

Rolando Aguirre: ‘Shepherding is my greatest joy in ministry’

June 7, 2017

Rolando Aguirre, president of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas, has been on the staff of Calvary Baptist Church in McAllen 10 years. He is the founding pastor of *Calvary en Español*—the pastor for Spanish-language ministries at the church—as well as the congregation’s discipleship team leader.

He also produces and directs a television program, *Descifrando Enigmas*—“Decoding Enigmas”—that is featured weekly on *televisa* along the Rio Grande Valley and bordering cities in Mexico.

From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on church and ministry. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-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?

I have served as a social worker and supervisor of the Rio Grande Children’s Home in Mission.

I also served as youth minister, discipleship leader and occasional preacher in Colombia before coming to the States.

I served as first vice president of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas from 2014 to 2016.

I have experience in the mission field, especially in Latin America and other parts of the world, mobilizing the local church.

I have been a camp pastor for children, youth and adults on multiple occasions.

- Where did you grow up and how did you come to faith in Christ?

I had the privilege of growing up in a Christian home in Colombia, the country where I was born. I received the gift of salvation in 1990, led to Christ by my mother. I have a rich heritage of Christian servants in my family over the past three generations.

My great grandfather was the co-founder of the first evangelical church in a little town called Riomanso, (Tolima) Colombia. He joined a missionary from the United States on this endeavor and suffered persecution with other believers. They lost all of their material possessions. They were forced to relocate to a different place after being severely punished for the sake of the gospel.

Therefore, I was part of the generation that was able to see the persecution of Christians and the migration of missionaries in the late 1980s, when Colombia was having problems with violence, narco-traffic and terrorism. I also was a witness of the growth of the persecuted church in the '90s and was actively part of it. Subsequently, this cultivated in me a passion to be trained in the area of human services, leadership and biblical theological studies.

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

Doctor of transformational leadership from Bakke Graduate University, 2016; thesis: "Developing Transformational Leadership Principles for Latino Church Leaders in the Rio Grande Valley"

Master of arts in human relations/professional counseling from Liberty University, 2009

Bachelor of arts in biblical theological studies from Baptist University of the Americas, 2005.

Biblical theological studies from Rio Grande Bible Institute, 2001-02

Ministry/church

- Why do you feel called into ministry?

God's purposes for our lives are always good. Every sincere Christian who wants to know God's will concerning his life can know it. However, this is typically a discovery process and not a dramatic revelation. Discerning God's call has definitely included prayer, reflection and community.

I remember my mother praying for God to use me in the future to proclaim his word as a preacher. At that time, I laughed at this prayer, thinking this calling was for someone else but surely not for me. As time passed, I started serving in ministries with children, youth, worship and community outreach. I began preaching when I was 14 years old, because there was a lack of a preacher who would preach at a mission church that my father had under his supervision during those days. I served as a youth pastor before coming to the United States to be trained in a formal theological institution.

In all this, I developed a passion to counsel people and to minister to the needy, rejected, persecuted and the oppressed. I ministered to many but felt the need to be better equipped for the ministry in the areas mentioned above. As Henri Nouwen states in *Making All Things New*: "The spiritual life is not before, after, or beyond our everyday existence. No, the spiritual life can only be real when it is lived in the midst of the pains and joys of the here and now." God used people, circumstances and events in my life to

confirm his calling to me.

As I was growing up, God allowed me to serve him along with my father in different missions we would visit on a weekly basis. I developed a passion to serve God. Yet I thought I never would go into “full-time” ministry, but God had other plans. Through my mother’s illness and other hardships, God communicated specifically to me that I needed to serve him vocationally for the rest of my life.

It was through a process of reflection and meditation that one particular night I had a divine encounter with the Master. I could not get up from the floor as I was on my knees before his presence. I cried and laughed intensely for hours. I experienced joy and received an affirmation and clarity of pursuing serving him at all costs for the rest of my life. I renounced to my dreams of becoming a medical doctor to serve the Doctor of all doctors. I remembered that I prayed to him as the prophet Isaiah said: “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8b).

- What is your favorite aspect of ministry? Why?

Shepherding is my greatest joy in ministry. I enjoy preaching God’s word and leading people to follow Christ and becoming passionate disciples who also make other disciples. I love to guide others to find their God-given gifts so that they could utilize them for God’s kingdom purposes.

- What one aspect of congregational life gives you the greatest joy?

It is a joy to see how God’s redemptive power could change the life of a person who surrenders completely to him. Also, seeing how a spiritual baby becomes a mature believer who bears much fruit gives me the greatest joy in ministry. When families are restored and individuals find a clear focus and/or purpose in life, I sense how God’s undeserved grace ministers to me in a very unique way.

- What one aspect of congregational life would you like to change?

Our natural tendency to look inwardly instead of looking outwardly to the people who need to know about the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- How has your ministry or your perspective on ministry changed?

I have written a purpose statement for my life, which has been in progress for sometime now, and which is still in progress as my perspective in the ministry continues to evolve. It reads: "The purpose of my life is to glorify God through my worship life, my development as a disciple of Christ, my communion with other believers, my service to others, and by making disciples who live out their purpose in the world."

My spheres of influence are my family, my church, my community, networks of churches and strategic international connections. The four dimensions of this missional purpose are to love God (Matthew 22:37), live his mission (Matthew 28:18-20), love people (Matthew 22:39) and lead them to follow. It is my aspiration that this would be my life purpose statement, regardless of my career choices in ministry.

While the Great Commandment is a subjectively measured purpose, the Great Commission is more objective. Nevertheless, I do not believe either one to be less important. The primary command of the Great Commission is to make disciples of all nations. Then, I am called to make disciples and to love others by serving them.

I also know that I have been called to what is known as "full-time vocational ministry." This vocational assignment is in line with my purpose statement, especially in the area of making disciples. I presently am a pastor of a local church and serve as the president of a convention. Thus, if God leads me to be a pastor the rest of my life, then I want to be the best equipper of leaders that I can be in a loving and restoring way. Additionally, I would

like to lead the congregation to make disciples who make disciples. I pray to become a transformational leader who is constantly pursuing a spiritual life of “being” more like Christ.

- What qualities do you look for in a congregation?

These qualities could be summarized in one sentence, “a congregation that loves God and loves one another.” (Mark 12:30-31)

- What do you wish more laypeople knew about ministry or, specifically, your ministry?

Laypeople are also ministers. The secular-sacred divide created between clergy and members in our congregations is not a good practice.

Today, many people are split between the Sunday and Monday—or private and public—areas of their lives. In a highly specialized society, we play different roles according to different rules with different parts of our personalities, and our lives slowly disintegrate.

Many of the pastoral and spiritual crises people face are a direct result of this disintegration of work, home and church. This is why laypeople are crucially important in our churches as they exercise their God-given power through the Holy Spirit and live as ministers of reconciliation in the name of Jesus Christ. Both the vocational—the church scattered—and the worship—the church gathered—activities of Christians are important. On Sunday, the latter equip and mobilize the scattered people of God for their mission and ministry on Monday.

But also needed are small committed groups in which people can honestly share their struggles in faith, home and work. This is real and authentic discipleship.

About Baptists

- What are the key issues facing Baptists—denominationally and/or congregationally?

I believe Baptists, as well as other denominations, deal with critical issues. One of the most prevalent ones is the secularism that rips holes into the morality of Baptists. In addition to this phenomenon, I observe a tendency to develop persistent fragmentation due to various reasons over the years. Baptists are known to either agree or disagree in many things, which causes organizational rupture and multiplication of new Baptists alliances.

About Rolando

- What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

I love many Bible passages. For example, one that speaks on purpose and mission is the one found in Ephesians 2:10 that states, “for we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” This is an essential passage to understand God’s purpose in our lives as we enter into a relationship with him. In a general sense, we are his “workmanship or making” as he created everything with the power of his word.

Though, we are also created in a new sense as his new creation according to 2 Corinthians 5:17. There cannot be a stronger expression to denote God’s transforming work in the process of salvation by grace than this one. The words “created in Jesus” communicate about his active work in our soul, spirit and in our future state of glorification with him. It is clearly stated that we have been created “unto good works.” The reason of this design is that we lead in this world by living in holiness in our daily walk with Christ. In other words, ‘the primary objective is not to get us to heaven but to bring heaven to earth.’

- How can you reintegrate spirituality and work? How can you explain this principle to the members in your congregation?

To maintain spiritual integrity, we need a spirituality that integrates, not separates, our faith and work. The individualistic “Protestant prayer ethic,” which gets the leftovers from the Protestant work ethic, fails to provide this. Under the pressures of modern work, many Christians feel isolated and unsupported in the workplace and find it difficult to pray and reflect in a way that integrates their church and work lives. Some theological guidelines for developing a corporate spirituality of work are:

Re-emphasizing the importance of the church scattered as well as the church gathered.

Both the vocational—the church scattered—and the worship—the church gathered—activities of Christians are important. On Sunday, the latter equip and mobilize the scattered people of God for their mission and ministry on Monday. But also needed are small committed groups in which people can honestly share their struggles in faith, home and work.

Recapturing a sense of vocation.

From the Bible and the Protestant Reformation emerges the understanding that all Christians have a ministry and vocation to serve in the working world, an understanding modeled on Christ as prophet, priest and king. This does not pit preaching or evangelism against ordinary work but sees kingdom work as healing creation and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) as fulfilling the creation commission (Genesis 1:26-28).

Recapturing the idea of the “mixed life.”

We must not abandon Christian people to the totalitarian demands of many workplaces and the Martha life of unreflective activism. Nor should we forfeit the workplace and adopt the monastic, contemplative Mary life.

Reconnecting wisdom, virtue and skill.

Developing a spirituality of competence and compassion is needed to overcome the split between Mary and Martha. Work is a major way we can cultivate and develop Christian virtues (Galatians 5) and attitudes (Matthew 5:1-13). It can develop either the fruit of the Spirit, making us patient, gentle and self-controlled, or the opposite fruits of the flesh. These virtues do not spring up in a vacuum but emerge through much practice and, above all, grace.