

ON THE LEVEL

VOL. 19 ISSUE 4 | WINTER 2019-20 | DVULI.ORG



Navajo Nation

is Tyrell Platero's turf and he's all in



CHERYL CUTHBERTSON

takes asset mapping all the way to Africa

WILL CUMBY

has answers for youth workers who don't know the answer



UYWI National Conference

May 21–23, 2020

Los Angeles



Legacy Conferences

Chicago: July 16–18, 2020

Houston: March 28, 2020

Los Angeles: April 25, 2020

Atlanta: May 16, 2020

New York: June 6, 2020



National Conference

September 20–October 3, 2020

Kansas City

DVULI Content Delivered in Africa

Cheryl Cuthbertson (Seattle-Tacoma 2011) *sees positive sustainability in communities far away from home.*



As the Director of Sustainability and Engagement for Children of the Nations (COTN), Cheryl Cuthbertson (Seattle-Tacoma 2011) is a part of the team that serves approximately 5,000 children around the world. COTN is a Christian nonprofit organization dedicated to raising children out of poverty and hopelessness so they can become leaders who transform their nations.



The organization specializes in caring for the most desperate children in some of the poorest countries in Africa and the Caribbean. An emphasis is placed on caring for the whole child—physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually—not just providing temporary relief.

"I am privileged to equip and train staff to invest in children who will ultimately change their nations," said Cuthbertson. "One of the DVULI skills I learned—asset mapping—has made a tremendous impact on the international youth environments where I have trained and worked. I modified some of the content on asset mapping to make it culturally contextual for our leaders in the villages in Malawi, Africa."

The DVULI second local workshop, Community Youth Development, introduces the concept of asset mapping, which tasks participants to walk their immediate neighborhood to identify positive assets where they live. This exercise helps leaders see the power their neighborhoods have to thrive when initiatives are collectively activated in their community.

Cuthbertson explains, "As we walked throughout the community, we trained leaders to look for assets instead of deficits. By asset mapping their villages, leaders are now working collaboratively to improve the conditions in their community and have identified opportunities to support the children they serve. The chief and staff in those villages asked, 'Why hasn't someone taught this technique before?'"

The outcome has been so impactful that it has changed the direction of development in these communities. Where they were once seeing communities negatively affected by gentrification and decline, Cuthbertson reports, "We are now seeing communities grow with a trajectory toward positive development and sustainability. The youth are thriving as a result of the asset mapping process."

COTN has made a commitment to providing communities with sustainable development tools and methods in key areas, which include basics such as water, agriculture, renewable energy, and microfinance initiatives. They believe a sustainable approach to caring for children and their communities is the most effective way to empower people to transform their nations.

"Over the past nine years, I have used DVULI principles in leading my own teams and sharing the breakthrough skills with international youth leaders in the U.S., Africa, and the Caribbean," Cuthbertson reflects. "Replicating the training has had a significant impact on raising up other leaders who are responsible for youth development."

To ensure their mission is best accomplished, Cuthbertson and the teams at COTN are intentional about promoting continual learning and growth to their constituents. "Truly, DVULI has changed my own life," Cuthbertson exclaims.

Learn more about Children of the Nations at <https://cotni.org/>

The Truth You Don't Know

Opinion by **William Cumby** *(Houston 2010)*



Ministry can place leaders in predicaments where they are expected to have the right answers to everyone's questions. Although leaders desperately want to be available, helpful, or inspirational, the last thing they want to say is, "I don't know."

Desiring to have all the answers is a common struggle for ministry leaders. They know it is irrational, yet leaders obstinately try. Remember that Jesus died for everyone. He holds the answers and is the answer. Stop trying to take His place.

It is okay to not know something, but it is not okay to do nothing about it. We must have the audacity to look for answers instead of shying away from certain scenarios because of fear or tradition. Intentionally doing nothing is just as bad as doing the wrong thing (James 4:17).

You are a conduit of the gospel. It is imperative that you not only know about religious traditions but also recognize the importance of a relationship with Jesus by consistently learning and speaking Jesus' truth. Wisdom is our greatest weapon against fear. Scripture teaches, "Intelligent people are always ready to learn. Their ears are open for knowledge" (Proverbs 18:15 NLT). We should be willing to seek knowledge and engage in tough conversations even if we don't have all the answers. These conversations make strong leaders. Whether it's discussions about death, drugs, race relations, or the LGBTQ movement, we must be open to talking about difficult topics.

It is obvious that we should be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry" (James 1:19). Unfortunately, many of us are guilty of labeling or judging before we take the time to learn the full story. What do you think

As you endeavor to better serve the community, consider the following techniques when you don't have an answer:

1. Learn "what" and dig for the "why."

Instead of blindly accepting certain traditions, explore the reasons why. I'm not telling you to start challenging your deacons, elders, or board on every tradition of your ministry, but it is good to know why they adhere to certain beliefs.

2. Read blogs and listen to podcasts.

I was told that any good preacher should keep one hand on the Bible and another hand on the newspaper. Modern technology would suggest keeping a hand on the computer mouse. Have the humility to recognize that you don't know it all. Keep reading and listening to stay aware of culture shifts.

3. Go to the conferences and attend the classes.


Conferences are a giant one-stop learning experience at a glance. It is easy to fall into the stream of visiting classes with your friends or just hitting the big room talk. Instead, go to the classes that challenge you. Where there is opportunity for challenge there is possibility for growth.

4. Bring in professionals.

Recently, my ministry kids experienced a situation where a student attempted suicide in the hallway of their high school. Although I have had grief training, my personal experience was limited. That following Sunday, I brought in two licensed mental health professionals. It is a great idea to incorporate specialists when your knowledge is narrow. Admitting your limitations is a greater sign of strength than weakness. When we engaged with mental health professionals, it established new ministry partnerships and significantly helped our teens.

5. Address the uncomfortable.

If we aren't talking in our ministries about the uncomfortable things, youth will still find an answer. Make sure you are a part of their search process. There are a lot of tough subjects in ministry. Before you jump into them, make sure you get the consent of leadership and parents. People want to know that you care about their circumstances. If you gain their heart, then you will get their hand. Ministry is not a test that you study to pass once. There are a lot of pop quizzes and major exams along the way. I challenge you to be a life-long learner. You aren't going to know everything, but you can learn a lot of things. Study your Bible, learn about your community, follow the society trends, and most importantly, seek God's wisdom. Your freedom to live in ministry rests in your ability to embrace your inefficiencies, accept help, and engage in opportunities to learn more.



**"If we aren't talking
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truly grabs Jesus's attention? Is Jesus more concerned about the way someone dresses for church (wearing a do-rag and ripped jeans) or that this individual is actually attending a worship service?

Will Cumby (Houston 2010) is the Minister of Youth at The Fountain of Praise, in Southwest Houston, TX. With over 14 years of youth ministry experience, he is a regular blogger and contributor to youth ministry publications (Willc1day.com).

Meeting Youth where they are in Navajo Nation

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

For Tyrell Platero (Albuquerque 2015), meeting youth where they are isn't just about relating to what they value or knowing what makes their generation tick.



With the support and partnership of his wife, Monique, the couple views youth ministry similarly to raising a big family. For seven years, Tyrell, 25, has served as the Program Director at Broken Arrow Bible Ranch (BABR) on the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico. He juggles many responsibilities, including staff (40) training and development, but the youth who come to BABR are top priority.

Q: What is your ministry's mission and how do you address the needs of the youth in your community?

A: The mission of Broken Arrow Bible Ranch is to reach Native American students with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We carry out this mission by providing a summer camp experience focused on outdoor recreation and a one-on-one gospel presentation.

The Navajo Nation is the largest Native American reservation in the U.S.; therefore, the challenges and struggles are vast and complex. The primary issue we see is the lack of parental guidance, and more importantly, the lack of biblical parental guidance in the home. Within the heart of every staff member at BABR is a motivation

to inspire a generation of leaders who are present and engaged in their communities and homes. We want to see a bridge between the wisdom of our elders and the passion of the youth—a connection that is at the core of our culture.

My wife and I are called to train and disciple young men and women who work on staff throughout the summer. In addition, we provide follow up and discipleship throughout the school year.

Q: What kind of challenges are your youth facing that might be considered uncomfortable, and how do you work through them?

A: We can all agree that some struggles are universal, and some are specific to our ministry. Often, those of us in ministry are the first to talk to individuals who are struggling with alcoholism, thoughts of suicide, or abusive relationships. Additionally, on the reservation, people face basic challenges like living without running water or primary necessities. For example, a drive into town for food and supplies is often a full-day trip. We don't have the convenience of first responders arriving at a scene in a timely manner because jurisdictions vary between state, county, and tribal lands. Therefore, we must be many

things to many people: doctors, counselors, teachers, and parents—all while living on a bare-bones budget less than the average lower-class missionary.

No matter the ethnic background, the thought of living without Jesus is widely accepted throughout the world. To us, that's not okay. We address these and other issues



"We reach our young people by being present and available all the time. We invite them into our lives and familial circles."

through regular communication with our students and by networking with any and all resources strategic to our mission.

Q: Where are youth going for answers when they are not looking to the truth in God's Word?

A: Youth are looking to community, but not in the way we would think. Navajo people are familial people, meaning that we take family very seriously. Many adopt outsiders and second and third cousins into families and call them brothers and sisters. It's not uncommon to see a huge household of people who have grown up together but aren't closely related or even related at all. Because of this mindset, we see that some youth turn to the wrong kind of community. The LGBTQ movement is one such rising group, often manipulating and twisting the history of the Navajo people to adhere to their philosophy and ideals. Gang warfare and the trafficking of drugs across tribal lands also twists the Navajo idea of family.

Q: How do you meet your young people where they are?

A: The best way we meet and minister to young people is by showing up at places where no else would go. We reach our young people by being present and available all the time. We invite them into our lives and familial circles. The cool part is that sometimes youth come to us. Whenever two or three people gather around an old, rundown basketball court in a small town, a small flicker of interest ignites and turns into a huge gathering of people.

Q: Tell about a time when you didn't have the answer to a youth's concern—what did you do?

A: I feel like I have daily experiences like this. One moment stands out to me. About five years ago, I was talking to a young man in the chapel at BABR after a very powerful service. Everyone had gone to the basketball courts, so it was just the two of us. This young man began to tell me things that were beyond what I could relate to. He asked the questions, "Why is this our people's stereotype? Why does the world see us as drunks? Why do I see myself only becoming that?"

I paused, praying like mad. I simply told him that I didn't know. I didn't know why dads leave and moms struggle. I didn't know why we live in poverty, being the richest Indian nation. I did tell him we'd walk through that journey together, and if he needed to be encouraged, he could call me, and we could just "not know" together.

That young man will be graduating Bible college next year and will be returning to help us at BABR.

Q: How do you keep yourself and others serving with you encouraged to continue when ministry seems impossible?

A: We laugh, we laugh often, and we laugh together. Even if it's at ourselves, our staff always makes time to gather and laugh. All my life I've heard stories of my ancestors gathering around a small campfire on their way back from imprisonment at Bosque Redondo during the Long Walk, and it is amazing to me that the unique makeup of our ethnic heritage was communication and community. The Navajo people love to tell funny stories, and we love to make each other laugh. That's the way the Lord made us. He made us that way for a reason, so we could get through the hardest seasons of our lives. Then, now, and forever.

Q: What advice do you have for other youth ministers about how to process when a young person's actions result in a letdown?

A: I would say to them that it's okay to grieve. It's okay to cry and wonder if what you're doing is genuinely making a difference. God wants us to be that vulnerable with him (Psalm 13). I would tell them to never give up and to think about what God was and still is trying to teach them in that moment. Allowing God to interfere with your plans makes all the difference to your future.

Breakthrough

Thomas A. Brackeen, Jr.
(Washington, D.C. 2009)

As I reflect on 17 years of ministry as an urban youth pastor in the D.C. area, three words come to mind: Trust the Process. These words, which were shared often in the DVULI program, take on a deeper meaning 10 years later.



When I accepted the call to ministry, I felt God was calling me to something great, but I assumed that meant conforming to standard ministry practices. I had to learn to become comfortable with the fact that the path I took in ministry didn't have to look like everyone else's path. Over time, through experience and education, largely in part to the DVULI program, I have done ministry differently each year. Today, I am a better man of God, youth pastor, and human being.

In the earlier years of ministry, I was given some direction. I was told that if I went to school, received my degree, and waited my turn, I would eventually have a church and be a senior pastor. So, I adopted the church jargon, lingo, and a style of preaching that was not necessarily meant for me. I learned about models that were supposed to help grow your ministry and help expand your budget. It seemed that evangelism—due to the astronomical growth in churches throughout the D.C. area in the 1990s and 2000s—was a tool to grow numbers but not a way to build and invest in people.

In 2009, when I attended the DVULI program, I began to deconstruct some ideologies I had learned throughout the years. I always considered myself a relational youth pastor but also one who tried to operate within the models of church growth. I often felt conflicted in my approach of

how to do ministry because growth is not often measured the same way by senior leadership. DVULI helped me realize what I was doing wrong. For example, I learned about the importance of balance and what would happen if there was a lack of balance in my life (tea kettle illustration of slowly boiling dry). I learned that leverage was important. Having a superhero mentality and doing ministry by myself was only going to damage the ministry in the long run. Additionally, I learned about being careful of trying to grow my ministry based on the big event effect—putting all your energy, resources, and time into one large youth event where kids have an opportunity to be saved and join the church only to not have anything sustainable to keep them engaged and moving forward.

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The Power of Latino Leadership



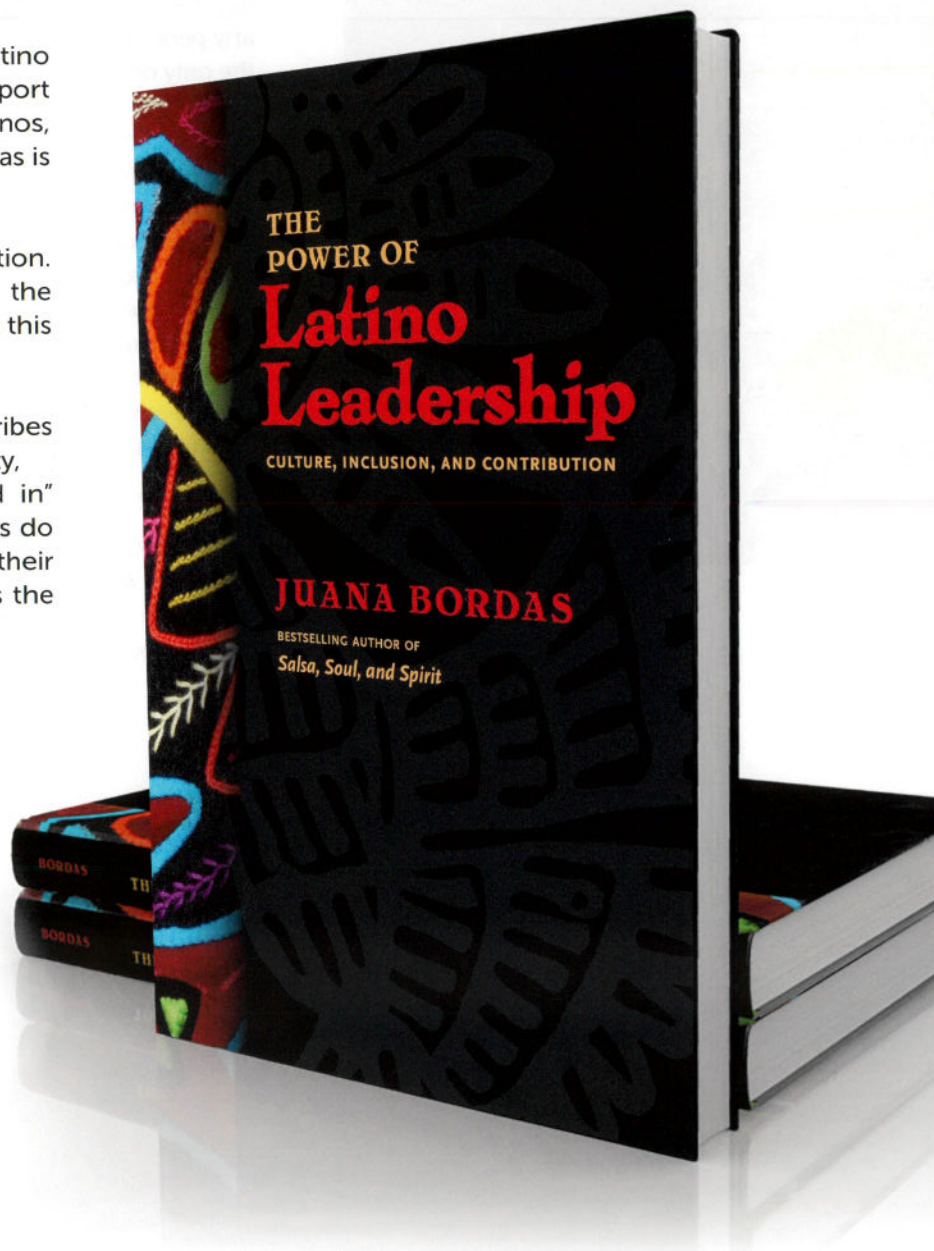
Resource recommendation
by Marvin Jacobo (Youth for Christ 2009)

For leaders living in a city with growing Latino population who want to encourage and support the ever-growing leadership influence of Latinos, *The Power of Latino Leadership* by Juana Bordas is highly recommended.

By 2030, Latinos will be 30% of the U.S. population. Bordas highlights 8 principles that describe the unique ways the Latino community will lead in this multicultural age.

Consider how the prophet Zechariah describes what many urban leaders dream of for their city, "A good city to grow up in and grow old in" (Zechariah 8:4-5 MSG). What can DeVos grads do now to activate and unleash Latino leaders in their cities? *The Power of Latino Leadership* offers the right insight for how to prepare and respond.

The Power of Latino Leadership is available on Amazon: <https://amzn.to/2qFy9fA>



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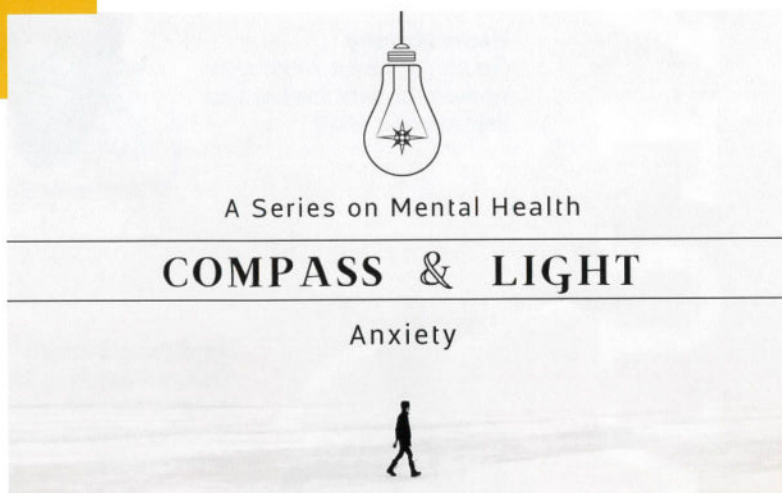
"I decided to go through personal and spiritual counseling because I felt that I was still struggling with escaping some stigmas from earlier on in ministry."

As I went through the cohort, I was also encouraged by the instructors. I often vented about the frustrations of church and how I had to navigate it. I talked about how the kids were "my kids" and how the ministry was "my ministry." Coach Ron Carter said something to me that I will never forget:

"Brackeen, these kids are not your kids—they belong to God." Those words from Coach Ron convicted me and linger with me as I walk in ministry each day. He taught me to make sure I am being led by the Holy Spirit and not by any personal endeavors. It's so easy to fall into a trap of thinking that you are the only one responsible for the growth and nurturing of urban youth.

In the last few years, I decided to go through personal and spiritual counseling because I felt that I was still struggling with escaping some stigmas from earlier on in ministry. I learned that I had to take the "me" out of ministry, and I watched God open doors for me to share with other young people and youth workers like myself. My desire is to see deepened discipleship as I continue along these next years of ministry. I reflect daily on the growth that I have gained from DVULI. If it wasn't for this program, I don't know where I would be in ministry or if I would still be in ministry. I am grateful for the seeds that were sown, the time invested, and the relationships formed. Thanks to the instructors, staff, and the entire DVULI family for shaping who I am today.

Thomas Brackeen (Washington, D.C. 2009) is the Minister to Youth and Families at Metropolitan AME Church in Washington, D.C. He is also a youth and young adult ministry consultant and trainer, Founder of Keep It Real Fridays Movement and CEO of TBJ, Enterprises, LLC.



A Series on Mental Health

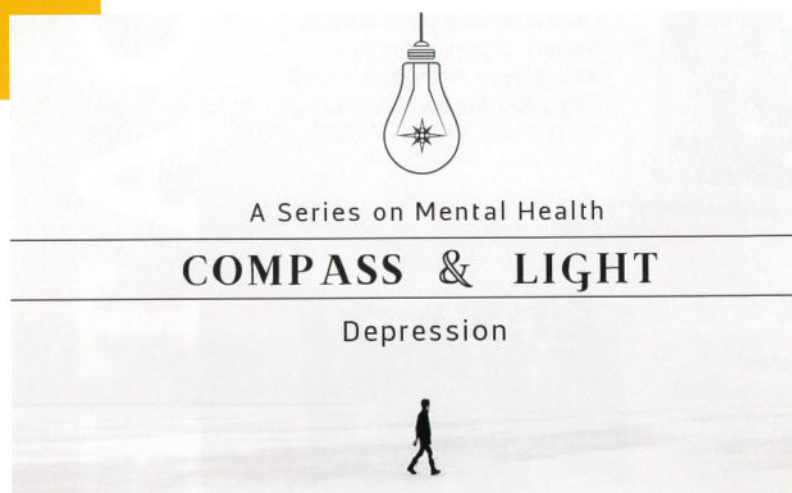
Resource recommendation by Rebecca Wallace, Staff Writer

Discovering that you have a mental illness can be earth shattering. The reality is you aren't alone. *Compass & Light* is a series that delves into the murky waters that surround mental health. This short series of videos looks at seven issues many people face today—issues such as depression, anxiety, and even eating disorders. Not only are these videos great for those who struggle with any of these issues, they can also be eye-opening to those who are concerned about people who do.

This tremendous resource can help someone in everyday life (family and friends) as well as those in ministry to youth.

To access *Compass & Light*, click:
<https://rightnowmedia.org/Content/Speaker/1001174>

Remember, all alumni of DVULI have a complimentary RightNow Media subscription. Email our office (staff@dvuli.org) if you have not taken advantage of this benefit.



ALUMNI UPDATES



Ayesha (Ansari) Wilcox
(Cleveland 2013) married her best friend, Rick Wilcox, on September 28, 2019.



Henry Murphy
(Youth For Christ 2009) went home to be with the Lord on September 2, 2019.

Kristen Batten

(Cleveland 2009) wrote a book entitled, *Trust Waits for Promise*.



Demitrius Burnett
(Oakland/Bay Area 2017) released his first collection of poetry titled, *Sermons Will Ruin Your Life*.



Peter Bishop
(Detroit 2011) received a Masters of Spiritual Formation and Discipleship from Moody Theological Seminary.



Dorian Hodge
(Paterson 2001) exchanged forever vows with Shaleeka Grove on July 27, 2019.

Donna Barber

(Atlanta 2008) recently published a book entitled, *Bread for the Resistance: Forty Devotions for Justice People*.



Jesse Carballo Jr.
(Houston 2010) and his wife, Lucy, welcomed their new baby boy, Jacob, into the world on October 23, 2019.



Joanna (Babiarczyk) Soroka
(Newark 2014) and her husband, Alexey, welcomed a new baby girl, Yulia Soroka, who was born on August 27, 2019.



Nike Green
(Portland 2005) became Director of the Office of Youth Violence Prevention in Portland, Oregon.

Chris Bates

(Los Angeles 2010) earned gold as a member of the coaching staff on the USA Water Polo Men's National Team.
(Note: Chris Bates, Pictured Row 1 center)



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