

Young ministers join together for growth and encouragement

October 19, 2020

Young ministers long for community—not just to hang out, but to grow. To meet that need, a group of young ministers formed [The Pastor's Common](#) in September 2019.

The Pastor's Common exists to strengthen the church by creating space for pastors to build community, to grow morally and intellectually, to be resourced and to be heard. It now has more than 150 members.

The [Truett Church Network](#) recently featured three members of The Pastor's Common—David Miranda, Nataly Mora and Evan Duncan—in a [Pastor's Round Table](#) discussion hosted virtually by Matt Homeyer, assistant dean for external affairs at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary and director of the Truett Church Network.

Miranda, one of the founders of The Pastor's Common, is the director of Missionary Adoption Program and urban ministries for Texas Baptists. He is from Sulphur Springs and is a graduate of Dallas Baptist University.

Mora is the associate pastor of community and Spanish ministries at Park Lake Drive Baptist Church in Waco. She is a native Texan, a daughter of immigrants, a graduate of DBU and a current student at Truett Seminary. Miranda and Mora planted a church together in Dallas' West End while attending DBU.

Duncan is teaching and communication pastor at First Baptist Church in Temple. Originally from western Pennsylvania, his stepfather was in the U.S. Army and was stationed "all over the world." Duncan is a graduate of the University of Mary-Hardin Baylor and Truett Seminary.

Intergenerational learning

Homeyer, 39, identifies himself in a “bridge generation” between older and younger ministers. He is interested not just in what younger ministers can learn from older ministers, but also what older ministers can learn from younger ministers.

Regarding COVID-19, the most pressing current issue, Homeyer asked where Mora, Miranda and Duncan see challenge and “kingdom opportunity.”

Maintaining Park Lake Drive’s multi-generational and multiethnic identity while meeting online has been challenging, Mora said. But since the church’s diversity is ingrained—and not simply an idea or an aspiration—maintaining the church’s identity has been easier, she noted. She cited the example of a Spanish-speaking church member who made sure a senior adult woman was getting food.

Taking church online has made it easier for people to self-select different spaces, which usually are smaller and less diverse groups than when people met in person, Duncan said. Connections can’t be taken for granted during the pandemic in the way they were when people could meet in person. The benefit of virtual connections, then, is the opportunity for people to have deeper and more intentional connections than they may have had in person, he noted.

Hope for the future

Many express pessimism about the future of the American church, but Homeyer wanted to know what gives these young ministers hope as they look into the church’s future.

Duncan was quick to express how proud he is of [Gen Z](#)—those born

between 1995 and 2010—who he sees leading in ministry and teaching and as incredible communicators. They are not confined or threatened by denominational boundaries, he also noted.

Also, he sees growth in spiritual practice—faith as “a thing we do” instead of something purely internal.

Mora and Miranda agreed [Millenials](#)—those born between 1981 and 1995—like “doing things in community.” Citing Emil Brunner’s *Dogmatics*, in which he asserts the church is a community and not a thing, Mora said Millenials tend to question institutions, preferring community and fellowship.

Frustration with the church

“Where do you grow frustrated with the church now?” Homeyer asked.

Pointing to the “sacred place” the church occupies to advocate, educate and be a good neighbor in its community, Mora lamented that the church doesn’t “step into that space often enough.”

The church frequently gets “bogged down” in problems instead of proclaiming the gospel and meeting needs, Duncan said. Young ministers know change happens slowly in the church. “But does it have to be this slow?” he asked.

Miranda is most frustrated with “moral inconsistencies” in the church and noted atheists have asked him why the church does things they see as moral equivocation. The world “is eager for us to be who we say we are,” Miranda stated.

Support from the church

In a desire for community, young ministers long to fellowship and be disciplined. To achieve both, Miranda and a group of young ministers formed The Pastor's Common for ministers in their 20s and 30s.

Young ministers also long for mentoring from seasoned ministers, Miranda added.

In response to what support young ministers need, Mora pointed to the need to encourage women called into ministry and gifted to preach and pastor.

She also counseled mentors not to put mentees in a box or to remake them in the mentor's image. Instead, look at young ministers' gifts and give them opportunities to use them, and "maybe even to fail. We grow from failure; we grow from those experiences, as well," Mora added.

"Utilize our creativity," Miranda said.

Duncan mentioned [*Growing Young*](#) by the Fuller Youth Institute, a resource for churches wanting to engage younger generations.

Joe Loughlin, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Temple, not only entrusts Duncan with leadership—including preaching nearly every Sunday in either the classic or modern worship services—but also wants to learn from Duncan. In turn, Duncan wants to "give those keys away" to Gen Z students.

To those younger than them

Despite younger generations' questioning of institutions, Miranda, Mora and Duncan are on staff at three institutions.

As “insiders” who are part of institutions, Homeyer asked what encouragement or challenge they would give to those younger than them.

The younger generation values the “work that has been laid before us,” Miranda said. “We are standing on shoulders of people way ahead of us,” he added.

Mentioning Bill Arnold, founding and recently retired president of the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation, Miranda was impressed by a picture of Arnold raising money for the Texas Baptist missions when he was Miranda’s age.

“Your calling is not dependent on ... the permission or whatever of other folks,” Duncan asserted. “I mean, your calling is a calling from God, and so, run with that, and do it, and when you see things that you wish were being done that aren’t being done, do those things,” he continued.

With all the transitions taking place, “the thing that you desire probably doesn’t exist,” Duncan said.

“Don’t wait for somebody to create that for you,” he urged. Instead, “if you’re called to it ... just create it. And if you fail, OK. It already wasn’t there. So ... give it a try,” Duncan said.

Ministers who want to connect with The Pastor’s Common can email David Miranda at david.miranda@txb.org or follow the group on Facebook at www.facebook.com/thepastorscommon.

The Pastor’s Common also has created a web series titled “[20 Things We Learned in 2020](#)” that is available on Facebook and will culminate on Nov. 15.