in the Catholic Church. Celebrating Mass would require bringing a male priest, which many participants found disempowering. So, they found a way to do without the Celebration of Mass. Having very active women involved in leadership, they made up their religious program that included a homily given by one of the leaders and a liturgy prepared by women and for women. Therefore, in their conferences, they had a Latina women's liturgy in which they celebrated in a standard way who they were, their struggles, their preferred future or historical project, and "their belief in the divine, in Jesus as a friend and *compañero* (partner) in the struggle."<sup>184</sup>

Depending on Las Hermanas' religious background, some found the liturgies to be eucharistic; for others, liturgies were prayer services. Las Hermanas' goal was not to force anyone to accept their liturgies as Eucharist but to experience a new form of liturgical expression. It was in 1989 that the Las Hermanas conference celebrated with a different liturgy that articulated what became principal elements of *mujerista* liturgical celebrations. These elements are not unique, but they are distinctively of *Mujerista* Theology. The liturgy and the articulation of the following principles became a birthing moment, "a climbing onto the birthing stool to articulate religious understandings embodied in our Hispanic women's liturgies."<sup>185</sup> It was the birth of *Mujerista* Liturgy, through which *mujeristas* found ways to present their daily realities through spiritual exercises and rituals that identify and acknowledge their daily struggles under the rule of their oppressors. It showed an accurate picture of their daily suffering.

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<sup>184</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 171.

<sup>185</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 171.

Looking back, the Las Hermanas movement and their participation in their national conferences invited the church to partner with them as they educated grassroots communities on the issues they were concerned about to help reshape entire Latinx communities together with the church and guided by the Holy Spirit.<sup>186</sup> It reminds us of how powerful a group of people can be when working in unity with the church when they are gathered in the same spirit and for the same purpose.

The people of The Southwest Latin American District can learn from the Las Hermanas movement as they work together with the church towards narrowing the gap between the inequality of men and women while empowering women to do ministry, validating their call, and liberating them from the oppression they are currently experiencing. They can take the first steps, initiating something as simple as having conversations around their kitchen table. First, among the women in ministry in the Southwest Latin American District, acknowledging their reality of how they are affected by structural sin and their cultural background. Once they have become a strong group of sisters, it will be time to invite the district leaders to these kitchen table conversations, openly expressing their authentic feelings about their current reality of oppression and gender inequality, which puts them at a disadvantage preventing them from freely fulfilling their call to ministry. These conversations around the kitchen table can grow and include members and leaders of the community. Ideally, conversations around the kitchen table can become open conversations in a community gathering that will empower women to become their best and bring liberation for all.

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<sup>186</sup> "Learning from Las Hermanas | Commonweal Magazine," accessed February 7, 2024, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/learning-las-hermanas>.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, we will evaluate the problem presented in chapter one of how women in ministry in the Southwest Latin American District in the Church of the Nazarene are not allowed to fully develop and put into practice their God-given gifts, which hinders their ability to reach the potential they were created to have as human beings, as women, and as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We will then analyze how the district leaders' decision to continue practicing patriarchal leadership is not the most appropriate and fit at present. We will then evaluate what women in ministry in the Southwest Latin American District are already doing, which is pointing them in the right direction to develop the ministerial skills that will help them reach their potential. Finally, we will offer the solution we see best fits the problem, explaining how this solution will meet women in ministry where they are and take them step by step to develop their ministerial gifts and achieve their goals to become the ministers they were called to be.

We will introduce and interact with the artifact presented in Appendix A as the first step of the solution to the problem. The artifact is designed to bring awareness to the Latinx churches of the Southwest Latin American District of The Church of the Nazarene and to the district leaders to recognize and validate the call of women to ministry. In turn, the church and the communities where these women serve as ministers will benefit by being enriched and empowered by the service provided by these women who are eager to put their whole being to the service of God through freely serving their communities.

Chapter One introduced women's daily challenges in ministry in the Southwest Latin American District of the Church of the Nazarene. This problem originated from the Latinx

culture of a patriarchal and hierarchal leadership style that defines gender roles where men are superior to women and men are the leaders of households. Women do not have a voice and must submit to what male leaders have established as the norm of living. This leadership style is practiced at home, churches, and any other place where it is allowed. There is a conflict regarding the church, specifically The Church of the Nazarene, which believes in ordaining women to all positions of ministry, including administrators and lead pastors, and the office of elder and deacon.

Since Latino leaders direct the Southwest Latin American District, they operate it by the principles of patriarchal leadership and not by the established principles of the Church of the Nazarene. It creates a significant problem because women are responding to the call to ministry, but they are not allowed to fully experience training, growing, and learning so that they can freely develop their gifts and put them to the service of their faith communities. Most women who report experiencing a call to ministry get discouraged at the beginning stage of ministerial formation because of all the expectations the district has of them without providing proper tools. If this problem continues, the district has the potential to disappear as male pastors are reaching retirement age. Some male pastors decide to continue serving past their retirement age because they see the need for their leading services and stay in their positions until they finish their race in this life and are called home. Currently, four of the lead pastors are over ninety years of age.<sup>187</sup>

The district has several women who are fully trained, have ministerial experience, have completed the required program of ministerial studies, have earned theological degrees from a Nazarene Seminary in Costa Rica (*Seminario Nazareno de las Americas*), or Nazarene Universities or Seminaries in the U.S. and are in good standing. One of these women is an

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<sup>187</sup> Ledesma, Personal Interview by author.

ordained elder; others are district-licensed, and they all are ready to take a pastor-lead position, but the district has decided to go a different route. In 2023, they brought a pastor from Mexico to take a lead pastor position in Las Cruces, New Mexico. In 2023, they started the process of bringing another pastor from Mexico to take over the lead pastor position of a church in Douglas, Arizona.<sup>188</sup> As the district continues to operate in this fashion, it makes it less appealing to any women who experience a call to ministry to pursue their call, noticing that the opportunities to practice are very minimal.

The district's current position to continue bringing pastors from Mexico makes it difficult for the churches they take as lead pastors. They come with their gender roles very defined and continue to marginalize women, minimizing their opportunities to serve and only allowing them to serve in the area of hospitality and children ministry as the only two areas the district leaders feel safe to entrust women to lead.

Several resilient women in the Southwest Latin American district refuse to give up their call to ministry. They continue *en la lucha* (in the struggle) day by day, hoping for the day they can freely practice their God-given gifts to their full potential. These women take advantage of any opportunity they have to share their gifts in the communities they serve. Some of them are prayer warriors; others visit the sick, the outcast, the unwanted, and those whom society finds unworthy, bringing hope and purpose to their lives. These women hold firmly to their faith and spirituality, the two strong pillars that they report keep them together. These women continue serving from under, dreaming of the day they can come up to the surface and be able to serve in other areas openly, as their male counterpart pastors do.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Ledesma.

<sup>189</sup> Flores, Personal Interview by author.

## Enduring oppression

When asked why they have decided to stay in the district or why they stayed for so long, under their current circumstances when they could go to another district to practice their ministry freely, their answer was:

We need to endure the oppression and stay in the churches where we are serving; the people need us, and we need to open paths for those who are coming behind us so they can find a place to freely serve God, in spirit and in truth among our people, responding to their call to ministry serving our Latinx people.<sup>190</sup>

The Lord has called me to serve him by serving my people, the marginalized, and those without a voice. I am hoping and waiting for the day our oppression ends and the doors fully open for all, men and women equally, to serve God in a wholistic manner with my spiritual gifts, my talents, my day-to-day experiences that have made me stronger, to serve with all that God has equipped me to serve.<sup>191</sup>

I endured mistreatment, humiliation, oppression, and persecution, hoping for the day justice will be served. I deeply cared for the hearts God had entrusted me to care for. I knew I needed to remain silent to protect the hearts of those who could not speak for themselves, so I kept speaking up against injustice whenever I felt somewhat safe to do so, even when I knew I would be punished for doing so. The day came when I could no longer take it. With much prayer and advice from a woman in a higher position in the Nazarene Church, I left the Southwest Latin American District with my head held high and with the hope that one day I would get to see everyone in the district, men and women, freely serving God through the Latinx faith communities.<sup>192</sup>

The story of the problems these women are enduring closely echoes the problems Latinx women have endured for generations, to which Mujerista Theology was designed to offer a solution.

In chapter three, we learned about Mujerista Theology, its origin, and its purpose.

Mujerista Theology is a branch of liberation theology that was born in the late 20th century as a response to the need for liberation from oppression. Gustavo Gutierrez is attributed to be the father of Liberation Theology. Gutierrez, a Roman Catholic Priest who could not continue seeing

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<sup>190</sup> Flores.

<sup>191</sup> Lucy Estrada, Personal Interview.

<sup>192</sup> Donnelly, Personal Interview.

his parishioners living under oppression and poverty and not doing anything about it, started writing and developing the theology of liberation. This theology has been modeled, for the most part, under the Roman Catholic doctrine. Protestant communities have seen the positive impact of Liberation Theology and are adopting it to their beliefs and values.<sup>193</sup>

### **Seeking liberation for all**

Mujerista Theology encourages the development of Latina women's moral agency and gives a public voice to their theological views. The goal of Mujerista Theology is to support those Latina women who are struggling for liberation and remain *in la lucha* (*in the struggle*). Mujerista Theology is a theology from the perspective of Latinas for the entire church and communities. Mujerista Theology seeks and finds liberation for all; it provides a platform for the voices of Latina grassroots women to develop a theological method that connects their religious understandings and spiritual practices with their daily life experiences. Mujerista Theology challenges theological understandings, church teachings, and religious practices that oppress Latina women and offers a new theology where everyone has the same value as children of God. The daily struggles these women encounter become part of the new theology, spiritual, and religious practices, a theology that these women can identify with. Mujerista Theology is the hopeful solution to eradicate this problem.

### **Selection Artifact**

Our focus now is to explain the reasons for my artifact selection as a solution to the problem identified in chapter one. This deep-rooted problem will require a change of mindset

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<sup>193</sup> Zoltan Vogel, "Liberation Theology - A Critical Analysis. Pdf," *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology*, January 1, 2018, [https://www.academia.edu/38221258/Liberation\\_Theology\\_A\\_Critical\\_Analysis\\_pdf](https://www.academia.edu/38221258/Liberation_Theology_A_Critical_Analysis_pdf).

and a reasonable amount of time. This problem cannot be eradicated with a one-time solution. I propose a three-step solution, introducing the first step as the artifact for this dissertation.

I selected as my artifact a set of eight lessons of Bible narratives about the role of women in the Old and New Testaments; I selected three women from the Old Testament and three women from the New Testament to study their stories of suffering, hope, and triumph, their contribution to God's plan to restore humanity and their contribution to expanding the kingdom of God during their time in earth.

### **The solution to the Problem**

To select an artifact that offers the initial step of a solution to the identified problem, the Latina culture, context, place, age group, social and economic status, and the level of education and biblical exposure of the prospective students participating in this class were considered. The prospective students are adult men and women who attend churches in the Southwest Latin American District. An estimated fifty percent of the prospective students have a sixth-grade education and little exposure to biblical narratives of women in leadership.

An anecdotal study was conducted by interviewing five women and five men attending different churches in the Southwest Latin American district. Interviews were conducted via telephone between October 13th and October 30th, 2023. The interviewees were Ana Chavira, Sofia Moran, Esther Maya, Olga Soto, Mary Moreno, Fernando Hernandez, Ismael Corona, Joel Montoya, Martin Felix, and Daniel Bracamontes. The following questions were asked of each person interviewed:

Question 1: How long have you been attending your current church?



Question 2: Of the following women in the Bible, Miriam, Deborah, Esther, Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Priscilla, how many of them have you heard in your church, either in a sermon or a Bible study?

Question 3: Would you be interested in participating in a Bible study of eight weeks, one hour each week, that covers the story of the six women of the Bible that I interviewed you about?

The average length of church attendance of the ten people interviewed is 19 years. All the ten people interviewed expressed a desire to attend and learn in a Bible study class about the women they have not learned about.

Nine of the ten interviewed stated that they had never heard a sermon where a woman was one of the main characters in their churches. Only one person interviewed reported hearing a sermon about Mary, the mother of Jesus. Some have heard of women in the Bible in their Bible studies. Out of all the five women and five men interviewed, none of them could identify all the six women that I selected to write their biblical narratives. Most of them could identify an average of three of the women I chose to be part of my artifact, but all they could remember was their names for the most part; only two of the people interviewed could tell more than their names. Out of the ten people interviewed, no one has heard of Miriam or Priscilla.

Based on the replies from the people interviewed, we can see that this artifact is a valuable starting point, creating resources that inform people of biblical perspectives of women through the stories of women. It will increase knowledge across the spectrum, bringing awareness to our local churches, our children, youth, and adults that God sees and values us, both men and women, as his children, equally capable of serving and leading in any area of ministry.

I selected the following six women from the Bible for the eight lessons of my artifact: Miriam, Deborah, Esther, Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Priscilla. These women hold a wide range

of leadership roles. Miriam was a prophetess and a leader of women (Exod. 15:20). Deborah was a prophet and a judge, one of the most influential women of the Bible (Judg. 4:4). Esther was a queen who had the courage to take advantage of her status to plead for her life and the lives of her people, the Jews.<sup>194</sup> Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a willing servant, trusting in God and obeying his call.<sup>195</sup> Mary Magdalene was a devoted disciple of Jesus and an evangelist.<sup>196</sup> Priscilla was a teacher, a preacher, and a missionary.<sup>197</sup>

The curriculum comprises eight lessons, including a summary that introduces the basics of women in ministry through narratives of the Old and New Testaments, including the portion of the Church of the Nazarene's *Manual* that states the church's stand on women in ministry. This artifact's primary purpose is to provide education on the role of women in ministry throughout the years and how women have been an essential part of God's redemptive plan for humanity, even when gender roles were stricter.

### **Introduction to the Leadership and Ministry of Women in The Bible**

Introducing the Latinx congregations to the leadership and ministry of women through the biblical narratives of these women from the Old and New Testaments and how God chose them and equipped them to carry out their assignments will bring examples of how women have always been essential to the kingdom of God. These women were trusted with a variety of duties,

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<sup>194</sup> "Esther - Bible Book Chapters and Summary - New International Version," accessed October 28, 2023, <https://www.christianity.com/bible/niv/esther/>.

<sup>195</sup> "Meet Mary: Mother of Jesus and Humble Servant of God," Learn Religions, accessed February 13, 2024, <https://www.learnreligions.com/mary-the-mother-of-jesus-701092>.

<sup>196</sup> "WHO WAS MARY MAGDALENE IN THE GOSPELS? Apostle, Evangelist," *Women In The Bible* (blog), accessed February 13, 2024, [https://womeninthebible.net/bible-people/mary\\_magdalene\\_gospels/](https://womeninthebible.net/bible-people/mary_magdalene_gospels/).

<sup>197</sup> "What Does the Bible Say about Priscilla?," Christianity.com, accessed February 13, 2024, <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/people/what-bible-tell-us-about-priscilla.html>.

some of them as leaders, others as prophets, evangelists, pastors, or faithful servants. In each instance, we can see the presence of God with them.

The first lesson starts with Gen. 1-3; it introduces the students to Creation and Fall, setting the initiation of the presence of women in the story of God. A question for students when reading the creation story is, who is leading and who is following? How does this correspond to what you have experienced or seen in the church?

The following lesson introduces Miriam, considered one of the seven major female prophets in the Bible. We read in Exodus that Miriam was also a leader who, along with her brother Aaron, under the lead of their brother Moses, led the Israelites from slavery to the promised land. Learning from Miriam's leadership position entrusted by God will open our eyes to the facts we read in the Bible about women in leadership positions. Mujerista Theology is considered to be guided by the words of Miriam in the book of Numbers, "'Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?' they asked. 'Hasn't he also spoken through us?'" (Num.12:2, NIV).<sup>198</sup>

Being aware that Miriam suffered severe penalties for daring to speak against her brother Moses and claim that the Lord also spoke to her and through her, the story of Miriam invites mujerista theologians to speak up and to hope that those in power and control will eventually see that women have no leprosy. Mujerista Theology offers a solution to the struggle for survival and liberation.

The third lesson will cover the role of Deborah. The book of Judges, chapters 4 and 5, tells the story of Deborah, one of the most influential women in the Bible, who was the first woman judge. Debora is also known for her wisdom, courage, faith, and actions. Her impressive

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<sup>198</sup> Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (ORBIS, 2013), 81.

resume includes that of judge, warrior, poet, singer, and songwriter. Just as Deborah was a woman who wore many hats, the women of the Southwest Latin American District wear many hats, too. In contrast with Deborah, who freely practiced her leadership and the people above her respected her position, the women at the Southwest Latin American District must serve from under because those above them do not believe they are able to exercise fair judgment alone, so they cannot be entrusted to lead a church. Mujerista Theology will provide a path to liberation, and they can freely serve God in any role they hold as ministers.

The fourth lesson is about Queen Esther, the courageous woman who was willing to sacrifice her life for others. Her story is found in the Book of Esther in the Old Testament. This lesson gives us a great example of Esther's faith, courage, and loyalty to her people. She portrays an example of faith when she asks her uncle Mordecai and the Jewish people to fast with her so that her encounter with the king will be favorable for them. Esther had the courage to do the only thing available to save her people, even though it implied risking her life. Through her willingness to bring her request to the king, we can see her loyalty to her people. The story of Esther encourages anyone who may be under similar circumstances to step up and act on what is available and what is in her power to do. The women in ministry from the Southwest Latin American District can learn from Esther that to save themselves and future generations from the oppression they are currently enduring, they must take the opportunities they have to speak up for what is right and denounce what is wrong. Mujerista Theology will set the platform for these women to find a way out of oppression, starting with conversations around their kitchen table.

From Esther, we move to the New Testament in lesson five to learn about Mary, the mother of Jesus—her call to be the mother of Jesus and what it entailed. In the Gospel of Luke, we read about this courageous woman of strong faith. In the time of Mary, women did not have

much value; it is believed that Mary was probably a young teenager, 12 or 13 years old when the angel announced that God had chosen her to be the mother of Jesus. She was young, poor, and female—weaknesses that made her unsuitable in the eyes of the people of her time and the religious leaders to become the mother of Jesus, the son of God.

However, God, who was the one to choose the mother of his son, saw Mary's qualities; e saw her trust and obedience. God knew she was the perfect person to serve him in one of the most essential callings ever given to a human being, to become the earthly mother of Jesus. Mary did not consider the consequences; she willingly submitted her life to God's plan, regardless of the cost she would have to pay. Women ministers from the Southwest Latin American District can learn from Mary the courage she had to accept what she knew was right, the privilege to become the mother of Jesus regardless of the consequences. Being obedient to God can bring consequences that some followers of Christ may not be willing to pay. Conversely, Jesus promised his Father's love and presence to be with us: "Jesus replied, 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them'" (John 14:23, NIV).

Our obedience to God comes from a thankful heart, our love for Him, and our appreciation for the great price that He paid for us. If we truly believe in God, we should act when the opportunity arises. Isasi-Diaz's intention in *Mujerista Theology* is to give Latina women a public voice to contribute to their struggle for liberation and encourage them to remain in *la lucha* (in the struggle). Salvation cannot be conceptualized apart from liberation.<sup>199</sup> We cannot tell our Latino people of the grace of God while treating them unjustly. We cannot pretend to love God while being indifferent to the suffering of our sisters and brothers.

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<sup>199</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 1996, 203.

In lesson six, we will study Mary Magdalene. Not much is known about Mary Magdalene's life before becoming a disciple of Jesus. The Gospel of Luke says that Jesus cast out seven demons from her. From then on, Mary Magdalene and other wealthy women followed Jesus and his disciples and "provided for them out of their means" (Luke 8:1-3). Jesus not only allowed wealthy women to travel with him but also allowed himself and his disciples to depend upon their generosity and desire to provide for their material and physical needs.

In church history, there have been misunderstandings about Mary Magdalene's identity. She has been mistaken for the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), for the woman who anointed Jesus's feet (Mark 14:3-9; Matt. 26:6-13; John 12:1-8), and for the Samaritan woman (John 4).<sup>200</sup> Through this lesson, we will dive deep into the real Mary Magdalene, according to the Bible, a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ who had the privilege to be the first person to see Jesus after his resurrection and to deliver the good news to his disciples.

### **Liberty in the Spirit of God**

Mujerista Theology states that men who treat women condescendingly are suppressing the voice and freedom of women to follow God's call.<sup>201</sup> Second Corinthians 3:17 says that there is liberty where the Spirit of God is. This liberty is available for everyone as it was available for Mary Magdalene. It can also be available for the women of the Southwest Latin American District, and God can empower them through the example of Mary Magdalene and Mujerista Theology to open their eyes and ears to identify structural sin.<sup>202</sup> Mujerista Theology helps

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<sup>200</sup> Angie Velasquez Thornton, "Mary Magdalene: From Tormented Demoniac to Faithful Disciple," The Gospel Coalition | Canada, July 24, 2023, <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/mary-magdalene-from-tormented-demoniac-to-faithful-disciple/>.

<sup>201</sup> Martell-Otero et al., *Latina Evangélicas*, 32.

<sup>202</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 2013, 63.

Latinas discover and affirm the presence of God in their communities and in their daily life activities. It guides them to understand the reality of structural sin and find ways of combating it during their liberation.

Lesson seven takes us to the last woman we are studying, Priscilla. Priscilla was a practical theologian of the time of the apostle Paul. She and her husband Aquila were missionaries; one of the gifts she enjoyed putting to the service of others was hospitality. We read of Priscilla mainly in the book of Acts; although her name also appears in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 2 Timothy, in some places, her name appears in the form of a greeting from Paul to her and her husband, Aquila.

Acts 18:24 talks about Apollos, a teacher of the Hebrew Scriptures who was a close follower of John the Baptist. Apollos knew something about Jesus, but it is unclear if he only knew what he learned from John or if he learned more from believers later. When Apollos arrived at Ephesus, he was invited by the synagogue's leader to speak. Priscilla and Aquila, who were assigned to Ephesus by Paul in Acts 18:19, realized that Apollos needed more information to be considered a good follower of Jesus. Priscilla and Aquila took the time to show him who Jesus was and what he came to do. Apollos gladly accepted their explanation, and he became an influential evangelist.<sup>203</sup>

In the Southwest Latin American District, no one can even dream of the day when a male pastor can take advice from a woman even when they have the correct information. For example, none of the lead pastors are allowed to have Ash Wednesday services because "it is a Roman Catholic practice."<sup>204</sup> Some women had brought to the attention of the district leaders the fact

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<sup>203</sup> "What Does Acts 18:24 Mean?," BibleRef.com, accessed February 15, 2024, <https://www.bibleref.com/Acts/18/Acts-18-24.html>.

<sup>204</sup> Ledesma.

that Ash Wednesday is an opportunity to have time with the people of God and have some spiritual exercises that they have learned through their spiritual formation classes at the seminary, only to be turned down and told that whoever is teaching such things do not know what they are doing.

It is essential to mention that the current DS of the Southwest Latin American District has only received the basic ministerial classes from the modular courses that The Church of the Nazarene approves to fulfill the ministerial education requirement to become an ordained minister. These classes are for those who cannot attend college or seminary to obtain ministerial training.<sup>205</sup> Being in a position of a DS should require more formal ministerial education; a person with more exposure to various ministerial practices and theology will be more open to understanding and accepting what our clergy is currently learning at our Nazarene universities and seminaries.

### **Acknowledging the reality of sin**

Mujerista Theology enables Latinas to understand how much they have already contributed to the prevailing systems in society, including the religious systems, and how they have internalized their own oppression. Mujerista Theology assists Latina women in seeing that a radical structural change cannot happen unless a radical change happens first in each and every one of them.<sup>206</sup> Mujerista Theology helps them in the conversion process, helping them see the reality of sin in their lives and the need for liberation.

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<sup>205</sup> Flores, Personal Interview by author.

<sup>206</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 62.



The last lesson, a summary of the first seven lessons, will include short stories of a few women who have served or currently are serving in leadership positions in The Church of the Nazarene.

This will conclude the first step to the solution to the problem and method of delivery, bringing awareness to all the people in the churches of the Southwest Latin American district in the Church of the Nazarene.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Introduction**

In my research, through personal interviews with women pastors of the Southwest Latin American District of the Church of the Nazarene, I learned of their struggles to enter and stay in ministry. These women pastors talked about the challenges they face in their day-to-day living for the simple reason of being women. I learned that the patriarchal system that is currently in place treats women as inferior helpers; their ideas do not count, and they cannot use their initiative on any project they may be part of “because, as women, they do not know anything and need to be guided by a male (according to male leaders).”<sup>207</sup> They talked about the oppression they live under the leadership of first-generation Latino males who do not allow them to freely educate themselves to learn what their denomination believes related to women in ministry. The few women pastors who found their way to educate themselves in a Nazarene university or seminary are not allowed to practice at their local churches what they have learned from a Nazarene institution of higher education because, according to the male leaders, “it is too liberal” and they need to keep women in their place.<sup>208</sup> These women pastors live frustrated, wanting to be obedient to their call in a hostile environment where they are kept oppressed by those in power. Analyzing this situation, we realized the solution was not easy and proposed a three-step solution to the problem presented.

### **Education, the first step to the solution**

The first step towards a solution is to educate the local churches, their pastors, and district leaders. Educate them on how, since the beginning of creation, God gave women a special place,

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<sup>207</sup> Donnelly, interview.

<sup>208</sup> Flores, Interview.

and throughout the Old and New Testaments, women held leadership positions in guiding and liberating God's people. Educating the churches of the Southwest Latin American District on the stand of The Church of the Nazarene regarding women in ministry and bringing awareness to our church communities and district leaders will be the beginning of a solution. It will be accomplished by imparting the curriculum of eight lessons developed as my artifact to all the local churches of the district. Considering the Latinx culture, the steps to solve the problem must be taken slowly so that the people can assimilate the material learned and start identifying with it.

Currently, the pastors in the Southwest Latin American District have gatherings every two months to pray for each other, and there is specific training for three hours based on the current needs of the pastors.<sup>209</sup> I propose that the clergy development team in the district use these pastor's gatherings four times a year to approach the specific topic of how to help women discern and affirm their calling to ministry, giving guidance every step of the way to their current and aspiring women ministers. Other suggestions would be to find women ministers from other districts to come and teach a class on this subject and to find women ministers from other districts to mentor current and aspiring women ministers of the Southwest Latin American district.

Considering the cultural background and the patriarchal hierarchy in the Southwest Latin American District, I believe this is the best approach to initiate change gradually in small steps. Taking this approach will teach our local churches the history and current contributions of women ministers in our communities; at the same time, having the pastors exposed to discussions on how to help women discern and affirm their calling, giving guidance every step of

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<sup>209</sup> Flores.

the way to their current and aspiring women ministers, will cover the first step of bringing awareness to our local churches. Requiring lead pastors to acknowledge every woman who reports receiving a call to ministry and keep track of them will also bring accountability to each pastor from the district. Encouraging lead pastors to give opportunities to women who report having a call to ministry to practice in their local churches. As lead pastors give women opportunities to practice ministry in their local churches, they are investing in the spiritual and ministerial formation of women ministers in the district and those newly called.

Additionally, both female and male ministers should be encouraged to sign up for courses in spiritual formation at one of the Nazarene universities or seminaries; if possible, the district should pay a portion of the class so it will not be an economic burden on them. Enrolling pastors and aspiring pastors in a Nazarene university or seminary will help them tremendously; aside from learning from a different angle, they will meet new people and increase their network. It will also open the minds of the district leaders if current pastors who are also seminary students are allowed to practice in their local church what they are learning at the seminary.

### **Second step to the solution Introduction to Mujerista Theology**

As a second step of the solution, I am proposing the introduction of Mujerista Theology. Mujerista Theology provides a platform for the voices of Latinx grassroots women: “to develop a theological method that takes seriously the religious understandings and practices of Latinx women as a source of theology from *lo cotidiano*, “the everyday living.” To challenge theological understandings, church teachings, and religious practices that oppress Latina women; that are not life-giving, and, therefore, cannot be theologically correct.”<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 9.

Once awareness has been taken to all the Southwest Latin American District churches, congregations and district leaders will be familiar with the fact that God calls both men and women and equips them to carry his plan of redemption, serving in various ministerial positions. They will be more open to trying something different and starting roundtable conversations assessing the current situation of the Latinx churches and discussing realistic ways to utilize all the valuable resources they have in those women who are called, equipped, prepared, and ready to serve their faith communities. Also, looking for ways to externally recognize, honor, support, and validate God's call to women to ministry, creating an environment of equally accepting both men and women as capable of guiding our churches.

Hopefully, the doors will open with more opportunities for leadership positions for this segregated group of ministers who, aside from their gender and cultural differences, have been called to minister and guide the people of God.

Once ministers from the district and district leaders, both men and women, have completed at least two classes at a Nazarene university or seminary, one class in spiritual formation and one class in women in ministry, it will be time to start a sisterhood community where all the current and prospective women ministers in the district get together for a time of prayer, fellowship, and encouragement, a time to openly discuss their day-to-day challenges as they serve in their assigned ministry and a place and space where they can freely talk about the obstacles they encounter and together find solutions to overcome them. This sisterhood community can start around the kitchen table, and gradually, as more women join, they can take their gatherings to public places where everyone can feel comfortable attending and contributing to the discussions, at this point opening the discussions to everyone interested.

In this space, they can develop theological methods that Mujerista Theology suggests, including new spiritual exercises they can identify with based on their daily living experiences, such as Las Hermanas, who developed a mujerista liturgy.<sup>211</sup> I am explicitly proposing finding ways to present to the district leadership the fact that what these women are learning in Nazarene colleges, universities, and seminaries is real theology, approved by The Church of the Nazarene and that it is perfectly fine to implement at the local churches what they are learning at these institutions. By doing so, the old religious practices and church teachings rooted in the patriarchal cultural leadership that oppress Latinx women and, therefore, are not life-giving and cannot be theologically correct, according to Mujerista Theology, can be displaced and replaced with current teachings. As part of this second step, I propose to offer professional counseling for all those women whom the church has hurt as a result of the patriarchal hierarchy and leadership style that is currently in place.

### **Looking Forward**

The implications for future studies or plans: If others want to build on my project, I suggest going to step three, which continues with Mujerista Theology, and working towards having a strong presence in public where their voices can be heard. The sisterhood community initiated as part of step two will start growing by going into their faith community and inviting all women to be part of this group. Providing space for women to share their daily struggles and listen to their desires for freedom empowers them to become part of the group and gives them hope that together as a community, there are more opportunities for their voices to be heard. Start weekly gatherings in a public space where other people can see what is happening, and more women will be interested in becoming part of the sisterhood movement. Start having activities

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<sup>211</sup> Isasi-Diaz, 172.

where the community is invited, including males, youth, and children. Inviting speakers to share their successful experiences of liberation and what has helped move them from the margins to the center. By this time, the church community has noticed the strong presence of women and their increasing contributions not only to the church but to their communities; they will be more open to giving opportunities to women to step up in any leadership positions in the church and in their communities.

If I were going to do it again, I might include more people to interview to have a better representation. I intended to do it this time; however, due to the current situation with the district, many women are afraid to speak the truth for fear of retaliation.

## **Appendices:**

### **a. Artifact**

This artifact, in the form of seven lessons and a summary, is designed to bring awareness to the Latinx communities in the local churches where the Southwest Latin American District is present. Awareness in our churches that women and men are equally called to ministry, that God calls and equips the people He calls, and that women have been a vital part of ministry throughout history and can become a reality in our local churches if we accept and honor their God-given call to ministry. Our local churches and the district will benefit from all these gifts that women ministers have and are willing to share to contribute to their communities experiencing together the Kingdom of God, here and now, while advancing to the not yet. It will be amazing how one simple change in handling the district's day-to-day operations can change the world of these women who have been called to ministry but are not allowed to practice their God-given gifts freely simply because the district's priority is to continue practicing a patriarchal leadership style that no longer applies to current church needs.

Each lesson will be an hour long and begin with reading this portion of the Church of the Nazarene *Manual*:

501. Theology of Women in Ministry. The Church of the Nazarene supports the right of women to use their God-given spiritual gifts within the church and affirms the historic right of women to be elected and appointed to places of leadership within the Church of the Nazarene, including the offices of both elder and deacon.

The purpose of Christ's redemptive work is to set God's creation free from the curse of the Fall. Those who are "in Christ" are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). In this redemptive community, no human being is to be regarded as inferior on the basis of social status, race, or gender (Galatians 3:26-28). Acknowledging the apparent paradox created by Paul's in-struction to Timothy (1 Timothy 2:11-12) and to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:33-34), we believe interpreting these passages as limiting the role of women in ministry presents serious conflicts with specific passages of scripture that commend female participation in spiritual leadership roles (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18; 21:8-9; Romans 16:1, 3, 7; Philippians 4:2-3), and violates the spirit and practice of



the Wesleyan-holiness tradition. Finally, it is incompatible with the character of God presented throughout Scripture, especially as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>212</sup>

## **Lesson 1, Creation and Fall Genesis 1-3.**

### **Greetings**

Introduction (The instructor introduces her/himself to the class attendants, then each attendant introduces themselves by giving their first name)

First lesson topic introduction. The instructor will discuss the need to bring awareness to the congregation about the vital part of women in ministry. The instructor then leads the students in a word of prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to bring discernment to the class.

The instructor reads the portion of the Church of the Nazarene *Manual* that will be read at the beginning of each lecture, briefly explaining what the Nazarene church believes regarding women in ministry.

The instructor starts the lesson by asking students what they know about creation and fall. After acknowledging the students' responses to the question, the instructor guides students to take turns reading Genesis 1-3, inviting students to read from two or three different Bible versions, looking for some interpretation differences, noting that reading more than one version helps to clarify the real meaning that writers try to communicate.

This lecture introduces students to the purpose of creation, human identity, and the fall. Reading the Bible takes into consideration the Latinx literary and cultural context and identifies how God used women to lead despite the patriarchal culture of that time. After reading Genesis 1-3, the instructor takes a reasonable amount of time to discuss their understanding of the reading with

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<sup>212</sup> "Manual | Church of the Nazarene," loc. 2787.

students, then guides them to the learning objectives and continues the discussion to reach a consensus on each objective.

Learning Objectives:

1. To understand why God created human beings, specifically women, as the Bible describes.
2. To understand that the Fall was the result of the disobedience of both male and female by ignoring God's instructions.
3. To understand the context and reason women were leaders in the Old Testament.<sup>213</sup>

Answer any questions and conclude the class by asking a volunteer student to lead in the closing prayer—end of lesson #1.

## **Lesson 2, Women of the Old Testament—Miriam**

Greetings

Introduction (The instructor introduces her/himself to the class attendants, then each attendant introduces themselves by giving their first name)

Second lesson: Introduction to the topic and the reason for it. We have gathered today to study the women of the Old Testament, who they were, and how they contributed to the redemptive plan of humanity. Today, we will discover Miriam.

The instructor then leads the students in a word of prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to bring discernment to the class.

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<sup>213</sup> “MCOS Student Guides, English,” Nextcloud, 3–1, accessed October 22, 2023, <https://nubo.nazarene.org/index.php/s/JQYbcM8o8LjaMNq>.

The instructor reads the portion of the Church of the Nazarene *Manual* that will be read at the beginning of each lesson, briefly explaining what the Nazarene church believes regarding women in ministry.

The focus of this lecture is to introduce students to the ministry and leadership of Miriam as is presented in Micah 6:4, Exodus 2:1-10, and Exodus 15:19-21 in the Old Testament. Reading the Bible takes into consideration the Latinx literary and cultural context and identifies how God used women to lead despite the patriarchal culture of that time. After the Bible reading, the instructor takes a reasonable amount of time to discuss their understanding of the reading with students, then guides them to the learning objectives and continues the discussion to reach a consensus on each objective.

The instructor starts the lesson by asking students what they know about Miriam. After acknowledging the students' responses to the question, the instructor guides students to take turns reading the Bible passages listed above, inviting students to read from two or three different Bible versions, looking for some interpretation differences, noting that reading more than one version helps to clarify the real meaning that writers try to communicate.

### **Why was Miriam important in the Bible?**

In the Old Testament, we read the narratives of a female heroine named Miriam. She is considered a “matriarch in Christendom.”<sup>214</sup> We will discover some of her qualities and traits as we closely study her character. Her life supports many lessons for women today who believe in God and serve him. Miriam is a portrait of courage, deep family connections, leadership, and a

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<sup>214</sup> Caddabra Brown “Miriam in the Bible - Meaning, Characteristics, and Lessons Learned,” *The Faith Space* (blog), August 23, 2022, <https://thefaithspace.com/miriam-in-the-bible/>.

faithful life. She was Amram and Jochebed's daughter and Moses and Aaron's sister. Miriam was described as a prophetess, considered one of the seven major female prophets in the Bible. The other female prophets are Sarah, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Esther, and Huldah.

Some of you may remember from your Sunday School classes the story of Miriam and how she played an essential role in helping save her brother's life. A decree was in effect demanding that all Hebrew baby boys be killed. After hiding baby Moses for three months and being unable to hide him any longer, their mother, Jochebed, put the baby in a basket and sent it down the river. Miriam stood in the distance, keeping an eye on the basket with her baby brother inside. Watching from the distance as the basket went down the river allowed Miriam to see when the basket was taken out of the river by one of the slaves of Pharaoh's daughter who, when saw him crying, was moved by compassion and accepted Miriam's offer to find a Hebrew nursemaid to care for the baby without saying that the nursemaid was their mother. Not only did Pharaoh's daughter agree to bring the nursemaid to feed baby Moses, but she also told the nursemaid to take the baby with her to feed and care for, and she would compensate her. Miriam's protective nature and quick-thinking reaction made it possible for her mother to raise Moses by offering Pharaoh's daughter to find a Hebrew nursemaid.<sup>215</sup>

Miriam has played a vital role in the history of salvation for Israel, right alongside Moses, from the very beginning. She was recognized in life and after she died as a leader that God entrusted to lead the Israelites out of slavery to the promised land along with her brother Aaron,

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<sup>215</sup> "Who Was Moses' Sister? Miriam, Prophetess at the Red Sea," Learn Religions, accessed April 7, 2024, <https://www.learnreligions.com/miriam-sister-of-moses-701189>.

under the direction of their brother Moses.<sup>216</sup> According to Exodus 15:20-21, Miriam leads the women in music, song, and dance to celebrate God delivering them from slavery to safety:

Miriam took a timbrel in her hand and led the women in music, song, and dance to celebrate God delivering them to safety. ‘Sing to the Lord,

for he is highly exalted.

Both horse and driver

he has hurled into the sea.’

This part of the song, “Sing to the Lord for he is highly exalted,” is sung in our Latinx Protestant churches with the Spanish title of “*Quien, Quien, Quien, como Jehova!*” Next time your congregation sings this song, you will be singing ancient words delivered by a prophetess-- a woman!

Learning Objectives:

1. To understand that since the time of the Old Testament, God chose women to hold leadership positions, including that of a female prophet.
2. To understand that God equipped the women He chose to accomplish their mission.
3. To understand the context and reason women were leaders in the Old Testament.

Questions to follow:

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<sup>216</sup> “5 Lessons and Truths We Can Learn from Miriam in the Bible,” Crosswalk.com, accessed April 7, 2024, <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/wisdom-and-warnings-from-the-life-of-miriam.html>.

1. How would you have felt if you had been put in the position of Miriam, taking a vital role in the salvation history of Israel right alongside Moses and Aaron from the beginning?
2. How would you think you would have felt if you were in the position of Miriam at a young age, knowing that your quick reaction and boldness to act would contribute to the outcome of your younger brother's future?

The instructor answers any final questions and concludes the class by asking a volunteer student to lead in the closing prayer—end of lesson #2.

### **Lesson 3 Women of the Old Testament Deborah Judges 4 and 5**

Greetings

Introduction (The instructor introduces her/himself to the class attendants, then each attendant introduces themselves by giving their first name)

Third lesson: Introduction to the topic and the reason for it.

The instructor will discuss the need to bring awareness to the congregation about the vital part of women in ministry. The instructor then leads the students in a word of prayer, inviting the holy spirit to bring discernment to the class.

The instructor reads the portion of the Church of the Nazarene *Manual* that will be read at the beginning of each lecture, briefly explaining what the Nazarene church believes regarding women in ministry.

This lecture focuses on introducing students to the ministry of Deborah, as is presented in chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Judges in the Old Testament. Reading the Bible takes into consideration the Latinx literary and cultural context and identifies how God used women to lead

despite the patriarchal culture of that time. After reading Judges 4 and 5, the instructor takes a reasonable amount of time to discuss with students their understanding of the reading, then guides them to the learning objectives and continues the discussion to reach a consensus on each objective.

The instructor starts the lecture by asking students what they knew about Deborah. After acknowledging the students' responses to the question, the instructor guides students to take turns reading Judges 4 and 5, inviting students to read from two or three different Bible versions, looking for some interpretation differences, noting that reading more than one version helps to clarify the real meaning that writers try to communicate.

In the Old Testament, we read about Deborah, one of the most influential women in the Bible, who was the first woman judge. Deborah is known for her wisdom, courage, faith, and actions. We read her story mainly in Judges 4 and 5. Her impressive resume includes that of judge, warrior, poet, singer, and songwriter. Deborah and Barak: The Conquest of Canaanite Oppression. Judges 4 testifies to God's deliverance and the courage of ordinary people who become extraordinary in adversity. In the story of Deborah and Barack, Deborah is the leader who commands Barack as her military leader, and he follows her commands. She has authority over the men in these narratives. Barack leads the army, but Deborah tells him what to do. What we can learn from Judges 4 is that regardless of our position, gender, or status, we all can be instruments of divine intervention if we have faith and obey God's will.<sup>217</sup>

#### Learning Objectives:

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<sup>217</sup> "Judges 4 Chapter Summary," accessed October 28, 2023, <https://biblehub.com/chaptersummaries/judges/4.htm>.

1. To understand that since the Old Testament, God chose women to hold leadership positions, including being a judge.
2. To understand that God equipped the women He chose to accomplish their mission.
3. To understand the context and reason women were leaders in the Old Testament.

Questions to follow:

1. How does the narrative of Judges 4 inspire you to act courageously in the face of adversity?
2. How does the prophecy of Deborah and its fulfillment reflect on the nature of God's plans?
3. What characteristics of Deborah make her an effective leader? How can these be applied in today's context?
4. How does the account of Judges 4 empower women and advocate for their roles in leadership and decision-making?

The instructor answers any final questions and concludes the class by asking a volunteer student to lead in closing prayer. End of Lesson #3

#### **Lesson 4 Women of the Old Testament Queen Esther**

Greetings

Introduction (The instructor introduces her/himself to the class attendants, then each attendant introduces themselves by giving their first name)

Fourth lesson: Introduce the topic and the reason for it.



The instructor will discuss the need to bring awareness to the congregation about the vital part of women in ministry. The instructor then leads the students in a word of prayer, inviting the holy spirit to bring discernment to the class.

The instructor reads a portion of the Church of the Nazarene *Manual* that will be read at the beginning of each lesson, briefly explaining what the Nazarene church believes regarding women in ministry.

The focus of this lecture is to introduce students to the character of Esther as a leader, as presented in the book of Esther in the Old Testament. We will read the Bible, taking into consideration the Latinx literary and cultural context, and identifying how God used women to lead despite the patriarchal culture of that time. After the selected reading from the book of Esther, the instructor takes a reasonable amount of time to discuss with students their understanding of the reading, then guides them to the learning objectives and continues the discussion to reach a consensus on each objective.

The instructor starts the lesson by asking students what they know about Queen Esther. After acknowledging the students' responses to the question, the instructor guides students to take turns reading Esther 2:5-10, 2:17, 2:22, 3:13, 4:14, 4:16, 6:11, 8:5, 8:11, 9:28, inviting students to read from two or three different Bible versions looking for some interpretation differences, noting that reading more than one version helps to clarify the real meaning that writers try to communicate.

#### Central Theme and Purpose of Esther

The book of Esther presents the narrative history of Hadassah, later named Esther. Esther was a beautiful, unknown Jewish young lady who was chosen to replace the banished Queen

Vashti. Esther ended up saving her people. The primary purpose is to show God's faithfulness towards His people.<sup>218</sup> As the story develops, several other characters come to the scene. Haman, a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites that Israel defeated, seeks to destroy Esther's Uncle Mordecai and get rid of all the Jews. Mordecai, concerned about the well-being of his niece, started hanging out by the king's gate, and while there, he heard of a plot by Haman to kill the king (Esther 2:19-21).

Later in the story, King Xerxes uses Haman to honor Mordecai, an event that humiliates Haman; Haman has given the king ideas of how to honor the man the king delights to honor, thinking he was the one to be honored. Haman ended up hanging in a trap he erected to hang Mordecai.

Mordecai begs Esther to plead for her people, but Esther is fearful. Mordecai replied with a well-known verse of the Bible that she may have been put in her position for "such a time as this" (4:14). Esther requests that all her people fast and pray for three days and nights before she approaches King Xerxes.

Esther courageously approached the king without being invited, saying, "And if I perish, I perish" (4:16). The King grants Esther's request and rules in favor of the Jews a decree to save the people. The statute allowed the people to defend themselves if attacked. This act established a celebration of deliverance, the feast of Purim, as a reminder that God saved His people.

#### Learning Objectives:

1. To recognize that since the time of the Old Testament, God chose women to hold leadership positions, including that of saving the Jews from being killed.

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<sup>218</sup> "Esther - Bible Book Chapters and Summary - New International Version."

2. To acknowledge that God equipped the women He chose to accomplish His mission.
3. To understand the context and reason women were leaders in the Old Testament.

### **What Can We Learn from Esther Today?**

“Esther remains one of the most popular books of the Old Testament. It is a continual reminder that God is sovereign, and His will prevails against those who seek to destroy His followers. It also reminds us that God has a purpose for our lives, and we should be willing to trust and follow God’s plans.”<sup>219</sup>

We must be willing and ready to rise when God places us in a position of influence and use every opportunity to promote God and protect His people, believing He has a plan for our lives.

Queen Esther was courageous and willing to sacrifice her life for others. Will we be willing to do the same?

The instructor answers any final questions and concludes the class by asking a volunteer student to lead in the closing prayer—end of Lesson #4.

### **Lesson 5 Women of the New Testament Mary, the mother of Jesus**

Greetings

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<sup>219</sup> “Esther - Bible Book Chapters and Summary.”

Introduction (The instructor introduces her/himself to the class attendants, then each attendant introduces themselves by giving their first name)

5<sup>th</sup> lesson: Introduction to the topic and the reason for it.

The instructor will discuss the need to bring awareness to the congregation about the vital part of women in ministry. The instructor then leads the students in a word of prayer, inviting the holy spirit to bring discernment to the class.

The instructor reads the portion of the Church of the Nazarene *Manual*, which will be read at the beginning of each lecture, briefly explaining what the Nazarene church believes regarding women in ministry.

This lecture focuses on introducing students to the ministry of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as is presented in the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament. We will read the Bible, taking into consideration the Latino literary and cultural context, and identify how God used women to lead despite the patriarchal culture of that time. After reading the Gospel of Luke, Luke 1: 26-56, Luke 2:19-51 and Acts 1:14, the instructor takes a reasonable amount of time to discuss with students their understanding of the reading, then guides them to the learning objectives and continues the discussion to reach a consensus of each objective.

The instructor starts the lesson by asking students what they know about Mary, the mother of Jesus. After acknowledging the students' responses to the question, the instructor guides students to take turns reading Luke 1:26-56, inviting students to read from two or three different Bible versions, looking for some interpretation differences, noting that reading more than one version helps to clarify the real meaning that writers try to communicate.

### **The Calling of Mary**

Mary is the woman God chose to be the earthly mother of Jesus. She is one of the Bible's most recognized and influential people. Her story is fantastic; she is a courageous woman of strong faith and strength. Mary was just a teenager; some scholars estimate she was probably 12 or 13. She was engaged to be married to a young man named Joseph. She was an ordinary Jewish girl looking forward to marriage when her life changed forever. One night, an angel gave her the great news that she would be the mother of the promised Messiah.

Fearful and anxious, Mary stood before the angel Gabriel, listening to his announcement. She could never imagine receiving this type of news that she would have a child and her son would be the promised Messiah. At her young age, she probably had many questions about how she would conceive the Savior, but she responded to God with humble belief and obedience.<sup>220</sup> Mary's calling held great honor and great suffering. The privilege of being the mother of the Messiah and the pain associated with childbirth and motherhood, considering her tender age.

The angel approached her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." In other words, she had been given much grace or "unmerited favor" from God. Her first suffering will come from being an unwed mother. She almost lost her fiancé, too; as for an ordinary person, it will be difficult even to consider the idea of a young lady becoming pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Her beloved son was rejected and murdered. Mary's submission to God's plan would cost her so much pain, yet she was willing to be God's servant.<sup>221</sup> Mary was the only human with Jesus throughout his life, from birth until death.

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<sup>220</sup> "Meet Mary: Mother of Jesus and Humble Servant of God," Learn Religions, accessed October 29, 2023, <https://www.learnreligions.com/mary-the-mother-of-jesus-701092>.

<sup>221</sup> "Meet Mary."

Mary gave birth to Jesus and saw him grow as her baby; she also watched him die as her Savior. Even at her young age, Mary knew the Scriptures, so when the angel appeared to her and announced to her that the baby would be God's son, Mary replied, "I am the Lord's servant... may it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). Mary was familiar with the expected Messiah, for she had learned from the Old Testament prophecies.

Like all humans, Mary had some weaknesses. She was young, poor, and she was a female. These weaknesses were not suitable in the eyes of her people for her to be a person considered to be used by God almighty. However, God saw qualities. He saw her trust and obedience. God knew she would willingly serve Him in one of the most essential callings ever given to a human being, to become the earthly mother of Jesus.

Mary did not consider the consequences when she willingly submitted her life to God's plan, regardless of the cost she would pay. Even when obedience to the Lord meant for Mary to be disgraced as an unwed mother, regarding her engagement with Joseph, he may decide not to marry her, or worst yet, he may have her put to death by stoning as it was permitted by law, to stone unfaithful women. Being chosen by God for a high calling represents a great privilege and responsibility; it is a total commitment and willingness to sacrifice everything for our love and devotion to God.<sup>222</sup>

#### Learning Objectives:

1. To learn Mary's call from God and what it entailed.
2. To realize that God equipped the women He chose to accomplish their mission.
3. What qualities of Mary made her opt to be chosen to be the mother of Jesus?

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<sup>222</sup> "Meet Mary."

Questions to follow:

1. Am I like Mary, willing to accept God's plan no matter the cost?
2. Can I rejoice in that plan as Mary did, knowing it will cost me dearly?
3. Have I ever been able to decide to serve God, regardless of the suffering associated?
4. How do I prepare myself to be ready for the time when God calls me to something extraordinary?

The instructor answers any final questions and concludes the class by asking everyone to join her/him in reading Mary's Song aloud as a form of closing prayer, Luke 1:46-50:

And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on, all generations will call me blessed, and the Mighty One has done great things for me, holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. (Luke 1:46-50, NIV)

## **Lesson 6 Women of the New Testament Mary Magdalene**

Greetings

Introduction (The instructor introduces her/himself to the class attendants, then each attendant introduces themselves by giving their first name)

6th lesson: Introduction to the topic and the reason for it.

The instructor will discuss the need to bring awareness to the congregation about the vital part of women in ministry. The instructor then leads the students in a word of prayer, inviting the holy spirit to bring discernment to the class.

The instructor reads the portion of the Church of the Nazarene *Manual*, which will be read at the beginning of each lecture, briefly explaining what the Nazarene church believes regarding women in ministry.

This lecture focuses on introducing students to the ministry of Mary Magdalene, a faithful disciple of Jesus, as is presented in the New Testament. We will read the Bible, taking into consideration the Latinx literary and cultural context, and identify how God used women to lead despite the patriarchal culture of that time. After reading Luke 8:1-3, Matthew 27:55-56, and John 20:11-18, the instructor takes a reasonable amount of time to discuss with students their understanding of the reading, then guides them to the learning objectives and continues the discussion to reach a consensus on each objective.

The instructor starts the lesson by asking students what they know about Mary Magdalene. After acknowledging the students' responses to the question, the instructor guides students to take turns reading the Bible passages listed above, inviting students to read from two or three different Bible versions, looking for some interpretation differences, noting that reading more than one version helps to clarify the real meaning that writers try to communicate.

### **Who was Mary Magdalene? Her life and ministry**

Mary Magdalene is a well-known figure in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The Gospels mention her several times as a devoted follower of Jesus who was present in his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Mary Magdalene was a woman of strong faith; she had been



healed from the possession of seven demons by Jesus. She was one of Jesus' female disciples who played an essential role in the early Christian church. Her story exemplifies faith and dedication; she remains an important Christian figure. In our Latinx communities, there is much controversy about who Mary Magdalene was— some say she was a prostitute, and others say she was Jesus' wife. However, there is no evidence in the Bible to support these statements.

The Bible narrates that Mary Magdalene's first encounter with Jesus was when He delivered her from seven demons. Luke 8:1-3 reveals that Mary Magdalene was one of the women who traveled with Jesus and his disciples and who used her property to care for them. She witnessed the execution of Jesus (Matt. 27:55-56) and was among the first people to see him risen (John 20:11-18).

### **The Steadfast Disciple**

The Bible narratives tell that most of Jesus' disciples left him during the most challenging and last moments of his life on earth. Mary Magdalene stayed near him during his death, burial, and resurrection. She was near the cross during his crucifixion, along with Mary and Salome. Mary Magdalene was present at his burial, and she was one of the women who visited the tomb of Jesus after the Sabbath. She holds a special place in John 20:11-18. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene: "Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God"' (John 20:17).

I can imagine the mix of emotions that were part of Mary Magdalene's journey as a disciple of Jesus. Devotion, love, courage, and pain are feelings we can tell from the Bible readings. The words of Mary Magdalene to the other disciples in the Gospel of John, "I have seen the Lord," are her response to the appearance of the Risen Savior, who leads her "from grief

and loss to joy and hope.”<sup>223</sup> Mary Magdalene is the first to meet Jesus after his resurrection and the first to receive the core message of our Christian faith, that “the Lord is risen and has triumphed over sin, evil, and death.”<sup>224</sup> Mary Magdalene witnessed the miracles of Jesus, his crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection.

The fact that Jesus chose Mary Magdalene to be the person to deliver the good news of His resurrection to the disciples says that women were essential to Jesus. Through the redemption of Christ, women got their voices back. Mary Magdalene was chosen to go and tell. She was commissioned to preach. Jesus did not put any limits or restrictions on her. Instead, He ordained Mary Magdalene to be a carrier of his Gospel.<sup>225</sup> Women are no longer to be submissive; they are no longer to be destined to suffer in silence in the face of abuse; “they are no longer expected to blend into the background.”<sup>226</sup>

Through Mary Magdalene, Jesus called women to be His missionaries and preachers. Jesus did not select Mary Magdalene simply because she was the only person available then; this is clarified by what Paul wrote later in Galatians 3:28. In Christ, there is “neither male nor female.” When Jesus was raised from the dead, He entrusted his faithful disciple Mary Magdalene to go and tell of His resurrection.

Mary Magdalene lived a life apart from God before her encounter with Jesus, which radically changed her life; she went from a life oppressed by seven or more demons to participating in Jesus’ ministry and witnessing the greatest miracle of all time, the resurrection of

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<sup>223</sup> Dorothy A. Lee, *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament: Reclaiming the Biblical Vision for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 1.

<sup>224</sup> Lee, 1.

<sup>225</sup> “Why Was Mary Magdalene the First Witness of the Resurrection?”

<sup>226</sup> “Why Was Mary Magdalene the First Witness of the Resurrection?”

Jesus. We can learn from Mary Magdalene to be persistent in our walk with Jesus and not be afraid of what others may think.

Learning Objectives:

1. To learn Mary Magdalene's call from God and what it entailed.
2. To realize that God equipped the women He chose to accomplish their mission.
3. What qualities of Mary Magdalene made her opt to be chosen to be the first person to see Jesus after his resurrection?

Questions to follow:

1. What can I learn from the ministry of Mary Magdalene?
2. If I receive a call from God to a particular project, am I willing to accept the call?
3. Have I ever been in a position to decide to serve God, regardless of the suffering associated with the call to serve?

The instructor answered any final questions and concluded the class by asking a volunteer to lead in the closing prayer, end of lesson 6.

## **Lesson 7 Women of the New Testament Priscilla**

Greetings

Introduction (The instructor introduces her/himself to the class attendants, then each attendant introduces themselves by giving their first name)

7th lesson: Introduction to the topic and the reason for it.

The instructor will discuss the need to bring awareness to the congregation about the vital part of women in ministry. The instructor then leads the students in a word of prayer, inviting the holy spirit to bring discernment to the class.

The instructor reads a portion of the Church of the Nazarene *Manual* that will be read at the beginning of each lecture, briefly explaining what the Nazarene church believes regarding women in ministry.

The focus of this lecture is to introduce students to the ministry of Priscilla from the New Testament from the time of Paul. We will read the Bible, taking into consideration the Latinx literary and cultural context, and identify how God used women to lead despite the patriarchal culture of that time. After reading Acts 18:1-3, 18-19, 26; Romans 16:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:19; and 2 Timothy 4:19, the instructor takes a reasonable amount of time to discuss with students their understanding of the reading, then guides them to the learning objectives and continues the discussion to reach a consensus of each objective.

The instructor starts the lesson by asking students what they know about Priscilla. After acknowledging the students' responses to the question, the instructor guides students to take turns reading the Bible passages listed above, inviting students to read from two or three different Bible versions, looking for some interpretation differences, noting that reading more than one version helps to clarify the real meaning that writers try to communicate.

### **Who is Priscilla in the Bible, and why does her story matter to our lives today?**

In the Bible, Priscilla is presented as a mighty woman of faith. She was a woman of strength and purpose. In the New Testament, Priscilla is identified with her husband, Aquila. She is one of the greatest female missionaries of the Scriptures. Priscilla and Aquila worked

alongside the Apostle Paul and became very close friends.<sup>227</sup> Throughout the story of Priscilla, we see her bravery as a new Christian despite being a victim of Roman persecution of the early church. Hospitality was one of her greatest gifts; she used it to serve the Lord. Regardless of her continuous travel, every time she made home a place, she would invite people to come for worship and fellowship.

The story of Priscilla is found in the New Testament book of Acts 18; she and her husband Aquila have just been forced to leave their home in Rome because Claudius, the emperor at that time, had ordered all Jews out of Rome. Due to the growing spread of Christianity, forced to leave their home, they found their way to Corinth, where they met the Apostle Paul. The Bible does not tell explicitly when Priscilla and Aquila came to believe in Jesus; we know from Scripture that when they left Rome, they went to Corinth, where they met Paul. They most likely received Paul's teachings if they had not been believers. Since Priscilla and Aquila did the same type of work as Paul for money, they were tentmakers; they became friends quickly. Their friendship became a partnership in ministry that lasted a lifetime. They adopted Paul's lifestyle. According to Jewish law, those who teach and preach should not get paid. Paul, being a Jew, he followed that principle. Priscilla and Aquila traveled extensively as missionaries.

In writing a letter, Paul says: "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them" (Romans 16:3-4). During those days, deciding to become a missionary was a great deal. Many people lost their lives during the early days when Christianity was new. Violence was the norm against Christians. The Jews hated them, and the Romans were killing them for fun. By

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<sup>227</sup> Caddabra Brown, "Priscilla in the Bible: Characteristics and Lessons Learned," *The Faith Space* (blog), October 24, 2022, <https://thefaithspace.com/priscilla-in-the-bible/>.

being friends with Paul and hanging out with him, Priscilla and Aquila were exposing themselves to being killed.

After spending some time in Corinth, Paul decides to go to Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila decided to go with him. Priscilla and Aquila went to the synagogue one day during their time in Ephesus. They found a passionate, young, and brilliant scholar named Apollos, who delivered the sermon. While listening to the sermon, Priscilla and Aquila noticed that Apollos did not know that Jesus had already been born, died on the cross, was resurrected, and returned to heaven. They knew it because, in his sermon, Apollos talked about the coming Messiah, the prophecies from the Old Testament talked about. His sermon was about John the Baptist and the need to repent in preparation for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah.<sup>228</sup>

Apollos' sermon was incomplete because he did not know about Jesus. So, Priscilla and Aquila decided to fix the problem, and Priscilla took the lead. They invited Apollos to their home, and there, away from everyone else, they taught him the whole story about Jesus. Apollos learned that the Old Testament prophecies had been fulfilled and that salvation was available now, full and free in Jesus.

Priscilla was considered a laywoman; she taught the Gospel to people and had a church in her home. Paul could not do his ministry alone; he needed the support of Priscilla and Aquila. They saw the need and stepped up to the plate. We can learn so much from Priscilla and Aquila. We see in their story that every disappointment is God's appointment. When they left Rome after being persecuted for being Jewish, they met Paul, and their lives changed forever. They probably left a successful business in Rome, but God made it work for their good when they left. By

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<sup>228</sup> Caddabra Brown, "Priscilla in the Bible: Characteristics and Lessons Learned." The Faith Space. Accessed October 24, 2022. <https://thefaithspace.com/priscilla-in-the-bible/>.

leaving Rome, they met Paul and became their ministry partners. This reminds me that God uses the disappointment of our lives for His glory. Romans 8:28 became a reality in the lives of Priscilla and Aquila.

Learning Objectives:

1. To learn that regardless of our difficulties in life, if we are willing to be instruments of God, He will guide us to the place, time, and people to help us fulfill our call.
2. To realize that God equipped the women He chose to accomplish their mission.
3. To understand that God gives us unique gifts and talents that we can use to serve others as we contribute to expanding the Kingdom of God here and now.

Questions to follow:

1. What can I learn from the ministry of Priscilla?
2. What qualities did Priscilla possess that were helpful during her life as a missionary?
3. Have I ever been in a position to decide to serve God, knowing of the risk associated with it?

The instructor answered any final questions and concluded the class by asking a volunteer to lead in closing prayer. End of lesson #7

**Summary of seven lessons: Lesson 8**

Greetings

Introduction (The instructor introduces her/himself to the class attendants, then each attendant introduces themselves by giving their first name)

The instructor leads the group in prayer, giving thanks to God for allowing the completion of the course.

Summary of the seven lessons. The instructor takes time to thank everyone who showed up for either all or part of the seven lessons, then announces that we had arrived at the end. Today, we will do a quick review of what we learned in the seven lessons and ask for everyone's participation by suggesting ways to keep bringing awareness to our homes and church of the vital part of women in the Bible and currently at our homes, our schools, and our churches. Allow time for students to share their favorite parts of the lessons. Ask if any of them were impacted by any of the women we study; if so, allow them to share.

From a biblical perspective, this study proposes that women must have full access to the church's ministry as ordained ministers or laypeople. Access to ministry should not depend on gender but vocation, wisdom, and the church's discernment of call.

The instructor reads a portion of the Church of the Nazarene *Manual* at the beginning of each lesson, briefly explaining what the Nazarene church believes regarding women in ministry.

In 2018, Dr. Jesse C. Middendorf, a general superintendent emeritus in the Church of the Nazarene, stated in a video titled "Thinking Out Loud: Women in Ministry"<sup>229</sup> spoke powerfully about the critical contribution of women clergy; we will watch the short video now. Please

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<sup>229</sup> Middendorf, "Thinking Out Loud."



follow the link for the video and play it for the students; if needed, please arrange for a translator to translate the video into Spanish.

<https://www.facebook.com/NTSPRAXIS/videos/1929829710382631/?mibextid=zDhOQc>

In this video, Dr. Jesse Middendorf states that the current policy of The Church of the Nazarene requires taking courses in women's ministry as part of the requirement for ordination. Dr. Middendorf closes the video by inviting all male pastors to step to the plate and accept, encourage, embrace, and promote women's ministry at all levels.

The Church of the Nazarene currently has one woman holding a seat as General Superintendent. "In 2017, the Church of the Nazarene elected its second-ever female General Superintendent, Dr. Carla Sunberg. General Superintendent is the highest elected position in the Nazarene Church, overseeing the Nazarene denomination. This has been a cause for celebration for Nazarene women clergy, and hopefully, the church culture around women in ministry will better reflect the church's deepest convictions."<sup>230</sup>

The instructor closes with prayer and dismisses the class for refreshments to give closure to the eight weeks of lessons. This is the Latino way of properly closing any event, with food and a time of fellowship around the table.

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<sup>230</sup> Cassie Grimm, "We're Not Going Home: The Church of the Nazarene and Women in Ministry – The Echo," accessed November 1, 2023, <https://echo.snu.edu/were-not-going-home-the-church-of-the-nazarene-and-women-in-ministry/>.

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