

Closed doors led Baptist woman to minister elsewhere

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DALLAS—Isabel Docampo was ordained a year after messengers to the 1984 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting passed a [resolution](#) opposing women's ordination and limiting women's roles in ministry to positions other than the pastorate.

But ever since she was a child, Docampo had participated in the church and in ministry.



Isabel Docampo
(<https://www.smu.edu/perkins/2.2.16Portraits-106>)

Docampo is director of the Center for the Study of Latino/a Christianity and Religions and professor of supervised ministry at Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology, but she grew up in a Louisiana

Baptist church and attended Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

At her church, she served as youth minister. She translated Vacation Bible School programs for the local Baptist association of churches, and she taught VBS classes.

"In a small church, you must do everything," Docampo said.

However, she saw ministry not just as a task but as a calling she had received from God.

Before her ordination, Docampo had been director of Christian Social Ministries for the Baptist Association of Greater Baton Rouge. But the funding for her department stopped soon after her ordination, she said.

"After I was ordained, I spent a whole year under scrutiny," she recalled. "It felt like there were two bodies—the people who cared about missions and the people who just cared about politics."

To find a place that would help her heal, Docampo moved to Washington, D.C, where she began attending Calvary Baptist Church, an American Baptist congregation.

"I needed to be in a congregation that would embrace me and give me spiritual nourishment," Docampo said. "I needed time to differentiate the differences between the politics of the church and my relationship with the divine."

Before she could serve in ministry again, she needed time away from the church where she had grown up—the place where she first heard God's calling and learned to serve, she explained.

"It was a time to renew the joy of my salvation," she said.

Difficult situations—when she felt excluded from following her calling in

Baptist life— shaped how Docampo has helped the church since.

“Everything we need to be about, even in the power dynamics of the church, is the radical inclusivity of God for creation,” Docampo said. “If we really want to look into the gospel of Jesus Christ, we need to at least respect when we hear someone have a different view.”