

Dr. Pablo Juarez: From atheist guerrilla to gospel minister

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Dr. Pablo Juarez is the pastor of First Baptist Church en Español in Kaufman. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on the church and ministry. To suggest a BGCT-affiliated minister to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

Background

Where else have you served in ministry, and what were your positions there?

- Church planter for Duck River Baptist Association, Tenn.
- Church planter for Eastern Baptist Association, N.C.
- Pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Emanuel, Wallace, N.C.
- Dean of student services at Baptist University of the Américas.
- Adjunct professor, Dallas Baptist University.
- Bivocational pastor.

Where did you grow up?

I was born and raised in Nagarote, a small city near Managua, the capital of Nicaragua.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

I grew up in one of the poorest corners of the world, experiencing a lot of hurt and hardships, believing my life was purposeless. At age 13, I enrolled in the Sandinistas' guerrillas and experienced the pain, cruelty and

hopelessness of war. Witnessing the killing of many young men my age and being surrounded by constant danger marked my life forever.

Once the war ended and the Sandinistas took control of the Nicaraguan government in 1979, I was sent to study agricultural engineering in Cuba. During my college years in Cuba from 1980 to 1984, I was exposed to communism. This exposure to communism made me an atheist, denouncing the idea of a God.

Once my studies in Cuba concluded, I returned to Nicaragua, where I married Gilma, the love of my life, in 1986. We had two beautiful children: Luis and Yessy.

After a couple of years, my wife and I grew very concerned about the social and political instability of our country. For that reason, in 1994, I decided to leave everything behind and relocate our entire family to the United States.

We left Nicaragua and embarked in the dangerous journey to the United States as undocumented immigrants. During this journey, I felt the need for God for the first time, even though I still doubted his existence.

Once in the United States, we moved from place to place until we settled in Siler City, N.C. The Lord began to knock in my heart there.

My feelings of abandonment and loneliness were very much alive in me, until I began to experience the embrace, acceptance and love of Christ through a Christian family that offered their friendship and care for us. Eventually, I started going to their church and heard the message of Jesus Christ.

In March 1996, I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, got baptized and started serving him. I was ordained to the ministry in 2001. In 2006, I became a U.S. citizen.

Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?

- Doctor of Ministry, Campbell University.
- Master of Divinity, Campbell University.
- Master of Business Administration, Dallas Baptist University.
- Master in Higher Education Administration, Dallas Baptist University.
- Bachelor of Religion, Campbell University.
- Agricultural studies, National University of Agriculture, Managua, Nicaragua.
- Industrial studies, Technical Institute Jose Martin, San Cristobal, Pinar del Rio, Cuba.

About ministry life

Why do you feel called into ministry?

In his book *The Call*, Os Guinness writes: “Our life-purpose therefore comes from two sources at once—who we are created to be and who we are called to be.”

Once I came to understand I was created to be in a loving relationship with God and called to a life of worship and service, I realized an unbearable need to devote my life completely to kingdom work.

I no longer felt peace and purpose in professions and fields not directly involved with making disciples. I also discovered a calling to ministry after serving in different ministries as a young believer. Through prayer, service and mentorship, I surrendered my life to ministry in 1997.

What is your favorite aspect of ministry? Why?

The development and training of young leaders is by far my favorite aspect of ministry. Inspiring people to grow and providing vision and the

resources they need to become faithful followers and servants of Jesus is my ultimate passion.

Jesus was the prime example of the significance in leadership development. He provided mentorship and guidance to young ministers, educators and administrators, and in turn, they continued his work here on earth of giving eternal hope to broken families.

What one aspect of ministry gives you the greatest joy?

The opportunity not only to share Christ, but to guide families to pursue education and professional growth in their respective fields. Facilitating Hispanic families with resources and opportunities fills my heart with joy and purpose.

About Pablo

Why are you Baptist?

Initially, I became Baptist by nature, because the family that reached me for Christ was Baptist. However, I chose to continue as a Baptist by nurture. Through my discipleship process, I found Baptist distinctives to have biblical and sound doctrine. I also found Baptists to be people of the Bible above all else.

As Baptists, we enjoy a priceless heritage of generations who have exalted God's Son, our Savior, and have proclaimed God's inspired word. Specifically, I embrace our stance as the Bible being the final authority, the autonomy of the local church and the priesthood of the individual believer.

Name something about you that would surprise people

who know you.

While in Nicaragua, I owned and managed a city baseball team. Baseball and basketball are my favorite sports. In baseball, I root for the Texas Rangers, in basketball for the Lakers. My son and I fell in love with basketball during the Shaq and Kobe era. While playing, I pretended to be Shaq, and he was Kobe.