

# Cultural humility and creativity needed to develop community

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WACO—Effective Christian community development not only requires compassion, but also demands cultural humility and creativity, speakers told the No Need Among You Conference.



Rather than presuming to have the solutions to all the problems people in poverty encounter, Lorena Garza-Gonzalez urged Christians to come “walk alongside” people in economically challenged communities. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Well-meaning Christians who cross cultural barriers to enter a low-income community because they want to “save” families and “fix” what they

perceive to be broken need to humble themselves, said Lorena Garza-Gonzalez, vice president of [Urban Strategies](#).

“There is only one Savior,” Garza-Gonzalez reminded participants at the event at First Baptist Church in Waco, sponsored by the [Texas Christian Community Development Network](#).

## **Develop relationships**

Rather than presuming to have the solutions to all the problems people in poverty encounter, she urged Christians to come “walk alongside” people in economically challenged communities.

“You have something to offer—a relationship,” she said.

However, the basis of a genuine relationship is respect and a willingness to learn from “the real expert of culture”—the person from that culture—rather than presume to speak from a position of authority, Garza-Gonzalez said.

A development worker who grew up in an individualistic Anglo culture needs to examine his or her cultural biases before assuming to prescribe answers to a more communal Hispanic community that thrives in a network of extended family, she noted.

Instead of assuming a development worker can “empower” a community, a more appropriate posture is to recognize strengths already present in that community and help its members uncover the power they already possess, she said.

She pointed to her own experience growing up as the child of Mexican immigrant parents who were economically poor but rich in resourcefulness.

“See the gifts we have—how our community manages life,” she said.

# ‘Create space for people’s emotions’

The gifts people in poor urban communities possess include untapped artistic potential, said playwright Stevie Walker-Webb, founder of CAST, a nonprofit organization that creates theater for social change.



Creativity and the arts provide ways for people in difficult circumstances to express their emotions and tell their own stories, said Stevie Walker-Webb, former artistic director for Mission Waco’s Jubilee Theatre. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Creativity and the arts provide ways for people in difficult circumstances to express their emotions and tell their own stories, he said.

Walker-Webb grew up on 17<sup>th</sup> Street in Waco, two blocks from Mission Waco. He credited Jimmy and Janet Dorrell, founders of Mission Waco, and the workers who conducted afterschool programs for neighborhood youth

as being “guardians of my possibility.” They “expanded the fabric” of how he saw himself and envisioned his future, he said.

With the help of a scholarship Mission Waco provided, Walker-Webb earned his undergraduate degree from the University of North Texas.

At Dorrell’s invitation, he returned home to serve as artistic director with the [Jubilee Theatre](#), Mission Waco’s community performing arts venue, where he produced original works such as “We Ain’t the Huxtables” and “HERstory.”

Jubilee Theatre became “a place for difficult conversations ... a place to rage and engage, to create space for people’s emotions,” said Walker-Webb, who went on to earn a Master of Fine Arts degree from the New School for Drama in New York.

He has worked as outreach coordinator for Theatre of the Oppressed-NYC and is a fellow with the New York Theatre Workshop.

“Creation is God’s first love language. ... When we stop creating, we break God’s heart,” Walker-Webb said.