



# ON THE LEVEL

Serving Urban Youth Leaders  
**FOR 25 YEARS**

Issue 2 | Fall/Winter 2023

**ELI MAREZ**

GETS CANDID ABOUT  
THE REDEMPTION IN  
HIS LIFE LESSONS

## **SPECIAL**

Michael Mata, DVULI  
Facilitator for 25 Years

## **BREAKTHROUGH**

Micah Espinoza Proves  
Perseverance, Not Perfection,  
Yields a Thriving New Calling



SCAN FOR AN  
INTERACTIVE PDF  
VERSION OF THIS  
NEWSLETTER



# REFLECTIONS

## FROM THE DIRECTOR - PART II

LETTER FROM EILEEN KOOREMAN

In my last reflection (in the [Spring/Summer newsletter](#)), I looked back on 25 years of DVULI. In this reflection, I want to celebrate what is to come!

### LOOKING BACK

Since 1998, we have been intentional to edit and revise curriculum content each and every year. In fact, it is part of our DNA to request feedback after every training from participants, facilitators, and coaches and then do an After Action Review (a Systems Thinking tool) on each workshop.

As a result, our content has remained fresh and relevant based on what we have learned from our participants.

### WALKING THE TALK

About five years ago, the DVULI team began scenario planning around a bigger question. The landscape for adult learning has certainly evolved over the past 25 years. Technology is the most obvious change with the arrival of virtual learning options. The field of leadership development has also changed dramatically. When we first started, leadership development was not even on the radar of most churches, nonprofits, and educational institutions. Now, it is embraced and valued by most. Our focusing question became: "Is it time for a major overhaul of DVULI?"

We agreed to put everything on the chopping block—except the core values! We have plenty of evidence that they still stick. However, we considered making other changes to the program. For example, with all the demands on time today, we thought about making the program available virtually. We also thought about breaking it down into smaller segments instead of the longtime commitment. We even considered abandoning the goal of encouraging leaders to work together, instead focusing on individual development. We quickly realized we needed to know more about what our leaders were being challenged with today and the kind of leadership development that would be transformative for them.

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### READY, SET, GO!

In 2022, we hired SpringTide Research to survey and interview Christian leaders currently serving urban youth, both DVULI alumni and those who have never been through DVULI. To our surprise, the length of the program and the intimacy of in-person training was something urban youth leaders longed for. They valued getting to know others in their city who also had a passion for serving youth, and they wanted to get better at working together. Read the results of the 2022 study [here](#).

We also received other helpful information from the survey and a focus group we conducted with DVULI stakeholders. Based on all of those fresh ideas, we began working hard to develop a brand-new version of DVULI.

### LOOKING FORWARD

We will test some ideas with our 2024 cohorts, and the new and improved version will roll out in 2025. The plan is still evolving, but I can reveal a few highlights. It will be a hybrid program utilizing both in-person and virtual training opportunities. We will start mid-year (rather than in January), separating the national conferences into different calendar years, which is important for bi-vocational and volunteer leaders. It will end with a capstone event that brings all five cities together.

So stay tuned. The best is yet to come! Remember the words of Eric Hoffer, "In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists." Let's continue to be learners and embrace the opportunity that change can bring.

*At DVULI, we are looking forward to seeing what's next.*

EILEEN KOOREMAN

 [@erkooreman](#)  [ekooreman](#)



**It is with great honor and admiration** that Team DVULI celebrates DVULI alumni who have served urban youth for 25 years or more.

We are proud of DVULI's 25th anniversary, but those feelings pale in comparison to the respect and gratitude we have for these stellar individuals and the exceptional career longevity they've enjoyed.



With a thousand more reasons to quit rather than pursue their calling, these steadfast servant-hearted alumni stayed on the narrow path and on their mission to lead youth. It's important to note that many of these individuals have been fighting the good fight for 30, 35, 45, and 50 years!

**Join us in celebrating this extraordinary group of Christian leaders on this benchmark occasion:**

Bob Adame

Barry Baker

Carolyn Bibbs

Harroll Chisom

Pete Contreras

Jack Crowley

Will Cumby

Bill Curry

Jeff Czyzyk

Marvin Daniels

Stephanie Donovan

Wayne Holmes

Archie Honrado

Karol McIlvaine

Carlos Nicasio

Donna Perkins Whitman

Alvin Sanders

Reggie Smalls

Wilbur Smart

Emmanuel Tikili

Randy VanderWeit

John Allbrittin

Scott Arnold

Juliet Arrington

Hilda Arsenault

Diane Ayers

Seth Baker

Tammy Barnett

Cheryl Beard

Dale Bishop

Jerry Bishop

Kelvin Bowen

Jason Brooks

Beverly Brown

Tim Brown

Patricia Burns

Cynthia Burton

Danita Calhoun

Roy Campbell

Rick Carr

Brian Carter

Brian Cassell

Ruth Castillo

Eddie Cole

Broderick Connesero

Guinera Curry

Kirk Davis

JoAnn Dean

Daisy Diaz

Nancy Donat

Margaret Dunbar-Demaree

Camela Echols Blackmon

Howard Eddings

Bertha Edison

Nes Espinosa

Micah Espinoza

June Evans

Denise Fase

Curt Gibson

Jack Golston

Donna Golston

Dina Gonzalez-Piña

Merv Griffioen

Scott Grzesiak

Myyon Hardeman

Sandra Hardy

Minetta Hare

Gordon Havens

Gilbert Hernandez

Roderick Hines

Benita Hopkins

Kimberly Huckleby

Rob Hughes

Brent Hyden

Kelvin Jackson

Philip Jackson

Dereck Jackson

Marvin Jacobo

Eric Johnson

Jennifer Jones

Michael Jones

Barron Lacy

Nate Landis

Larry Lloyd

Gary Loomans

Angela Lugo

Francine Marchelle

Laassah Marshall

Esperanza Martinez

Michael A. McGee

Sandra Miller

Darrin Miller

Domingo Mota

Cedric Nelms

Paul Neville

Susan Newton

Luis Palomo

Mike Peters

Eunice Pickens

Dave Rahn

Frank Reynoso

Sirena Rodriguez

Danny Sanabria

Shane Schlatter

Anna Scott

Patrick Simmons

Mark Singleton

Tony Smith

Harold Sparrow

Aaron Starr

Katani Sumner

Chris Sumner

Don Talley

Matumaini Taylor

Bridget Thomas

Jackie Thornton

Jerry Torres

Felipe Valdez

Gib Vestal

Tony Wade

Felecia Wade

Virginia Ward

Carlos Webster

Amy Westra

Amy Williams

June Williams-Smith

Maurice Winley

**DID WE MISS A NAME?** Contact your liaison or email us directly at [staff@DVULI.org](mailto:staff@DVULI.org) by December 31, 2023.



# REUNION 2023

# COME TOGETHER

**CELEBRATING 25 YEARS** of Investing in the Lives of Urban Youth Leaders

**THIS SUMMER,** we celebrated our quarter-of-a-century benchmark in Philly! DVULI staff, DeVos family members, and urban youth leaders (and some spouses) from across the nation gathered for DVULI's alumni reunion. Our goal was to "Come Together" en masse in the city of brotherly love to rest, reconnect, and refresh!

Festivities included three days of guest speakers, including Dan White Jr., Adam Russel Taylor, and Sandra Van Opstal. Each day was jumpstarted with powerful worship from City Reach Band and devotions with Justine Conley. The Colossian Forum took alumni through the Christian Conflict Transformation in their Wayfinder Workshop.

Philadelphia-based DVULI alumni welcomed fellow alumni with graciousness and a passion for their beloved city. Attendees ran the "Rocky stairs" with Gerald in the morning and enjoyed the city sights after each session. A convenient crowd favorite located next to our hotel was the Reading Terminal Market, a famous indoor farmers' market providing an impressive array of grocery, dining, and shopping attractions!

We hosted a special event at the National Constitution Center (NCC), located steps from Independence Hall in historic Philadelphia. After dinner, Doug DeVos led alumni through a Q&A with NCC President and CEO Jeff Rosen, followed by free time to enjoy the museum's interactive exhibits that brought the U.S. Constitution to life.

**IT ALL STARTED IN 1995** when Rich and Helen DeVos had the idea to launch a national philanthropic project the whole family could work on based on their shared interests. An intensive discovery process revealed a common passion—disadvantaged urban youth.

They believed optimal impact could be made by creating a faith-based leadership development program focused on sustaining urban youth leaders in ministry. After much research, interviews, and focus groups with ministry and youth leaders, the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative was launched in 1998.

**FOR 25 YEARS,** DVULI has remained committed to its mission: to equip Christian leaders who serve urban youth with transformative leadership tools.

*Pictured right: Doug and Maria DeVos with Ron McConico (Twin Cities 2008)*



On the final evening, the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown conference hall echoed with belly laughs at the hilarious musings of comedian Michael Jr. Afterward attendees enjoyed the "After Vibe" with DJ B-N Praya spinning tunes, a freestyle rap tutorial from Randy Mason (Newark 2021), followed by an open mic rap session.

**Everyone left Philly with some new friends, precious reconnection with old ones, and lasting memories.**

**SCAN TO VIEW**  
the Reunion 2023 photo gallery.





# MAPPING OUT MICHAEL MATA'S OWN UNIQUE ASSETS



By Gerald Bell (Kansas City 2003)

One conversation with veteran leadership trainer Michael Mata, and there's no denying you've tapped into a fountain of resources. For close to a half-century, Michael's acute focus on community development and the equipping of leaders has prompted major institutions and organizations like DVULI to keep him on their radar.

At the recommendation of former DVULI program director Noel Castellanos, Michael met with Ginny Vander Hart and Eileen Kooreman a year after DVULI was launched to discuss his expertise in planning and development, as well as his work as a college professor. In this meeting, Michael was intrigued by the mission of empowering leaders who work with underserved youth with tools likely found in higher education or other training establishments but with a unique design.

"I was interested right away," recalls Michael of how Ginny and Eileen described DVULI. "When [they] began to hint at the kind of things that were beginning to happen, it impressed me. I told people that they (DVULI) are providing blue chip training for these very marginal ministries that need help for long-term sustainability and impact."

With his background in raising resources and convening local and national influencers, Michael was certain he would be asked to instruct DVULI's Resource Networking workshop. However, after hearing his stories, the team concluded that Scenario Planning was a better fit for him. Although he was unfamiliar with the term Scenario Planning at that time, the work he was engaged in clearly aligned with the concepts taught in the module.

A few years later, Michael was asked to take on the Community Youth Development workshop. Content such as the "Web of Life" and "Asset Mapping," among other elements, proved to be sweet spots for him as a DVULI facilitator. In addition, the community walks to exegete the sights, sounds, and smells of a neighborhood were highly esteemed experiences for participants learning under Michael's leadership.

"I want to see a difference made not only in the lives of the individual [leaders] but also in the lives of young people," offers Michael, who was a Nazarene Church youth pastor before expanding to other disciplines as co-pastoring, community development, and higher education. "When I worked with the young people in my church, I realized it was possible to impact more youth than those who were members of my congregation."

**HE RELISHES BEING IN SPACES AMONG LEADERS WHO LOVE GOD, ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT REACHING YOUTH, AND ARE EAGER TO LEARN.**

To date, Michael is the only DVULI trainer to facilitate three of the five local workshops the program delivers. Most others facilitate one. He relishes being in spaces among leaders who love God, are passionate about reaching youth, and are eager to learn. With a curriculum vitae loaded with extensive involvement in key decision-making committees and significant achievements, what's important to Michael in the learning environment is that students apply what they have learned.

Because DVULI addresses the personal and organizational components of its constituents, Michael found this even more attractive and is, in part, why he willingly returns to train at the request of the staff. Resource Networking was later added. Clearly, he embraces the mission of DVULI and embodies the kingdom qualities necessary to thrive as a leader, making him an asset to the program.

When asked what sustainability principles a community leader should apply in a post-pandemic era, Michael quickly responds with a beaming grin, "That is an excellent question. Next!"

## Michael's Sustainability Tips for DVULI Alumni:

» **SELF-CARE:** "A lot of our people come from marginalized communities, and often that means people of color. Then those in the church have heard it's all about ministry, ministry, ministry. Taking care of ourselves and our family is first. Knowing we are nurturing our spirit, soul, mind, and even our body is most important."

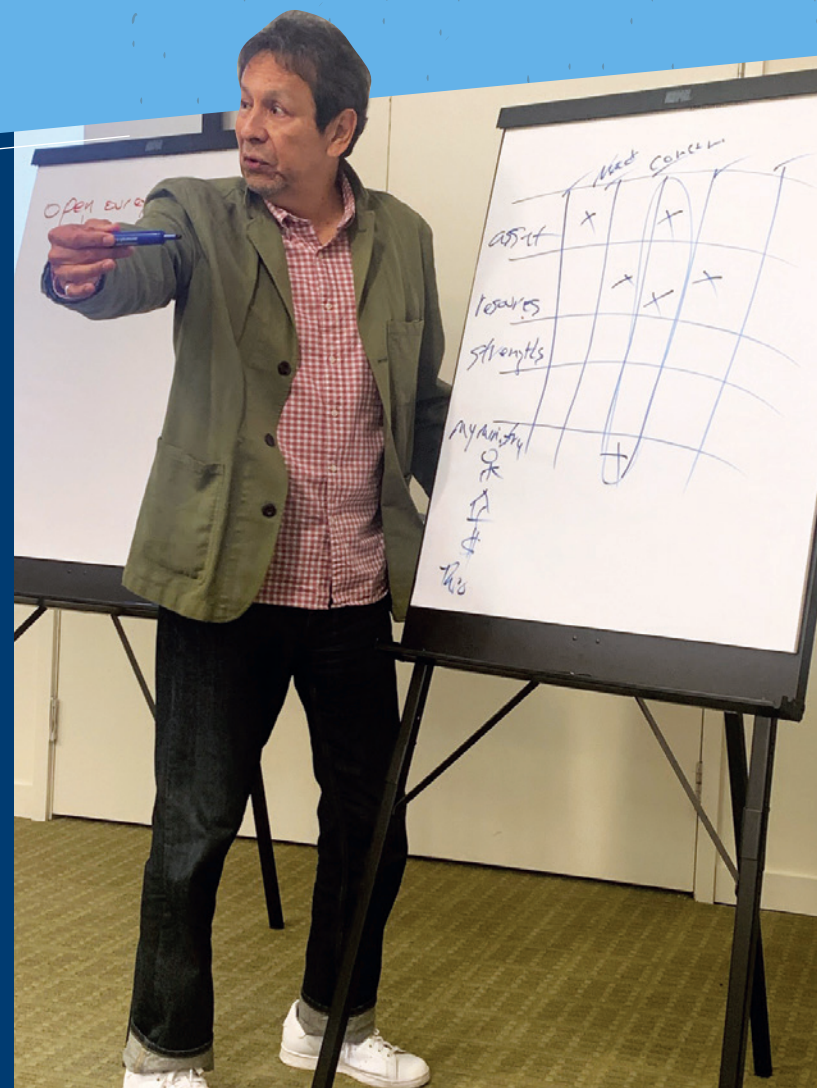
» **DON'T SERVE ALONE:** "You might have the brilliant idea to create your own nonprofit or ministry, but it's best done in collaboration with others. See yourself as part of the larger movement of God in community. It isn't about if you can raise a million-dollar budget. Whatever small role you play is significant to the bigger picture."

» **HAVE COMMUNITY-WIDE IMPACT:** "This takes a lot of time. Change happens at the rate of trust. So, develop trust in others to have community-wide impact and move beyond just institutional building. Remember, ultimately, it is God who gets the glory."

» **LIFELONG LEARNING:** "Developing skills looks different now than it did years ago. One of the things I appreciate about DVULI is the staff's willingness to listen, learn, and adapt to the changing needs of leaders. That could mean learning from mistakes or even falling short, but being a learner is important."

In a caring tone, Michael cautions leaders not to settle for only learning new information but to go deeper in knowing what to do with it. "There's knowledge and there's application," he notes. "There is also a bridge between the two, which is the element of ongoing coaching to help individuals take the material they've received and know when and how to apply it to their context."

Referencing author Tim Soerens's resource, *Everywhere You Look: Discovering the Church Right Where You Are*, Michael urges ministry leaders to discover where God is already doing the work and to come alongside it.



"It's not about you being the pioneer. The work might be in areas you don't always think about," he reasons. "The church is beyond the facility itself, so it's not about attracting youth to your church."

Michael continues, "My good friend Father Greg Boyle sums up what I have come to understand about young people: 'These so-called forgotten, disregarded individuals, who society sees as troubled and problematic, already have a sense of the divine. It's really us helping them to discover for themselves that they are precious in God's sight.'"





**F**or nearly two decades, Micah Espinoza (Denver 2005) was a full-time church-based pastor and executive director of a nonprofit that worked with the unchurched in Southwest Denver. He gave everything he had to his work and the church that nurtured him in his faith and leadership. Coupled with meeting the high demands the ministry placed on him, Micah had a wife and three children to support. His dedication to church was never about money; he often considered doing something else. To hear him tell it, "I struggled to make ends meet, but I stayed focused on God's calling. I am here today because I pushed through when others quit." He kept Proverbs 3:5-6 hidden in his heart and was open to whatever came, even if that meant doing something different.

# BREAKTHROUGH

MICAH ESPINOZA (DENVER 2005) *By Gerald Bell (Kansas City 2003)*



After some 17 years of church service, the Lord began bringing new opportunities. He always had a heart for the poorest and most vulnerable people in the community. "It didn't matter if they were youth, adults, addicts, or homeless—I would help anyone who needed help," Micah says. Ultimately, he resigned from the church and relocated from Denver, Colorado, to a much smaller Grand Junction, Colorado (population 160,000), with family in tow. There, Micah assumed an associate pastor role and took over the leadership of a prisoner re-entry program funded by the state. His entrepreneurial and trailblazing spirit began to shine. He started with one staff member, a small caseload, and nothing else.



The rural area where he now lives and serves contends with the typical challenges impoverished neighborhoods face. Counties identified as being in persistent poverty are typically less populous and make up 10.9 percent of counties but only 6.1 percent of the U.S. population. Grand Junction was no different. Poverty brings crime, addiction, incarceration, homelessness, violence, unemployment, and health care deficiencies. "My goal was to be a youth pastor until the day I die, but the Lord had other plans," Micah says. The relocation and new leadership roles have meant higher responsibilities that Micah has fully embraced.

**"I'M NOT HERE BECAUSE OF ME. IT'S A TESTAMENT TO GOD AND HIS VALUE IN ME. I HAVE CHOSEN TO GET UP AND KEEP GOING WHEN EVERYTHING IN ME SAID NOT TO."**

*GOD IS FAITHFUL, AND BREAKTHROUGH IS POSSIBLE!"*

After three years of running the re-entry program at the church, it had outgrown the church, its facilities, and the vision of senior leadership. In October 2020, he incorporated The Freedom Institute (TFI) as an independent ministry. TFI exists to break the generational cycle of poverty and incarceration in forgotten communities. "We're helping people coming out of prison, county jail, addiction, and homelessness to gain the stability factors that lead to significant, strategic, and sustained success," he says.

TFI has grown to have a housing inventory of 14 properties with 110 tenants," Micah explains. "We now provide targeted case management, stable housing, employment through our social enterprises, and recovery services. We have also engaged the leaders and youth with lived experience to do advocacy at a policy level. The youth are now becoming community leaders and launching new programs for young people." He continues, "We are moving money in statute, pioneering new ways of ministry among the poor."

Under his guidance, the mission of TFI skyrocketed over a very short time. The average under-resourced urban leader would need multiple years to establish what has taken him less than six years. TFI has built an agency with strategic wraparound services that address the needs of

the most vulnerable in the community. "I didn't see any of this coming when I was a full-time youth pastor," exclaims Micah, looking back at his ministry trajectory. "What I learned in DVULI was a huge part of getting here." The impact he is seeing is the direct result of all five DVULI core values working together hierarchically.

With all the strategic and significant developments that have emerged for Micah in church and para-church leadership, he's not one to forget how it feels to be limited or stuck in poverty because he lived through that reality as a



child and an adult. "I never felt my path was a common path to anything. I have always had a bit of a chip on my shoulder that I think is positive," describes Micah, who's known for being a straight-shooting communicator. "I am not perfect and take risks. If it weren't for people like me, we wouldn't have ended up in these places of innovation and service. I have learned to love myself exactly the way He made me."

The youth in his life continue to be a driving force for Micah, including his biological sons. He now finds time to be a paid assistant wrestling coach at Central High School in Grand Junction. "I have become healthier in every way. God has brought youth ministry back to me," he says of his coaching position. "Coaching wrestling is my balance. It refuels me. I love kids, that environment, competing, the combat, and all that. Plus, I still have something to say and something to offer. I have something of value to give to youth, and I want to give this truth from deep inside me."

Today, Micah has nearly 30 employees and a multimillion-dollar organization. "There's no shortcut to this," Micah insists. "I'm not here because of me. It's a testament to God and His value in me. I have chosen to get up and keep going when everything in me said not to. God is faithful, and breakthrough is possible!"



# THERE IS REWARD!

By Eli Marez (Phoenix 1998)

Gerald Bell (Kansas City 2003) contributed to this article.

In the mid-1990s, when the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative was in the ideation phase, Eli Marez was one of the original voices that the DeVos family listened to before the program's launch. In the company of the late Richard DeVos and other DeVos family members, Eli remembers hearing firsthand the family's vision and their "heart's desire to serve ministry leaders in urban communities across this nation." That was more than a quarter century ago!

"How time flies when you are having fun," says Eli, Senior Pastor of Renewed Life Church in Peoria, Arizona. As one of the first four city coordinators to experience the DVULI investment, Eli admits the road to breakthrough and longevity was not void of personal and ministry surprises, hardships, and ultimate refining. In his own words, this seasoned DVULI alumnus opens up about what God allowed him to endure and the life lessons that would follow.

I was once among the number of pastors and leaders you have heard of where God opened a wave of blessings that included notoriety, the applause of people, and financial increase. What I knew I could never do on my own, God provided.

ing of an organization that would serve the families in our community. It was "my baby." On this beautiful sunny day, I was invited to be there, not to participate but as a guest. I stood alone among hundreds of people in the back of the crowd. "Mr. Maryvale" (a title given to me by the local



## THEN IT CAME—LITTLE BY LITTLE, AT A PACE THAT WAS UNDETECTED BY ME OR EVEN THOSE AROUND ME. MY HEART BEGAN TO STRAY, AND BEFORE I KNEW IT, I LOST MY MARRIAGE OF 25 YEARS AND THE MINISTRY THAT GOD HAD ENTRUSTED TO ME.

Then it came—little by little, at a pace that was undetected by me or even those around me. My heart began to stray, and before I knew it, I lost my marriage of 25 years and the ministry that God had entrusted to me.

I will never forget the moment I was hit with the reality of what had happened. It was a day celebrating the part of the vision we had worked so hard for—the grand open-

leaders), standing in the back? This encounter sent me on a dark road of seven long years of wandering and loss I never thought I would experience. Today, I am so thankful for God's everlasting love and grace for me. He brought me through it all.

After 48 years of pastoring, my views are different now compared to when I was just getting started. My life is

not the same in many ways because God has restored me and made my life better, and I give Him all glory. My hope is that my wisdom has increased in these older years and that I've learned through my mistakes. I want to offer those who continue to emerge and press forward in ministry some essential lessons from my own leadership trajectory. These may not be for every leader, but I hope some will find them helpful.

## MY LIFE IS NOT THE SAME IN MANY WAYS BECAUSE GOD HAS RESTORED ME AND MADE MY LIFE BETTER, AND I GIVE HIM ALL GLORY.

### 1. Make sure what you believe God wants you to do is a calling, not just an idea.

I can look back when I was in my twenties and recall the men I was in ministry with, only to realize that less than half are still in ministry. Ministry is a call from God, entrusted to you, affirmed, and confirmed by those spiritual men who surround you. Ideas come and go, but the call of God remains.

### 2. Refuse the temptation to compare.

When you're young, you will face this one for sure. You're trying to figure out many things, giving it your best, and even looking to others to find your way. Role models are a blessing, but don't cross the line to compare yourself with them. You are uniquely you.

### 3. Expect failures.

I wish this were not true, but it is. Expect to be betrayed, even by those closest to you. Expect to get hurt many times over because when you love people, those closest to you will betray you. Expect to be broken. God can't use you unless He breaks you first.

### 4. Remember, it's not yours.

This is God's work, not yours. He chose you to entrust His work to you. These are not your people; they are God's people. You were chosen to shepherd and love them through the good and the bad.

### 5. There are no quick successes in God's work.

Anything that will last will be a load of hard work and knee-bending moments crying out to God. You will face moments that cause you to second-guess God and yourself. You will face mountains in the form of problems, challenges, and roadblocks you thought you would never face. God's greatest goal is different than yours.

Yours may be to get it done, but God's greatest work is what He will do in you.

### 6. Make sure you have dealt with your past.

Your past will haunt you, and Satan will make sure of it. I have seen young men and women run headlong into great trouble while in ministry because they have not dealt biblically with their past. The sins of their youth have not been addressed with God and with godly men. To their detriment, the sins of their youth are unresolved in their adult life.

### 7. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

God must be your first love. God gives no room for any other kind of love in your heart. He is jealous for you. He will not share His love with anything else or anyone else in your heart. He wants your love to be for Him. If your love for the vision He has given you is greater than your love for Him, you are on a downward path of self-reliance.

### 8. Know when it's time to sit and when it's time to walk again.

This is self-examination time. It takes a lot of courage to admit that things are out of line with you and God. The hard fact is that when you continue with a misaligned heart at home, in your marriage, or in other relationships, you do a disservice to the people you are called to lead. I've always said that one of the greatest gifts you can give to your people is a healthy leader—one who is open before God and others and knows when it's time for a vacation, a sabbatical, and even an extended time to sit. I promise that if you do this and give yourself the time to heal and restore, God will let you know when it's time to walk again.

Someone wise said, "When God has a difficult work to be done, He will take a difficult person and crush him." Stay close to Him. He is and will be your greatest reward.



**Eli Marez (Phoenix 1998)**  
is the Senior Pastor of  
Renewed Life Church  
in Peoria, Arizona.  
By his side is his wife,  
Monique Marez, who  
serves as worship  
leader at the church.



# D ALUMNI PROFILE

By Kimberlee Mitchell, Staff

**NAME:** Carolyn Bibbs (Memphis 2004)



**NAME OF ORGANIZATION:**  
Creative Life Incorporated

**POSITION:** Founder, President/CEO

@cdbibbs



## How long have you been involved in youth programs?

As a child, I was involved in youth church ministry, so I could say that I have worked with youth most of my life. In 1978, we launched Jesus Explosion, but we have since changed the name to Creative Life Incorporated (CLI).

## Tell us about your youth program and how you fulfill its mission.

The mission of Creative Life Incorporated is to embrace, educate, empower, and enrich the lives of children, youth, and families in Memphis. CLI is a safe haven for more than 1,500 local children, offering educational, recreational, and life-enhancing opportunities through after-school and summer learning programs. Students also participate in summer camp and a performing arts program, where they are taught drama, music, and dance. Additionally, CLI offers a twenty-first century STEM learning lab and a year-round nutrition program.

## Why do you think God has called you to this work?

I had a praying mother who was told she would never have children. One night, she went to church, and a minister told her she would have a child within 16 years. She had two children and dedicated my brother and me to the Lord. She told both of us that we would be used by God. My mother led me to the Lord at eight years old after my church told me I was too young to receive Christ. As a child, I learned to pray and trust God. By age 19, I accepted the fact that God was calling me to ministry. I yielded to Him, and the rest is history.

## What do you hope to accomplish as you serve Creative Life Incorporated?

God has given me a wonderful life. He has fulfilled every desire I have ever had for ministry. I've seen thousands of young people come to know Christ in a phenomenal way. Some are now pastors, evangelists, professional counselors, and upstanding leaders in the community. I have traveled abroad and throughout this country, sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. I have found myself in settings I never would have imagined and have been honored for doing what I was called and ordained to do. I will continue to serve in every capacity I can until God says differently. Forty-five years is a long time!

## What challenges have you or the organization had to overcome?

During the COVID pandemic, our program enrollment dropped to almost none. One employee asked during this time of testing our faith, "What are we going to do?" I said we will work as hard as we did when we had hundreds of kids enrolled and believe in God. Looking back over the last three years, God has brought us through many challenges. We have stood firm in our faith, believing that He has called us to minister to youth in Memphis. We have earned the right to speak Christ in the lives of our children. Thousands of youths have come, and many have gone. But because of CLI, they know Jesus.

**"WE HAVE EARNED THE RIGHT TO  
SPEAK CHRIST IN THE  
LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN.  
THOUSANDS OF YOUTHS HAVE COME,  
AND MANY HAVE GONE. BUT BECAUSE  
OF CLI, THEY KNOW JESUS."**

## What are you most proud of that the program has accomplished?

We moved into an old, dirty warehouse in 1999 with a vision to refurbish it and call it our home. Since that time, we have torn down walls, added new ones, and made our facility one that we love and is admired by everyone who visits.



We occupy 24,000 square feet. Within our walls, we have built an auditorium that seats over 300 people. The stage has sound, lights, and technology that easily accommodates over 50 performers. There is a computer lab, offices, and a boardroom. When you walk around the building, you see technology in every classroom and colorful furnishings. The greatest part of this story is that we rented the building for three years. Then, in 2003, we signed a 30-year mortgage and paid it off in five years. Our God is faithful!



## What kind of collaborative opportunities are benefiting this work?

For seven years, we conducted forums, city-wide silent marches, and silent protests throughout Memphis on behalf of families who had lost children to violence. We were joined by city officials, ministers, parents, and youth. We prayed silently and watched the stats go down on violence in our city. During this season, I was invited to the mayor's office to meet with government officials under the Obama administration who were involved with youth and children. They visited Memphis to learn what we were doing to experience the drastic drop in violent crime. I was given the opportunity to answer questions about Creative Life's Stop the Violence Initiative.

## What can your DVULI family be praying for as you move forward?

I have worked to build a team of God-fearing employees who carry the same burden for the survival of our youth. Within the last two years, I have hired four of our college graduates to work full time and have started interviewing to hire more this year. Our goal is to employ additional young people who have a passion for God and a desire to work in ministry. Please pray for me as I prepare to entrust the responsibilities of my job into capable hands. No, I'm not retiring just yet! I feel God is not finished using me to pray, counsel, and raise funds to further the outreach of Creative Life Incorporated.





# CLASS OF 2024. CITY COORDINATORS



## READY TO STEP INTO 2024

DVULI is delighted to announce the five new city coordinators for 2024. Please welcome these well-qualified individuals who will lead the 2024 cohorts.

**BOSTON** – Sarayna Sathananthan  
**INDIANAPOLIS** – Aaron Story  
**LOUISVILLE** – Therron Cunningham  
**MEMPHIS** – Coasy Hale  
**PHOENIX** – Alfredo Hernandez

**SARAYNA  
SATHANANTHAN**  
**BOSTON, MA**  
 @adventuresofsaranya



**NOW  
RECRUITING  
FOR 2024**

[DVULI.org/Nominate](https://DVULI.org/Nominate)



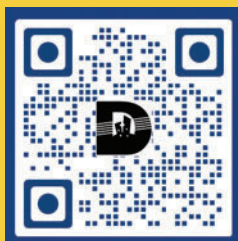
**ALFREDO  
HERNANDEZ**  
**PHOENIX, AZ**  
 @alfrediyoo

**AARON STORY**  
**INDIANAPOLIS, IN**  
 @coachaaronstory



**COASY  
HALE**  
**MEMPHIS, TN**  
 @coasyh\_

**THERRON  
CUNNINGHAM**  
**LOUISVILLE, KY**  
 therron.cunningham



If you know urban youth leaders in their cities who are good candidates for the DVULI investment, please contact our office or submit your nomination online at [DVULI.org/Nominate](https://DVULI.org/Nominate).

(left to right) Aaron Story, Alfredo Hernandez, Sarayna Sathananthan, Therron Cunningham, and Coasy Hale



# D 100% RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

By Ron Carter, Staff (Birmingham 1999)



## LOVE OVER FEAR

*Facing Monsters, Befriending Enemies, and Healing Our Polarized World*

By Dan White Jr.

Agency, the ability to make choices, is a gift God entrusted to humanity. But if not stewarded properly, the results can be disastrous.

Take, for example, our current age of polarization. Friends are becoming enemies, family members are being disowned, churches are divided, and shouting matches have replaced civil discourse.

In *Love Over Fear*, Dan White Jr. exhorts Christians to exercise their agency in a manner that goes against the cultural grain.

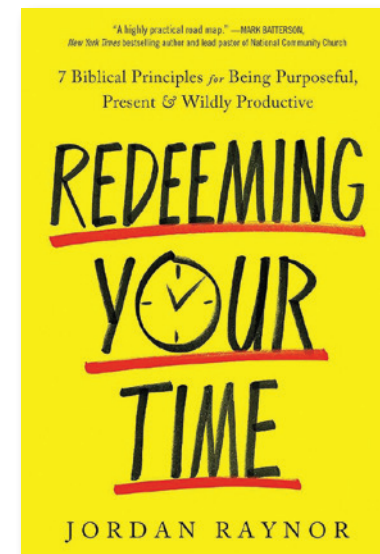
**In *Love Over Fear*, Dan White Jr. exhorts Christians to exercise their agency in a manner that goes against the cultural grain.**

Instead of attacking or avoiding those we disagree with, Dan offers a third option—love. This pathway of love is not about simply disregarding the faults of others but about heeding Jesus’s call to “love thy enemies.”

Using a conversational writing style, Dan shares real-life stories of those who changed their hearts and minds, learned how to practice compassion, and discovered the power of showing affection to those they viewed as monsters.

To help others achieve similar success, the author draws insight from theology, neuroscience, and psychology to show how and why fear works, the impact fear has on the brain, and the implications of seeing and treating others as objects.

*Love Over Fear* is a timely book, and I highly recommend it. If the name “Dan White Jr.” sounds familiar, it’s because he was a keynote speaker at DVULI Reunion 2023 in Philadelphia. If you liked his presentation, I’m confident his book will bless you.



“If you’ve slipped back into some of your old pre-NC1 habits and are looking for a good resource that could help to get you back on track, *Redeeming Your Time* by Jordan Raynor is it!”

—Ron Carter



## REDEEMING YOUR TIME

*7 Biblical Principles for Being Purposeful, Present & Wildly Productive*

By Jordan Raynor

At NC1, you were convicted by the presentation on balance. You realized you were overcommitted and ruled by the tyranny of the urgent, a lack of boundaries, and the struggle to say no. In other words, you faced the fact you were “boiling dry.” This was one of your “breakthroughs,” and you committed to being better and doing better.

But with the passage of time, you’ve found it difficult to maintain your “balance momentum.” You’ve slipped back into some of your old pre-NC1 habits and asked yourself if there was a good resource that could help get you back on track.

Wonder no more because I have just the resource: *Redeeming Your Time* by Jordan Raynor.

**In *Redeeming Your Time*, Raynor offers a unique take on time management that doesn’t focus on changing our habits.**

Describing himself as a “serial entrepreneur,” Raynor is a nationally bestselling author who has helped millions of Christians around the world connect the gospel to their work through his podcast, devotionals, and books *Called to Create* and *Master of One*.

In *Redeeming Your Time*, Raynor offers a unique take on time management that doesn’t focus on changing our habits. Instead, Raynor’s approach takes the full scope of our lives into consideration and consists of seven principles drawn from the life of Jesus:

- |                                      |                              |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1) Start with the Word               | 4) Prioritize Your Yeses     |
| 2) Let Your Yes Be Yes               | 5) Accept Your “Unipresence” |
| 3) Dissent from the Kingdom of Noise | 6) Embrace Productive Rest   |
|                                      | 7) Eliminate All Hurry       |

Through these principles, you’ll discover how Jesus responded to the competing demands of his time without “boiling dry.” I’m also confident you’ll regain your “balance momentum.”

**BOTH BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE ON AMAZON.**



RON CARTER  
(Birmingham 1999)

f [ron.carter.3745](https://www.facebook.com/ron.carter.3745)  
@ [roncarterofficial](https://www.instagram.com/roncarterofficial)  
in [linkedin.com/in/ron-carter-2b17b872](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ron-carter-2b17b872)





## WE CREATED AFFINITY GROUPS FOR YOU!

As a DVULI alum, your ongoing development and sustainability in urban youth ministry is what drives our existence.

In direct response to your request to connect with fellow alumni who serve in the same ministry specialties, we will be conducting Zoom dialogs for 13 ministry specialties. In the fall of 2023, we hosted two dialogs, and this will continue throughout 2024, allowing for two annual calls per Affinity Group.

To join these national conversations, please identify one to five ministry specialties from the list below and we will invite you via email:

- AFTER-SCHOOL TUTORING
- ARTS (music, dance, worship)
- ATHLETICS (sports, recreation & fitness)
- GANG INTERVENTION & PREVENTION
- HOMELESS & UNSHELTERED TEENS
- JUVENILE DETENTION AND PRISON MINISTRY
- ENTREPRENEURIAL BUSINESS TRAINING (business & employment)
- HUMAN TRAFFICKING
- YOUTH MENTORING
- PARENTING (teen mom and dad) AND ABSTINENCE
- EDUCATION AND COLLEGE PREP
- YOUTH DISCIPLESHIP/LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
- YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH



DVULI prays this collaboration will allow you to learn/share best practices and remain razor sharp. It's our hope the space created in these dialogs strengthens your connection to the kind of resources that keep you thriving!

**SCAN TO BE INCLUDED IN THE AFFINITY GROUP ZOOM DIALOGS.**

## RECRUITING AFFINITY GROUP MODERATORS!



Are you so passionate about your work that you would like to co-lead a discussion? *Email your liaison or contact us via the website.*

## DVULI ALUMNI UPDATES



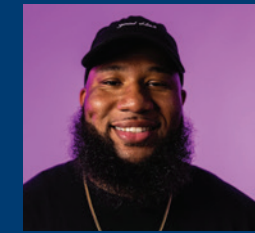
**D'Andre Ash**  
(Atlanta 2008)

accepted a teaching position at Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School, a college preparatory day and boarding school located in southeast Georgia.



**Lawrence Cain, Jr.**  
(Cincinnati 2021)

launched *Money Mondays*, a podcast that provides practical financial and business resources.



**Nobles Darby**  
(Cleveland 2023)

signed on as Co-Chaplain for the Cleveland Browns and the Cleveland Cavaliers and is collaborating with the Cavs on a youth program he leads.



**Alton Hardy**  
(Grand Rapids 2006)

authored *Long Is the Way*, a book chronicling his personal story about fatherlessness, poverty, racism, anger, sadness, loneliness, and a constant search for belonging.



**Dr. Minetta Hare**  
(Detroit 2002)

went home to be with the Lord on October 23, 2023, after succumbing to a hard-fought battle with cancer.



**Jaye Hill**  
(Detroit 2004)

accepted a Youth Development Coordinator position with Cru Inner City Detroit in Michigan.



**Jessica Kemp**  
(San Antonio 2022)

joined the Trinity University Chapel and Spiritual Life staff in San Antonio, Texas, as the Assistant University Chaplain.



**Tolton Pace**  
(Atlanta 2014)

assumed the role of Senior Program Officer at Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation in Atlanta, Georgia.



**Ericka Porter**  
(Denver 2021)

launched Rise Up Training & Consulting, where she consults with youth-serving organizations in Denver, Colorado.



**James Quincy**  
(New York 2009)

received an Outstanding Alumni Award from Tuskegee University North Central Regional Alumni Association.



**Felicia (Hooker) Sanders**  
(Chicago 2007)

was honored with the distinguished 2023 NFBPA Marks of Excellence Award for her exceptional achievements in public administration as Chief Schools Officer for the Chicago Public Schools.



**J'Micah Stevens**  
(Louisville 2022)

was named Pastor of First Congregational Methodist Church in Louisville, Kentucky.



**Jessica Taylor**  
(Portland 2013)

was named the seventh President of Multnomah University in Portland, Oregon.



**Matu Taylor**  
(Los Angeles 2019)

is the new Executive Director at STARS in Pasadena, California.



**Jon Wynne**  
(Detroit 2004)

was honored with the President Joseph Biden Lifetime Achievement Award for Volunteerism.





Share your personal updates and career benchmarks with us:  
**[DVULI.ORG/YOURSTORIES](https://dvuli.org/yourstories)**





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Grand Rapids, MI 49503

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## Serving Urban Youth Leaders **FOR 25 YEARS**

**"If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together."**

*African Proverb – Martha Goedert*

### **OUR WORK IS OUR PASSION!**

It's with gratitude and the faithful generosity of the DeVos family that we celebrate 25 years of serving urban youth leaders across the United States.

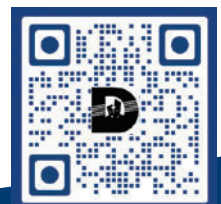
Powerful collaboration with our loyal partners has helped make going the distance with excellence possible.

### **THANK YOU, UYWI, LEGACY, AND E625!**

May God continue to bless our collaborative work to elevate urban youth leaders!



LEGACY



**SCAN FOR A**  
Word from Our Partners