

# FINDING MY FAITH



Introducing  
**Fernando H. Vera Sr.**  
Dawson's Newest Hispanic  
Church Planting Resident

Fernando H. Vera Sr. with his wife, Maria, and sons Joshua and Fernando Jr.

**I**n 2021, Dawson began an effort to plant five new Hispanic churches in Alabama by the end of 2025. To do this, we developed a Hispanic Church Planting Training Program to prepare church planters for the task. Our first two residents, Humberto Medina and Juan "Pipi" Aristizabal, have completed their training and are now planting churches in Huntsville and Alabaster. In October of 2023, Pastor Fernando Vera became our third church planting resident. Following is his story of how he came to know Christ and was called into ministry, in his own words.

I was born in Salvatierra Guanajuato, Mexico, into a Catholic home. My parents taught us how to be good Catholics. I still have memories of all of us going to Mass together and praying the rosary.

During my grade school years, my family relocated to the city of Celaya because of better school opportunities. When we moved, we left behind all my extended family. When I was ten years old, I became an altar boy in the church of "Our Lady of the Poor," and for almost three years I did not miss a day of Mass. I became very religious, to the point that I wanted to become a priest. Our local priest, Father Pedro, began to help me prepare for seminary and the priesthood. But God began to get my attention as I started reading the Bible for myself. I remember once when I was reading John 14:6, a question came to me: "If Jesus is the only way, what about the saints and the virgin Mary?" When I shared my doubts with Father Pedro, he told me it was a good thing to have more help getting into Heaven, and Jesus would never deny a request from His own mother to allow someone into Heaven. This convinced me for a while, but I still had doubts and began to stay at home and not attend Mass.

When I started high school, the death of my grandmother led me to seek God once again. I thank God that one of my best friends, Luis, worked in California one summer. When he finished his work, he went to a Christian camp where he accepted Christ. When Luis came back home, he shared Christ with me. I listened attentively as he shared his testimony with me. I then chose to accept Christ—but I only had an intellectual understanding of the Gospel, not a true, personal faith.

In the summer of 1985, my mother was diagnosed with cancer, and I became her primary caregiver. As I helped care for her, I realized that not only elderly people die, but also young people. This led me to ask if I were to die, where would I spend eternity? This question impacted me so much, and I reverted back to my old beliefs. I went directly to Tepeyac to see the Virgin of Guadalupe and prayed to her to intercede for my mother and me. I did this for a long time, but it never changed my longing for answers. My desire for inner peace grew. I wrote a letter to my friend, Luis, and told him that I wanted him to tell me more about Jesus. Luis gave me his Bible with his notes showing me the plan of salvation. I began reading the Bible for myself, and for my mother, and I began to feel a strong desire to know God.

One night I read that God "is knocking at my door." It was then that kneeling by my bed I declared to God "I want You to come into my life!" For the first time, I fully comprehended what the Gospel is about and what it means to follow Christ. I accepted Jesus as my only and sufficient Savior. I then told my older sister what had happened to me, and I shared the plan of salvation with her. By the grace of God, she accepted Christ as well.

After I accepted Jesus as Lord, Luis began to disciple me, but I was reluctant to leave the Catholic church. I tried to share Jesus within the church, but without success. I realized it was time to go. Once I joined another church, I was able to grow and experience Christian fellowship. My sister invited me to a Bible study led by missionaries Daniel and Beverly Kendall, and my desire to serve God grew and grew.

I was married on April 14, 1990, and entered an undergraduate seminary in August 1991. After graduation, my wife, Maria, and I had the privilege of opening a new church in Sarabia (half an hour from Celaya) in 1996. By 2000, we had established a wonderful congregation and a strong leadership team, but God had other plans for us. We were invited to the United States to serve in a Hispanic church in Louisiana—Iglesias Biblica Berea in the New Orleans area. We had never planned on ministering in the United States, but we decided that if it was God's will, He would open the door for us. We were right, God did open the door for the move. Since that time, we have had the privilege of working for 18 years in several different churches and ministries in the New Orleans area.

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Our time in the United States has not been without challenges. God blessed us with two beautiful children: Fernando Jr., and his brother Joshua. In late 2017 and early 2018, when Fernando Jr. was 16 years old (he is now 20), in less than a month he was involved in two accidents that resulted in brain damage. Even though he was still alive, many times this experience felt like we had completely lost our sweet son. It was such a difficult time that I decided to temporarily leave the pastorate to take care of our family. Our son had been a Jiu

Jitsu champion, a brilliant pianist, and an excellent student with a very helpful, good heart. Now he continues to battle with an unknown psychosis, but we know that God was and is in control (Jeremiah 29:11).

We also knew we were called to serve Him and believed this difficult period was only a detour from ministry. In 2020, while serving as a staff member at The Good Shepard Church in New Orleans, I enrolled in New Orleans Baptist Seminary to pursue a Master of Theological Studies. In 2022, we learned about Dawson's Hispanic Church Planting Residency Program. After completing the application process and passing the North American Mission Board's church planter assessment, we were confirmed to be Dawson's third church planting resident.

We are looking forward to learning from Pastor Joshua del Risco, the Director of the Residency Program, and we are excited about our upcoming move to Albertville and our partnership with First Baptist Church. We are honored to be a part of what God has been doing through Dawson's Hispanic Ministries for many years. We are excited for the opportunities we will have to share the Gospel as God opens doors for us in Albertville!