

## **Introducing NBA's 2020-2022 Multilingual Latin@ Pastors and Leaders Peer Group**

Héctor Hernández, NBA Connect Coordinator  
September 2020



A core part of our NBA mission is to “advocate for the well-being of humanity.” From that commitment, we are called to deepen our engagement in advocacy and activism.

As we continue to connect and resource Disciples health and social service ministries, nine Latin@ Disciples pastors, community members and leaders have been called together into NBA's newest Peer Learning and Wellness Group for Advocacy and Activism.

This unique peer group is comprised of clergy who are serving Spanish speaking and/or multilingual Disciples churches. Many of these leaders are bi-vocational, often serving in more than one multilinguistic (Spanish, Spanglish, English, and French) and multicultural community settings across the U.S. and Canada. They come from diverse cultural backgrounds and places of origin such as Venezuela, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Puerto Rico, Cuba and Bolivia. The peer group members include first- and second-generation immigrant identities.

Rev. Bere Gil Soto and I serve as the co-conveners for this peer and wellness group. Rev. Soto has been a familiar partner with the NBA in the past including offering trainings on anti-racism and equity for our NBA XPLORES residents. She herself is a full time pastor with [Iglesia Hermandad Cristiana](#), an immigrant Latin@ congregation on the West Side of Indianapolis, Indiana.



*The 2020-2022 Multilingual Latin@ Pastors and Leaders Peer Group on their kick-off call. Members were sent care packages that they were able to open together.*

**Pictured Clockwise:** Rev. Pedro Ramos Goycolea, Rev. Héctor Hernández, Rev. Ellie (Ely) S. Bulnes, Rev. Bere Gil Soto, Pastor Elena Parra, Pastor Juan Carlos Rodriguez Vizcaino, Rev. Siobhan (Shobie) Lopez, Rev. William Almodovar, Pastor Juan Carlos Rodriguez Mendoza.

On April 27, we kicked off the peer and wellness group with our first online meeting. We were looking forward to our first in-person gathering scheduled for June, but we could not due to Covid-19. Yet, that didn't stop our commitment to being together. That is why in July, we developed a plan B, engaging in a virtual culinary experience in which, as a group, we learned how to cook Argentinian Empanadas from scratch (if you don't know or have not eaten an empanada, you have not lived!).



*Peer Group Co-Convenor Rev. Bere Gil Soto shared this message on Facebook after meeting with the peer learning and wellness group: "Covid-19 is not gonna stop us from having fun and fellowship! The Multilingual Latin@ Pastors and Leaders Peer Group from the NBA Disciples got together to learn how to do Empanadas Argentinas. Needless to say, they were delish!!!!"*

The group's original name was Hispanic Pastors and Leaders Peer Learning and Wellness Group; however, as we began talking about our identity as a group, we invited the group to name themselves. As a group, we discussed how the different names imposed to us like Hispanic, Latino, and Latinx, to name a few, either are incomplete being part of a "single story," fell short, or are improper. At the end and after live-giving conversations, the group decided to be called: Multilingual Latin@ Pastors and Leaders Peer Group. Multilingual, because like I already stated, their lives and ministries navigate between cultures and languages. The group understands that Latinx's descriptive name is an imposed identifier. That is why they chose the name Latin@, a gender-neutral shorthand for Latino/Latina.

This group was formed because we wanted to create a "welcoming brave space" where Latin@ Clergy could unpack, be heard, and seen in their own language and could be replenished, finding harmony and new life in the process. This type of space for our Latin@ clergy doesn't exist or is very rare.

The group meets online every month, even in our new "Zoom fatigued" reality. Although we have been together for a short time, we have created a beautiful bond. "This group has given me the opportunity to connect with people who are navigating ministry during such a time as this," says Rev. Siobhan Lopez. "We have been able to be vulnerable about our worries, doubts, joys and achievements, giving me strength and encouragement to continue in ministry and to continue celebrating all victories big and small."

NBA Peer Learning and Wellness Groups provide opportunities for leaders to engage in peer support and encouragement, mutual dialogue, spiritual renewal, and peer-to-peer learning.

The vision of NBA Peer Learning and Wellness Groups is to provide an opportunity for likeminded individuals to create together and also to cultivate a community centered on:

- **Education:** Peer-to-peer learning, sharing experience and expertise on leadership/ministry-related issues, and sharing resources.
- **Inspiration:** Spiritual renewal, peer support/encouragement.
- **Justice:** Each cohort gives particular attention to the current issues affecting their work and/or ministries.
- **Wellness:** We insist on explore and experiment together, rest, play, and renewal on our online and in-person gathering. We cannot be fully ourselves and be our best version if we don't aim for balance.

As we hear from clergy and other leaders across the church, ministry is now more than ever abundantly complicated and overwhelming. NBA's Peer Learning & Wellness Groups are designed to bring people together to spend time in community, sustaining each other even as they work to sustain others in their own communities. In each of our online meetings, we declare "you are not alone," creating a brave space for proclaiming our joys and challenges. In the months ahead, I look forward to sharing out more of our stories and learnings.as well as watching for the presence of God in the midst of all we do.

### **The 2020-2022 Multilingual Latin@ Pastors and Leaders Peer Group**

**Rev. Siobhan (Shobie) Lopez**, Co-Pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Del Este De Whittier / East Whittier Christian Church, Whittier, CA.

**Pastor Juan Carlos Rodriguez Vizcaino**, Pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Discipulos de Cristo "Somos Uno" de Montréal / Montreal We Are One Christian Church, Montreal, Québec, Canada.

**Rev. Jesus Bulmes**, Minister to the Hispanic Community of Kings Highway Christian Church, Shreveport, Louisiana.

**Rev. Ellie (Ely) S. Bulmes**, Associate Minister of Kings Highway Christian Church, Shreveport, Louisiana.

**Pastor Ester Laura Valdes**, Hospital Chaplain and Associate Minister Parkway Christian Church, Plantation, FL.

**Rev. Pedro Ramos Goycolea**, Serves as Pastor of Desert Dove Christian Church. He is also the lead pastor of Comunidad Limen, an open & affirming community starting in Tucson, Arizona.

**Pastor Juan Carlos Rodriguez Mendoza**, Pastor of the Discipulos de Cristo Springfield Christian Church, Springfield Virginia

**Pastor Elena Parra**, Pastor of Ministerio Bethesda/ Bethesda Ministry, under the cover of Disciples of Christ, Everett, WA.

**Rev. William Almodovar**, After School Program Director at West Street Christian Church in Tipton, Indiana and Youth Services Director John Knox Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis, IN.

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*As the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. Founded in 1887 by six women responding to the needs of the day and on their doorsteps, for more than 130 years the NBA has continued to serve "the least of these." Learn more at [www.nbacaes.org](http://www.nbacaes.org).*

