



# ON THE LEVEL

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## DVULI 2019 Think Tank

is pointing youth  
to college

### GUINERA CURRY

didn't  
suspect  
she was a  
work in  
progress



### OPINION:

*Millions in college  
scholarships producing  
questionable ROIs*



# Welcome Ruth Castillo

By Rachel Weaver, Staff Writer

DVULI staff welcomes Ruth Castillo (Dallas 2015) to our team of liaisons. Ruth has been assigned to alumni relations and local follow-up efforts across Texas—Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio.

**Ruth has served in ministry for more than 20 years. She fully embraces and aims to embody the mission of reaching youth and growing leaders for God's kingdom. "I am committed to sharing Christ by being a living example of God's love," Ruth said. Previously, Ruth served as a youth pastor at Centro Cristiano Redención, A.G., where she provided counseling, financial guidance, and spiritual formation sessions.**

**A**dding this new role as a liaison has energized Ruth. "I am extremely excited for the opportunity to serve other alumni as we continue to walk in the freedom the cross provides. I look forward to building new relationships wherever God sends me," she said.

A former youth pastor at Centro Cristiano Redención, A.G., Ruth provided counseling, financial guidance, and spiritual formation sessions. "We strongly believe in the importance of not walking life's journey alone and being loved unconditionally," she said. Ruth also partners with CLAY (Caring Loving All

Youth) Student Leadership and serves at her local elementary school, Henry B. Gonzalez. "We apply a holistic and relevant leadership training for both students and parents in our community," shared Ruth.

Ruth and Daniel have been married for 18 years. They are blessed with three beautiful daughters and no dull moments. In addition to ministry, Ruth and Daniel own an automotive shop in Dallas, and enjoy racing their Ford Mustang in their spare time. They are also big soccer fans and love vacationing whenever possible. "Overall, we have learned to find joy in all things as long as we are all together," said Ruth.

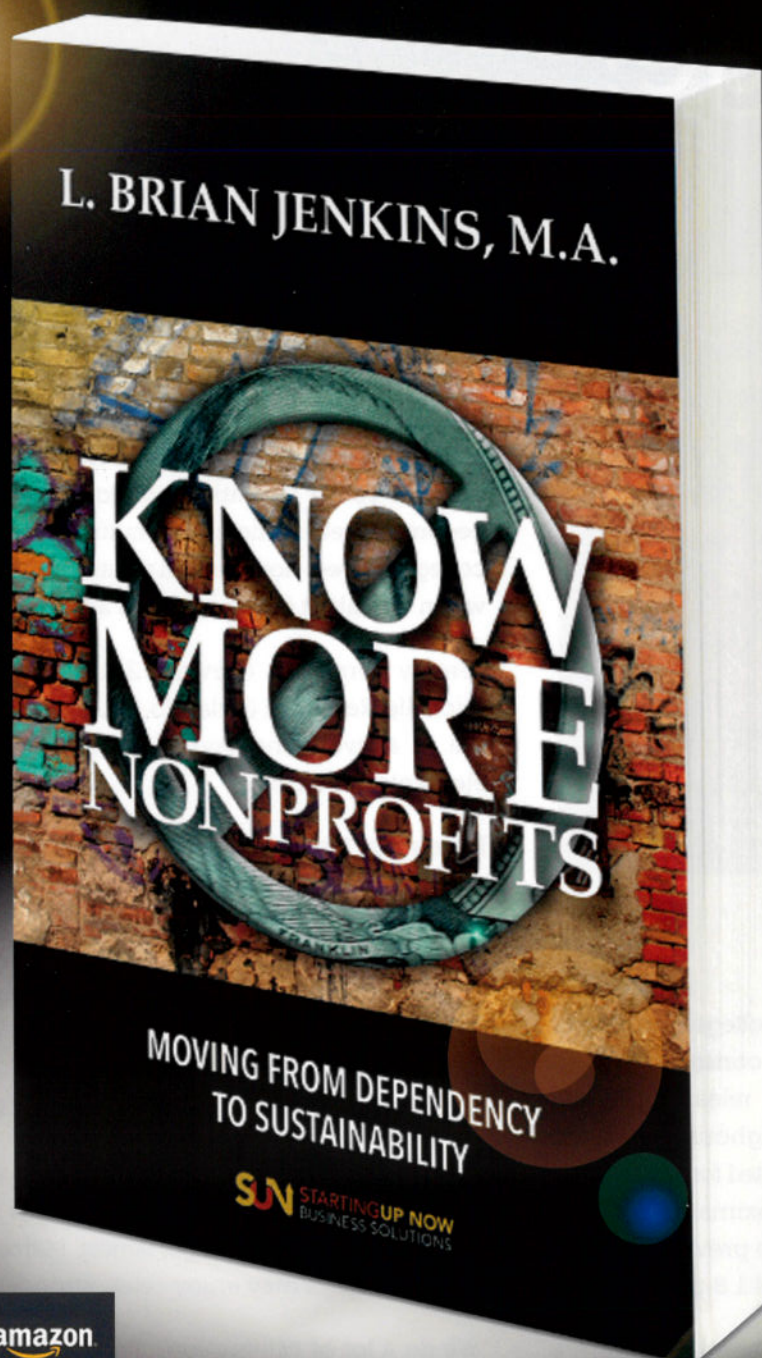
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You can congratulate Ruth on her new role at [ruthc@dvuli.org](mailto:ruthc@dvuli.org).



# Know More Nonprofits

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# Why Prepare Youth for College?

by **Gerald Bell** (Kansas City 2003)

THE THINK TANK



ESPERANZA MARTINEZ



JEREMY JERSCHINA



MARCUS THORNE



MICHELLE REYNOLDS

Perhaps you're one who's heard (or participated in) the discussions some youth and youth leaders are having about whether a postsecondary degree has lost its value. The subject has many high school students having second or no thoughts about filling out a college application.

**L**ast year, in the U.S., college enrollment decreased for the eighth consecutive year, according to new data released by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. The decline accounted for a 1.7 percent drop in enrollment (approximately 300,000 students) compared to the previous year. In 2017 the decrease totaled 1.8 percent.

With the reshaping of some workforce requirements and the fact there are countless families trying to avoid college loan debt, some students have opted for financial stability as an alternative to academic credibility.

This topic was the most recent focus of a DVULI Think Tank video conference. Some of the questions being addressed were; how do you inspire the youth who have lost confidence in America's higher education and financial aid system to go to college? How can the church support youth transitioning from childhood to young adulthood on becoming self-sufficient? If culture looks down on someone without a college degree, how should youth be encouraged to follow their dreams when the talent they possess is already in demand?

Jeremy Jerschina (Newark 2014), Esperanza Martinez (Miami 2007), Michelle Reynolds (Orlando 2010), and Marcus Thorne (Chicago 2007) are all actively engaged in youth ministry with pre-college program elements in place.

Esperanza Martinez works at Pneuma Church, a primarily Spanish-speaking congregation in Miami, with a school as part of their ministry. While they regularly stress the importance of education in creative ways, she said not all parents and students heed the message. "We bring in college representatives to speak to youth, we encourage education in our worship services, and highlight it in much of what we do," she says. "But we also know that there are other alternatives. There are people [in our church] who are very successful, who haven't earned a degree."

College exposure trips or complete tours, in and outside the city of Chicago, is one of the regular activities at the Young Men's Education Network (YMEN) in Chicago, Illinois. Marcus Thorne leads programming at YMEN and says they enjoy celebrating all of their youths' achievements.

"We do a lot of celebration," Thorne says. Annually, at the YMEN year-end banquet, all graduating students are recognized and given a new laptop to use in college. This has proven to be effective, but much of their celebratory influence can depend on which high school a youth attends and the level of peer pressure choosing higher education comes



with. Some students have friends who discourage them from going to college.

At New City Kids, an afterschool program in Paterson, New Jersey, students are offered, what Jeremy Jerschchina calls, an "immersive experience." There's an SAT class that includes mimicking the college application process. "As much as possible, we try to create, in a sense, the muscle memory of the experience so they can have small successes in a safe environment," explains Jerschchina. "This gives students the confidence to step out further and into an unfamiliar process... Then we provide a lot of individualized support which helps to really demystify applying for college."

Tracking alongside youth in the making of their future plans is most constructive at the individual level for Michelle Reynolds. In Orlando, Florida at Every Kid Outreach (EKO), Reynolds goes straight to the core of what her youth have been showing an interest in as early as middle school age. She says there are many young people who just are not ready for college immediately after high school because their interest remains unclear.

"They're looking at what their favorite college is, or a school that is the most popular," Reynolds notes. "I cringe when they say they're going to college because I already know their experience is going to be a waste of money and time – because they don't know what they want to do. They're not focused, and it will put them in debt."

Helping teens with making right choices about college, Reynolds encourages youth workers should get to know each student as well as possible. "This way, one [can help them] figure out what school is the best fit when it's time to apply. If they say their favorite school is Florida A&M University (FAMU), but you know they want to study nursing, and FAMU is not a top nursing school, then I'm saying, 'Okay, let's go back and find out what is the best nursing school you should consider.'"

## The God of College and Career Choices

Teaching students to give God glory in their professions, the Think Tank admits, rarely comes up in the conversations about college, trade school, or no school. They agree it doesn't take going to seminary to find biblical support for the importance of working and that being a choice that honors God. After all, Jesus was a carpenter!

"I'll be honest, I don't know that I have the best shapes or form of theology around work," says Thorne. "God doesn't care if we're CEO or janitor. It's like who are you as a person. Are you being the best person that you can be? And being able to show forth God's Kingdom in the best way possible. That's how I would frame [those] conversations with our kids."

**"There are people [in our church] who are very successful who haven't earned a degree"**

*– Esperanza Martinez*

Reynolds takes the position that talking "Bible" to youth regarding their future doesn't have to be overt, but certainly there is value in bringing up biblical principles that apply. Citing Proverbs 16:9 that says, "a man's heart plans its way, but the Lord directs his steps," Reynolds acknowledges that youth will experience failures and successes, and they need to be able to manage or cope with either outcome. Laying a biblical foundation improves the likelihood of God getting the glory.

"I think we can do more to talk about God's value in work and our role as workers, workers originally in the garden [of Eden] and throughout the rest of the world," Jerschchina argues. "It is easy to get lost in the tumult of the rush towards the postsecondary education agenda [for our youth]."

Making a spiritual connection to our career choices and life's work must not only be in the conversation but at "the forefront," is how Martinez sees it. She states that we all have God-given talents to use and, in what we do [vocationally], God expects us to use them well.

"With our world increasingly concerned about automation and robotics and the loss of many kinds of work – like trucks being driven by robotic drivers [versus people] or automated by GPS – some lower-skilled jobs seem to have the threat of going away," Thorne added. "As we think through the kind of opportunities our students need to prepare themselves for, and what the Bible means when it says, 'If a man doesn't work, he doesn't eat' – we have to ask what does it mean to work fruitfully in a world that increasingly needs less and less of the kind of work that we have offered in the past."

*"Listen to the full Think Tank conversation at [dvuli.org/2019ThinkTank](https://dvuli.org/2019ThinkTank)"*



# Transformation Happens

Newark's Guinera Curry Learned That Someone Other Than Herself Can Do All things

With a passion and call to reach young women, Guinera Curry (Newark 2014) mastered juggling multiple ministry tasks with a "savior mentality" that sustained her confidence.

"I could do all things," Curry exclaimed.

"I was the gateway to progress. If I began to mentor or coach a young person, eventually, the relationship would allow for some transformation."

In addition to the ministries she led at her church, Curry agreed to be ordained as a deacon, she worked full-time in higher education, and all while raising two teenage daughters. When a fellow churchgoer recommended she participate in the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative, Curry saw the opportunity as a catalyst to change lives even more effectively. What Curry could not foresee, however, was exactly which particular lives would change.

At the first DVULI workshop, hearing about self-assessment, feedback, and communication, made Curry want to quit the program. "At no point did I ever expect or anticipate that I had to start with myself," said Curry, who had been in ministry for 8 years.

She has always felt comfortable doing ministry. What proved to be uncomfortable was having to reflect on her approach to ministry, on how she co-labored with others, and on her true identity. "This is not for me," Curry said.

"Are you kidding me? I don't need anybody trying to figure out who I am. Don't they know all that I do?"

On the car ride home from that workshop, Curry prayed, "let this cup (referring to DVULI) pass from me. Lord, I don't think this is what you have for me," she continued praying. "But if it is, ensure that all I can hear is you saying, 'Yes, continue.'"

Weeks after that workshop, at her cohort's local dialogue meeting, Curry was consoled by the discovery that she was not alone. Other participating leaders were being confronted by the same insecurities. "As much as we were posturing ourselves to gain whatever we thought we were going to gain," Curry said, "it became apparent that there was work on ourselves that had to be done."

The most paradigm-altering work for Curry came within the content of the DVULI Core Values; Accountability, Balance, and Interdependence.

## Accountability

At the DVULI National Conference in Orlando, Florida, Curry sat in awe while a speaker shared vulnerable and personal information many would only tell their accountability partners.

"Who knows me like that?" Curry asked herself.

After the conference, she wrote letters to six women about the type of relationships she hoped to embark upon. All six embraced it, three of which remain her accountability partners to this day.



"I've become very dependent on healthy accountability. Seeking it, activating it, and nurturing it," Curry said. "This ensures that my viewpoint, comfort level, and perspective are not limited. Also, that I'm not blinded, that God is using people around me to speak into my life and that I am blooming and flourishing as He desires of me in ministry and life."

### Balance

For two weeks prior to the conference in Orlando, Curry and other leaders tracked how they spent their time. Then, they were asked to consider what they valued most in life. The goal was to determine if the time invested in what they treasured, accurately reflected how they valued those treasures. Curry's did not.

"It was very evident that what I professed was important to me but also in direct conflict with how I utilized my time; and where my energy and focus were," Curry said. "Because I had ranked family so highly, and it was evident that they weren't, I had a mini-pity party with myself about, 'How do I really evoke what I believe in?' And as DVULI does, they graciously pull you along and help you unpack it in a way where there is no condemnation. You do feel a bit of conviction, but you don't feel condemned or degraded or worthless because of the learnings."

The need to focus on family, led Curry and her siblings to host Soul Food Sunday. Once a month their families gather together around a meal at one of their homes. In addition, she schedules monthly dates with her two adult daughters to maintain healthy connections with them. "This is uninterrupted time to be still, listen, and not be preacher mom," says Curry.

### Interdependence

Like many leaders, Curry admitted to being naturally independent, but priding herself in this independence resulted in more unhealthiness.

"I was on an island," she said. "You needed me. Let me come in and show you how to do it. Let me lead it for you... That was a crutch."


Today, Curry's ministry looks different, and so does she.

Though she admits she's a work in progress, Curry has stopped waiting for invitations to partner and now initiates partnership opportunities with other ministries. "It can be hard to collaborate because people in other ministries tend to be protective," she noted. "I am doing the work [collaboratively] because my heart is for those outside the church."

Post-DVULI, Curry became a certified professional life coach and personal life strategist. Additionally, she founded a mentorship organization called Enjoying Life Fully. She continues to pour into the lives of young women. In this new season, though, Curry is able to offer her mentees and others she touches a healthy life-mix she had not previously known.

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*David Daniels is a Chicago-based freelance writer and the managing editor at LegacyDisciple.org. Can be contacted at: [David@legacydisciple.org](mailto:David@legacydisciple.org)*

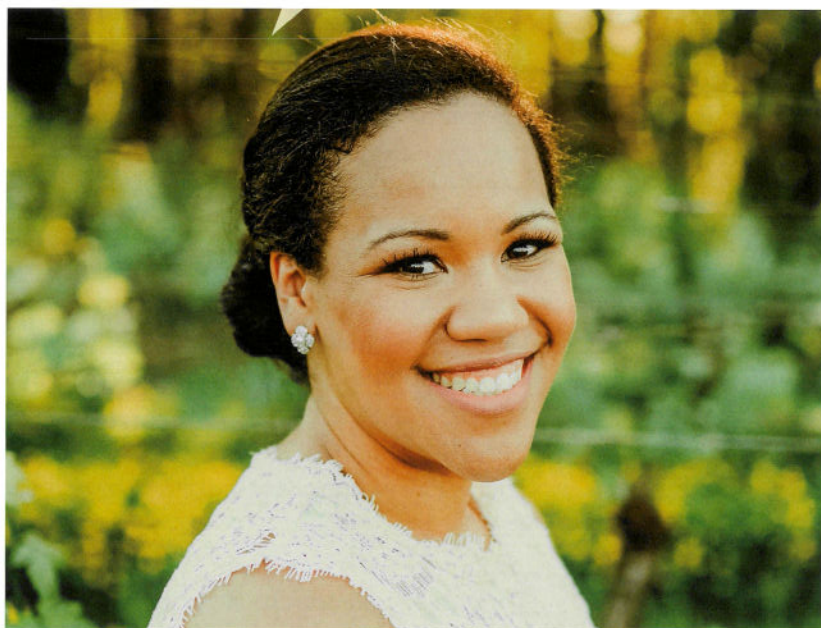


**"I've become  
very dependent  
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Seeking it, activating  
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# Breakthrough

— Jessica Taylor (Portland 2013)



God brought me into the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative (DVULI) right after my husband and I delivered our stillborn daughter. We were broken, devastated, and searching for meaning in our pain. Little did I know, in my interview for participation in DVULI, I was already expecting our daughter, Eliana. My pregnancy was full of doubt about being able to carry to term. There was the pressure of still walking through the grief of losing one child while trying to find joy in the blessing that another was on the way.

DVULI offered a breath of fresh air at a time when I felt I couldn't breathe. Learning about the Core Values and the lack of balance in my life convicted me that, if I were to remain in ministry, things would need to change drastically. I am an independent, high achiever and the Core Value of balance wrecked me. I immediately saw how close I was to burnout and how much I was not prioritizing my family and the "big rocks" that needed my attention first.

As a pastor, I often help other people navigate their mental, emotional, and spiritual crisis. But, finding time to manage my own inner life has, at times, seemed impossible. Now, my husband and I prioritize mental health and our inner life as non-negotiable pillars for life and ministry.

We regularly practice the commandment of sabbath as a family by working hard to be home together most evenings and making sure to worship together as a family on Sunday. I have hired a coach to help me continue to develop, and I have intentionally invested in my connection to my feelings and goals beyond my ministry aspirations.

The heart and commitment to my breakthrough plan remain strong six years later because I have seen the impact of focused abiding in Christ. It includes spending time with the Lord each morning and journaling each night. My family has also helped me prioritize regular doctor appointments to manage my chronic health issues instead of ignoring them. Overall, I have enjoyed better health because I asked for help taking better care of myself physically and emotionally.

I work hard to maintain balance in my life with each new season the Lord brings, but there is no perfect way to stay in balance. Grief is still part of our lives as we navigate the old and new challenges the Lord is guiding us through.

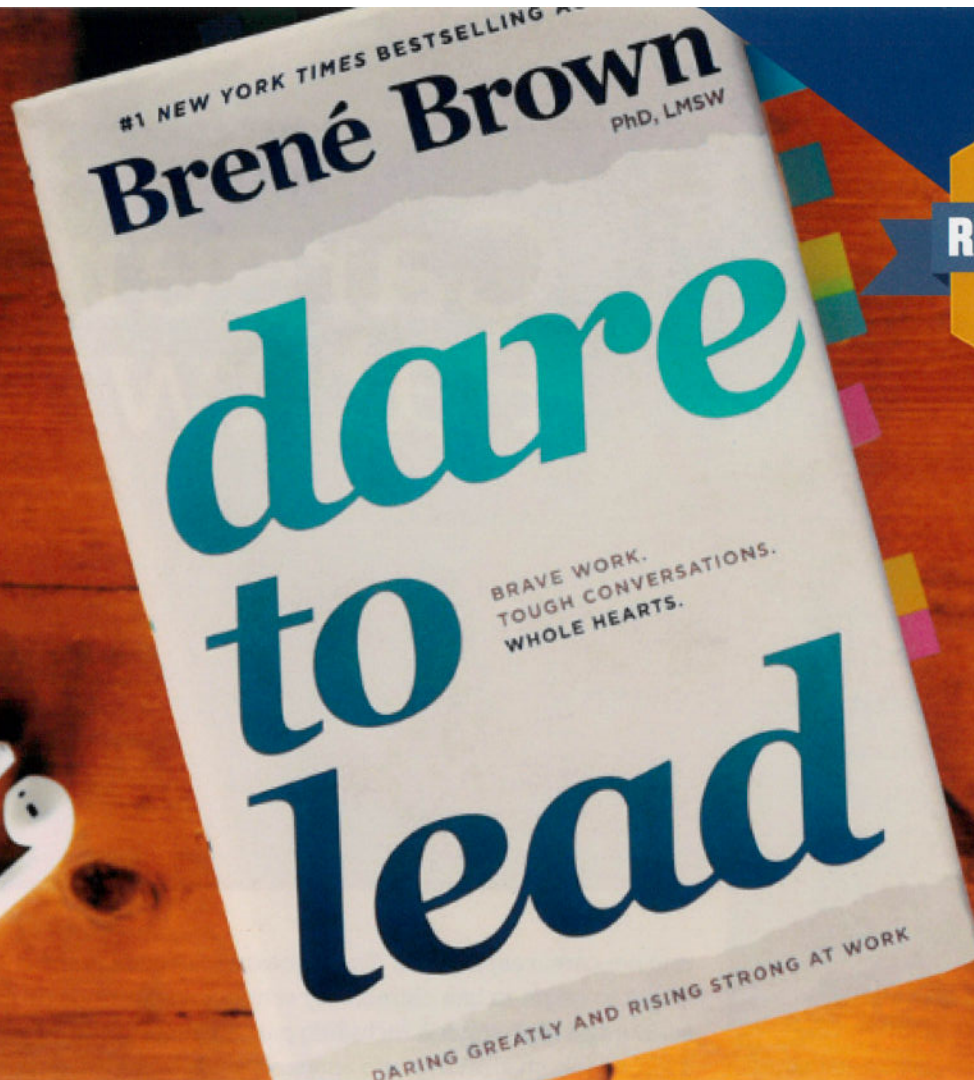
Now, I recognize the warning signs of burnout and put up guardrails before it turns into a crisis, including protecting my vacation times, seeing a professional counselor, going to a non-work conference, visiting the doctor, or connecting with friends who nourish my soul.

While this calling to ministry is incredibly rewarding, I must be careful not to let the call become something that steals my joy and connection to walk humbly with God. Moreover, even when a personal crisis hits, I see the importance of taking time to discern with Jesus how what I am facing honors Him.

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*Jessica Taylor, Ph.D. (Portland 2013) is a Liaison (Portland, Seattle-Tacoma) for the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative, Vice President of Diversity and Inclusive Development at Multnomah University, Ministry Director of Portland Youth for Christ, and Associate Pastor of Family Ministries at her church. For the past 15 years, Jessica has worked in urban ministry in the greater Portland area. Jessica and her husband, Eric, have two daughters, Eliana and Addison.*





# Dare to Lead

**Resource recommendation**  
by Jessica Taylor (Portland 2013)

*Dare to Lead* connects with leaders across industry and challenges each of us to face the difficulty of our working life with humor and grit. Brené Brown helps leaders engage from a brave, vulnerable, and authentic place. If you're looking for how to tackle difficult conversations and create a healthy culture of flourishing, then this is your guide book.

Brown's research found those who are brave and wholehearted in their lives were willing to let go of who they thought they should be in order to be who they are. She says courage is telling the story of who you are with your whole heart. Brown reminds us we cannot practice compassion with others if we cannot treat ourselves kindly. "Daring leadership in a culture defined by scarcity, fear, and uncertainty requires skill-building around traits that are deeply and uniquely human," Brown says.

Vulnerability is scary, but it is also the place where joy and love can connect. Learn how to take off your mask and lead from a place of courage because the world needs those who will dare to lead!

*An expert on empathy and vulnerability, Brown has written many resources on connecting with our emotions and one another. For additional resources, check out her other books, TEDTalk, Netflix special, or YouTube videos.* <https://youtu.be/iCvmsMzIF7o>



Announced to much fanfare in November 2005, the Kalamazoo Promise soon became the model for a growing number of similar programs nationwide that guarantee full college scholarships to every high school graduate in a particular locality or district, in this case, Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS).

The anonymous donors, who awarded more than \$54 million in scholarships in the first nine years of the program, aimed to help individuals and transform a community. The program's outcomes, which have been tracked by the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research based in Kalamazoo, are decidedly mixed.

**W**e now have the results for the first four graduating classes, from 2006-2009, that qualified for the tuition subsidies and have aged out, or are about to age out, of the program. (Eligible students may access the funding at any time within 10 years of graduation.) Enrollment in KPS increased significantly as a result of the program, reversing a long-term decline; however, about a quarter of KPS students still fail to graduate from high school on time. While postsecondary enrollment has risen significantly, completion rates have remained stubbornly low, especially for low-income students and students of color.

One young woman who enrolled and subsequently dropped out of college hits the nail on the head when she states, as reported in a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, "A lot of what we're taught is 'go to college, go to college,' and not 'go to college for this reason.'" She couldn't connect between her studies

# Career Pathways

## Lessons from the Kalamazoo Promise

Opinion by **Luis Lugo**, Guest Contributor

and her career aspirations. The process of career awareness and exploration ought to begin in late elementary school and continue throughout middle school and high school, including participation in work-based experiences such as job shadowing and internships. Instead, in stark contrast to the highly successful workforce development approach of countries such as Switzerland and Germany, we leave our young people to figure all this out for themselves, with predictable results. The young woman quoted in that article now works in a coffee shop making \$9.75 an hour.

The "college for all" mantra, unfortunately, has engrained a mindset among many of our young people that the baccalaureate degree is the sole postsecondary end worth pursuing and an *end-in-itself*. This helps explain the high number of high school graduates who go on to college only to wander about aimlessly and eventually drop out, a number that is estimated at two million per year nationwide. This, in turn, has helped to escalate student debt, which now stands at more than \$1.5 trillion (that is not a typo). Moreover, many who persist and eventually graduate are confronting the increasing phenomenon of what economists are calling "underemployment," that is, while they are holders of a bachelor's degrees, they are working in jobs that do not require that degree and often do not pay enough for them to service their debt, never mind support a family.

A quote from another KPS graduate in a recent *Grand Rapids Press* article on the Kalamazoo Promise underscores a related problem with the current approach, again, despite the best intentions. This young woman, a single mother, struggles to find the time for college because of her need to work. She explains, "I've got to have three jobs just to make ends meet. How am I going to have time to do a class?" The rewards of a learn-to-earn approach, especially when it involves spending several years acquiring an associate's or a bachelor's degree, are too far into the future to attract students who



**"Given the increasing amount of time it takes students to complete their studies, the idea of 'two-year' and 'four-year' colleges is highly misleading."**

are facing pressing financial needs today. Given the increasing amount of time it takes students to complete their studies, the idea of "two-year" and "four-year" colleges is highly misleading.

Might these young people be better served if we were to flip the model and adopt an earn-to-learn approach? This would entail high school graduates having, or being able to acquire in short order, marketable skills they can immediately use to access jobs that can serve as stepping-stones to further education.

There is a range of ways students can acquire such skills and credentials early on: From apprenticeships and high-end career and technical education programs—which often include work-based learning opportunities and can be structured to also carry college credits—to various industry-recognized certificates through community colleges. Through a series of stackable credentials, students can build their skills over time to access jobs that pay well and allow them to achieve success in their careers. They would also be able to generate income while they study, ideally having their employers pay for the cost of tuition. For many, that will include earning a bachelor's degree, though not necessarily as a first step before entering the labor force. But all this requires us to think differently about career pathways and the education and training our young people need to prepare for and access well-paying jobs.

Much to their credit, the leadership of the Kalamazoo Promise has recognized these challenges and is making some important mid-course corrections. They are rebranding the program to convey the multiple pathways to success besides a university degree. Their new tagline, "Your Path, Your Promise," moves away from the one-size-fits-all model that has not served well the majority of KPS graduates.

Often missing from these workforce discussions is any mention of the inherent dignity of labor, which is ultimately rooted in the fact that we are created in the image and likeness of God, the Worker *per excellence*. The commandment in Genesis 2:15 to "work and take care" of the garden illustrates who we were created to be and shows how work is essential to human dignity. This is reflected, for example, in the gleanings principle in the Old Testament (Lev. 19:9-10), where the Israelites were instructed not to pick their fields clean but to leave the edges and the produce that had fallen to the ground for the poor and the foreigner. It is also reflected in the Apostle Paul's instructions in the New Testament that able-bodied adults in the church who are not willing to work should not eat (2 Thess. 3:10), an admonition that, far from lacking in compassion, aims to restore those persons to their full dignity.

To be sure, the commandment to tend the garden was given before the fall, when human sinfulness introduced an element of "painful toil" into labor (Gen. 3:17). But though sin perverts, it does not destroy God's original design. Even the most seemingly menial entry-level jobs need not become "dead-end jobs" since, at a minimum, they can serve to increase the soft skills that are essential to advance in one's career trajectory. Therefore, despite the presence of sin, work remains honorable and, from a biblical point of view, can genuinely be embraced as a vocation or calling.

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*Luis E. Lugo, Ph.D., is the Director of Community Initiatives for the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He oversees efforts to increase educational outcomes for low-opportunity children and strengthen African American and Latino churches in the greater Grand Rapids urban area. Previously, Lugo served as the Director of the Religion Program for the Pew Charitable Trusts and a founding director of the Pew Research Center. An award-winning political science professor, Lugo earned a bachelor's degree at The University of Memphis, a master's from Villanova University, and a doctoral degree from the University of Chicago.*





**Tony McDuffy**  
(Detroit 2011) suddenly went home to be with the Lord on August 30, 2019.

**Gerald Wright**

(Phoenix 2000) went home to be with the Lord August 7, 2019.



**Krista Schlereth**  
(Pittsburgh 2018) and her husband, Chris, welcomed a baby girl, Lily Gracy Schlereth, on August 1, 2019.

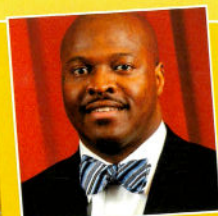
**Edrin Williams**

(Twin Cities 2008) was installed as senior pastor at The Sanctuary Covenant Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on July 14, 2019.



**Annette Bittner**  
(Twin Cities 2008) was hired as the Director of Youth Ministry at Bethel Christian Fellowship in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

**JoAnn Dean** (Atlanta 2014) has released a book titled, "Lifted for a Better View: The Journey of Transition."



**Cary James**  
(Washington 2009) recently completed the Baltimore Faith-Based Development Certificate Program.

**Darren Young** (St. Louis 2017) and his wife, Charlene, welcomed their first child, Malaya Annorah Bakunawa Young, on May 14, 2019.



**Jonathan Wynne**  
(Detroit 2004) has published the book *Anchored: Strength In Hard Times*.

**Matt Farmer**

(Kansas City 2015) became Vice President of the National Christian Foundation and the chaplain for the MLB Kansas City Royals.



**Kenda (Hogan) Taylor**  
(Kansas City 2015) married Burt Taylor, Sr. and will soon celebrate their one year anniversary.

**Randy Vander Weit**

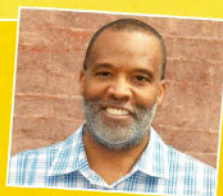
(Grand Rapids 1998) was hired as the Director of the Evening Recreation Program at the Boys & Girls Club of the Muskegon Lakeshore in Michigan.



**JC Dampier**  
(Twin Cities 2018) married Tesha Alston on May 31, 2019.

**Jerrel T. Gilliam**

(Pittsburgh 2012) became the Executive Director of Light of Life Rescue Mission in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



**Thomas Kilcrease**  
(Pittsburgh 2012) married Britney Kilcrease on June 7, 2019.

# ALUMNI UPDATES

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