

# Christian Latina Leadership Institute inspires service

January 25, 2019

BURNET—Alejandra Cervantes Lopez grew up seeing her mother involved in the church and helping others serve.

Her mother led a variety of ministries, from serving as president of Unión Femenil Misionera at Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana in San Antonio to directing her church's Sunday school.



Alejandra Cervantes Lopez (right) invited her mom, Elizabeth Cervantes (left), to the Christian Latina Leadership Institute, hoping she would receive a new vision for ministry. (Photo / Isa Torres)

But after Cervantez Lopez gained a renewed vision for service after attending Christian Latina Leadership Institute training a few years ago, she realized her mother also could benefit—particularly after her father's death last October.

“You find this inner strength to be who God created you to be,” she said.

So, Cervantez Lopez encouraged her mom to attend the recent Christian Latina Leadership Institute event at Camp Buckner, near Burnet.

## **Desire to develop leaders**

Developing Latina leaders—whether they were just beginning or needing a new source of inspiration—was the goal Patty Villarreal and Nora O. Lozano had in mind when they started the program in 2005. Both Lozano and Villarreal are professors at Baptist University of the Americas.

While BUA students can take institute classes for credit—as Cervantes Lopez did—women not enrolled in the school also can be part of the program, Lozano said.

“Any Christian woman who is ready to work on her leadership skills is welcome to come,” she said.



Nora Lozano

Whether that is in the church or in the marketplace, “we will help them to be better leaders,” Lozano explained.

Although Christian Latina Leadership Institute was formed to help Hispanic

women develop leadership skills in a culture and a society not shaped to benefit them, any woman from any other ethnic group can also be part of the program, Lozano said. They are welcome as Latinas-at-heart, she noted.

## Three-year program

The first year focuses on the individual, the challenges Latinas face and ways they strengthen leadership skills, care for themselves and—if necessary—restore faith in themselves as leaders, Lozano said.

It also teaches women to carefully study biblical passages that speak of the relationship between God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and women.

Instructors in the institute “along with several older sisters in the faith have helped me in so many different areas,” Cervantes Lopez said.

From the beginning of the program, students are encouraged to develop their calling and express their personal mission statement, Lozano said.



Third-year students at the Christian Latina Leadership Institute participate in a class on leadership in nonprofit organizations. (Photo / Isa Torres)

During the second year of the program, students continue to hone their

skills in leading others, learn more about self-care as leaders and build networks, while exploring ways they can project themselves outwardly, Lozano explained.

By the third year, students learn how to project themselves outside, exploring their roles in denominational or community organizations and nonprofits, she noted.

After the three-year program, students receive a certificate in Latina Leadership Studies.

## **‘A 360-degree transformation’**

Christian Latina Leadership Institute students interact and learn from accomplished Latinas in different fields, including ministry, nonprofits and various areas of business, Lozano said.

“For many of the students, this becomes a 360-degree transformation,” she said.

Since one of the main ingredients of such transformation requires women to have time to do self-care and heal, students are part of a retreat-style program encouraging spiritual renewal in their role as leaders, she said.

“We have to find a balance between patience, perseverance, love and kindness, and push through situations or circumstances outside our comfort zone,” Cervantes Lopez said. “We’re paving the way. The road is not set before us, but we hold onto God’s hope and guidance to where he’s leading.”



Each year, Christian Latina Leadership Institute students meet at Camp Buckner for an intensive four-day retreat-style training to develop leadership skills in ministry and in the business world. (Photo / Isa Torres)

For 12 years, Christian Latina Leadership Institute students have attended training at Camp Buckner, where they do not have to worry about anything else other than attend classes, work on assignments, and developing and nurturing relationships with each other.

For many women, the lack of education, taking care of their family, working to sustain the family, language and cultural differences, as well as lack of resources are obstacles to successfully develop themselves as leaders, she said.

“But education helps to clearly see other options you have,” Lozano said. “Through CLLI, many women have been inspired to go and continue their education somewhere else and share what they have learned with others.”

Like Cervantes Lopez, other women have felt empowered at Christian Latina Leadership Institute—often for the first time—and “gone somewhere else to help bring change in the lives of others,” Lozano said.

“This is the power Jesus has to transform the church, and the lives of families, individuals and communities,” she observed.

Christian Latina Leadership Institute has taken its training program to Monterrey and Metepec in Mexico, as well as North Carolina. The institute plans to expand to other cities in the United States and Mexico, Lozano added.

“Together we see that God is in favor of women—God is in favor of us, Latina women,” she said.

Whether women have just now begun their journey, or are exhausted and in need of strength to keep going, Lozano said she hopes Christian Latina Leadership Institute can be a source for them to receive “new dreams, new understanding and new ways to go forward.”