

"A GATHERING OF WOMEN"

May News Update by Tanya Lopez, Regional Disciples Women Staff

The Bittersweet Interlude

It seems like ages ago, but I first started working in women's ministries when I was about 18 years old. I was just recently graduated from high school and simultaneously graduated from the youth group to doing things with the ladies. I have always been a person who likes to help and work together with people to make things happen. So, when I had initially told my now mother-in-law, Pastor Carmen Lopez, that yes I could help her and attend meetings with the Regional Full Commission of Disciples Women (that's what our Regional Disciples Women's Ministry was called at the time) I had no idea what I had gotten myself into. At that time, she was serving as the acting President of the Hispanic Women's Ministries for the Convencion Hispana del Pacifico and I, as one of her church members and leaders, would help in any way that I could with that ministry.

I was doing ok, I thought. But I soon learned that saying yes and learning about new ways to do ministry gets you excited and when you get excited you tend to do things that you thought you'd never do. I was asked to serve as the secretary for the Hispanic Women's Ministry. I was already helping with this ministry so I figured ok, this is a little bit more than just hands on helping. This was a position on a committee. I agreed and things only moved faster and faster from there. Fast forward a few years and I was asked to serve as Hispanic Representative on the regional women's committee alongside my sister-in-law Siobhan Lopez. I was directly serving in the ministry that I was representing in the wider regional women's ministry leadership committee. It was a huge honor and I learned so much.

I learned very quickly that sometimes even though you sign up to do one job, in reality as part of a ministry team member, you wear many many hats. I don't think this is news to anyone in ministry. I took the minutes, I made sure we got meeting dates out to members of our team, I contacted pastors on behalf of the ministry, I also helped to write letters and had my now husband help us design flyers. I would help organize registration at events and coordinate hospitality needs. I would contact the venues of our events. This was a crash course in event planning and management. I had no clue how much work and how much I would learn by saying yes.

I was given the opportunity to learn, to serve, to lead. I now realize that I was learning by doing. I was learning hands on how organize and call together people. I leaned by doing. I didn't always get things out on time, I didn't always negotiate the best deals, but I was allowed the space to learn, to grow and to step out to do things. Many times, I wondered why I was being asked to do certain things. At times, I thought I'm only the secretary and this is way way more than I signed up for.

I served for four years as the secretary for the Hispanic Women's Ministry. When my last term was up as secretary and it was time for a new committee it was not entirely a surprise but it still genuinely shocked me when I was called by the nominating committee to serve as President of the Hispanic Women's Ministry. I was the youngest to serve in this position. I was hesitant but also knew that I had been doing and actively leading this ministry already and that now I could fly. I could bring new ideas and reimagine events. I could invite people that we had never thought to invite and design programs/ events in ways that we had never done so! I was full of energy, full of ideas, full of excitement! I said yes and for the last 4 years have been serving this ministry.

Things do not always go the way you expect them to. I had the opportunity to lead women to plan many events that looked and felt different. Each time being surprised by how open and ready the women I was working with were to try new things. But ministry had slowly been changing even when I served as secretary. Less women could afford retreat events, more women were having to work more hours, or take on additional jobs due to the state of the economy at the of the Recession. We had women who had seen an increase of women's events being planned by their local congregations, and so were no longer able to attend our events.

This trend is what was the Hispanic Women's Ministry has been most affected by during the two terms I have served as President of the Hispanic Women's Ministry. There are many new, thriving Hispanic Congregations with lots of active women's groups and ministries. Those active women are doing a lot in their churches. Again, nothing new to many of us. But what was new was that the women were gathering together locally to retreat, to have conferences, to have joint events with other churches in their areas. All exciting and wonderful things, but it meant that the exciting and wonderful things that we had been planning for them was sometimes something they couldn't attend any longer.

We, the committee I lead now as the Hispanic Women's Ministry President, are in the midst of planning and finalizing our final event together. It is very much a bittersweet moment for me. I have honestly had many emotions these past few weeks. I have had the opportunity to do so much and to lead the women to try things they didn't necessarily think would work. Many times, I wondered if anyone would show up. Spoiler alert, they did J I cried when I felt stressed because I worried about not going into the red, I laughed with my sisters, I jumped and danced while we worshiped together. I felt alone at times, at times I was frustrated with late registrations, but through it all I can honestly say this was a time I will never take for granted.

The Hispanic Women's Ministry taught me so much and helped form who I am as leader. It taught me perseverance, patience, it strengthened my faith, it helped me find my voice as a Latina Woman Leader. I had to speak loudly sometimes to be sure that I was heard, but this Ministry shaped me. For that I will always be grateful. And now as my term of 4 years as President comes to a close I feel ready to let this chapter in my life close for now. I will continue to support the events, and always be connected to the ministry very closely as I serve as Staff for all Disciples Women. But I am ready and eager to see how and where the ministry will go from here.

An interlude is a pause. A break in a song or a play. This is my bittersweet interlude. I say good bye to 8 years of leadership with the Hispanic Women, but I step into a new phase in my personal growth and development for my ministry and life. I will be attending Claremont School of Theology in the fall to pursue my Masters in Divinity. All the ways in which I have learned to serve and to lead have brought me to this interlude. For all the work, the struggle and the effort it took to serve in this ministry in the way that I did, while also raising my two young daughters and being the wife of a church planter. this is my time to pause. I will take this time to grow in a new way and to develop new skills to continue to serve in all the ways that I can for as long as I can.

Thank you Ministerio de Mujeres Convencion del Pacifico! I can't wait to see what the ministry will be and do with new leadership. I will always support and will continue to serve you all. Thank you for everything.

Amen.

Blessings,
Tanya Lopez

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