

# Voices: How the church shaped my educational journey

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When I was a little girl, I was so excited to start school. Part of this excitement came from my parents' hype about being in school. Ever since I can remember, they always said my job was to focus on school. As a young girl, I took their words very seriously, and when I started school at age 4, it became my full-time job.

## The importance of going to college

My parents didn't finish high school or go to college. They emigrated from Mexico when they were 24 years old. Part of the reason they moved to the United States was to give their children opportunities they didn't have in Mexico. One of those opportunities was receiving an education, which was the reason education became such a big topic in my house when I was growing up.

Going to college was not an option. It was a question of *where* rather than *if* we were going to college. Growing up, going to college was my main goal. I worked hard in school, and I thought I was on the right track to achieve my goals.

When I was in high school and started looking at college and scholarship applications, I realized how hard it was going to be to go to college. I was a Dreamer and going to college and finding the funds for college was going to be challenging. However, I knew it wasn't impossible because I had a cousin in the same situation as me who was navigating the waters on her own and was in college, slowly but surely reaching her goal of higher education.

# **My church supported my college dream**

It was during this time that my church became extremely important in my journey of higher education.

When my dreams seemed to crumble, my parents and my pastors—Carlos Valencia and Anyra Cano—were there to help me rebuild. It was not just about praying for me and listening to me when I felt down and defeated. They took the time to help me plan. They found options for me and scheduled college visits. They made calls to people and told them my story. They walked with me every step of the way until I ended up at Baptist University of the Americas, where my pastors also had been students.

The journey to BUA was not easy. BUA was never on my radar. I wanted to attend a very large public university in North Texas, but there simply was not enough money and not enough scholarships I qualified for.

In May of my senior year in high school, I still did not know where I was going to college. After a visit to the BUA campus and many conversations with leaders at the school, I made my decision to enroll at BUA.

Although it was a difficult decision, without God's guidance and my pastors' help, I would not have made it there.

# **My church sparked my career interest**

At my church, I also found my passion for what became my college major. At age 16, I started serving in my church in various ways, eventually helping with administrative tasks. I was very young and had a lot to learn, but I was eager and passionate to serve God in a way I never imagined.

During that time, I felt I needed to prepare myself better for the role God was leading me into. I chose business administration as my major because I wanted to serve God and my church in the best way possible. Once I was at BUA and began taking business courses, I felt joy and confirmation from the Lord that the career I had chosen was the right one.

## **My church influenced me to go beyond college**

My church has had an even larger influence on me when it comes to higher education. When my family became members of Iglesia Bautista Victoria en Cristo, the pastors were the only ones with a college education. As time passed, both pastors enrolled in graduate school and began working on their masters degrees. I remember being excited for them, but I didn't think a master's degree was for me.

When I went to a women's conference in San Antonio with several ladies from my church, God spoke to me, and I felt the desire to pursue a graduate degree even before I started college.

During the conference, Mary Ranjel, vice president of student life at BUA at the time, spoke about her educational journey and getting her master's degree. In that session, I knew I had to pursue a master's degree. By the grace of God, this past May, I graduated with a Master of Business Administration degree from Baylor University.

## **Encourage one another to pursue education**

I praise all the work the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas has done to give minority students a chance at higher education, work I definitely have

benefited from.

For churches that don't know how to help their students, find people who have the resources. Go to educational fairs. Make connections for your students, and walk with them throughout their process. If you don't know how, find someone who can help make it happen.

Don't give up on your students when they are discouraged. Many students may not have a support system at home, and the church may be the only support they have.

If you are a student dreaming of higher education, you are not alone. There are several of us who have been in your shoes and know what it feels like to dream big but have no map of the journey ahead.

Don't be afraid to ask for help, and know that your church is there to support you. Find someone who has succeeded, and ask them to help you. Most importantly, fight for your dream, and know God always is with you and always will provide.

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