

Little is much in God's hands, Laredo pastor insists

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LAREDO—A church without a lot of resources or large membership still can be a missional congregation, a Laredo pastor insists.



Dalila Martinez is pastor of Casa de Dios de Laredo in Laredo.
(Photo / Isa Torres)

Dalila Martinez, pastor of Casa de Dios de Laredo, noted her church began when her late mother, Julia Barba, started a mission in El Cenizo in the 1990s. The mission later relocated about 20 miles north to Laredo.

Barba helped start the mission with the assistance of Iglesia Bautista Redencion in Houston. She did not live to see the mission become a self-supporting church in 2017.

But Martinez followed her mother all along. Her parents first heard about

Christ when she was about 15 years old, and after she accepted Christ, she continued to grow in faith alongside them.

Martinez concluded her theological studies in Monterrey, Mexico. She graduated along with her mother.

Missions important to church's identity

Missions has been an important aspect of Casa de Dios' identity, said Martinez. Even when the congregation still was a mission, Martinez pointed out their past efforts in missions, especially with children.

"Children's ministry is one many don't want, but is the most important one in the kingdom of heaven," Martinez said.

When her mother was the pastor of the mission, Martinez served as the minister to children and youth.

"Reaching and working with children has been so wonderful to me," she said. "It is through children we are still able to reach new families."

Her background in children's ministry has been essential now that she is the pastor of a missional church, Martinez said.

"We continue to minister to new children in the faith—that is, people who have never heard the gospel," she said.

Making disciples

Through relationship and discipleship, new believers have a chance to grow in their faith, she said.

“How can we preach, ‘So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; everything is made new?’” Martinez said. “We do so by teaching them a new way of life.”

As the church preaches the gospel, Martinez said, members have come to love families previously trapped in vicious cycles of crime, poverty and dysfunction.

“When someone in a family comes to know Christ, that person brings a change to the family that no one was aware of,” she said.

Equipping new believers for new life

Fathers who were in jail, mothers who were prostitutes and numerous families with low income are those whom Jesus came to save, regardless of legal immigration status, Martinez noted.

As the church teaches about Christ, it also must teach about new ways of life and new paths to maintain that life, she added.

“If a woman who was a prostitute wants to make a change, how are you going to help her do that?” Martinez asked. “You have to be ready to help her find her talent and teach her that vocation. It can be doing nails or decorating cakes or something else.”

It is important that a person does not have to say, “OK, I have met Christ, and now what how am I going to make it?” Martinez said.

New believers need to be fully disciplined so they can experience a complete change, she stressed.

Casa de Dios now helps people find answers to immigration problems, as well as work with organizations to provide job training, school tutoring and English classes, Martinez said.

“This is the church using all of itself to give to others and lead others to do the same,” she said.

Modeling missions and ministry

As church members grow in the faith, they learn to also practice what they have seen, Martinez added.

Children in the church started bringing cans of food, which they put in bags to give to friends who have little to eat. Field workers in El Cenizo, where the mission first began, bring the first fruits of their lands to share with people in the church who may need it, she said.

The church may still be made up of a small congregation, Martinez said, “but we are still in our first love.”

Even as some other churches and leaders have refused to work with her for being a woman in ministry, Martinez said, she knows who has called her.

“One has to first answer to God,” she said. “Nothing can stop the will of God.”

Any opposition she faces is not as important as seeing a child in the church stand up and lead the church in Bible reading or a prayer, Martinez said.

“We learn to give to God everything that frustrates us and everything we are desperate to see changed,” she said.

The church may not be very big, and it requires a big effort for many members to attend worship services after a long day of work, she noted.

But after every church service, every person in the building comes together to have a meal. People bring food and share it with each other. Even when church members may be going through hard times, Martinez said, the

church strives to remember to serve each other.

“What is little can be a lot in the hands of God,” she said. “I know in Christ we are able to continue to preach the gospel, because Christ is for everyone.