

# LEADERSHIP LIVED

## ALBERT REYES **PUENTES: JOURNEY NOTES OF A BRIDGE PERSON**

Bridges connect places that are otherwise separated. Sometimes these places are physical; at other times bridges connect more intangible spiritual and cultural realities in us that are more difficult to access. People who have created these connections really can be thought of as bridge persons. It is this metaphor of *bridges* that describes much of my ministry and leadership. So I have chosen it to describe my journey as a leader and my growth as a participant in the Andrews University Leadership Program (AULP).

People who know me see me as a bridge person. I am a third-generation native Tejano of Mexican descent who has often been called into situations that called for being a bridge from one culture to another or from one domain of life to another. I have inherited this character as a bridge person from my ancestors who first

crossed the border in search of a new life. It all started in the late 1800s when José and Victoria Reyes, my paternal great-grandparents, crossed the U.S.-Mexico Border from Candela, Mexico, into Laredo in 1890 without proper documentation.

In 1926, my maternal grandfather, Carlos Lucas Garcia, crossed the international bridge from Mexico into the United States of America by train with a passport and visa. He found work in Texas, applied for resident status and citizenship when he arrived in Texas, and was granted permanent status in 1940. He eventually went to work in the Federal Railroad Building Project, a program to construct railroads in Texas. Later, my maternal grandmother, Jovita Guerrero Garcia, crossed the river with four children, without proper documentation, to join her husband in Corpus Christi, Texas. She applied for resident status in the 1940s and was granted U. S. citizenship in 1970. My grandfather had saved enough funds to bring the family with him with proper documentation in the 1920's, but had spent all those resources on medical care expenses for one of his sons, Pablo, who eventually died in Mexico before my grandfather left for the United States of America.

Leaving their country of origin to cross over to the other side brought not only the opportunity of a new life but also loss. For my grandfather, Carlos Garcia, it meant leaving familiar surroundings, friends, family, and his hometown to move to a new land. There he experienced a geo-political *mestizaje* (mixture or blending) of two cultural identities, two nationalities, two histories, and two lands. Few people realize what it means to be a Mexican citizen living in the United States, a foreign land, speaking only Spanish. Perhaps his greatest personal sacrifice was that in order to work

in the States and provide for his family, he had to leave his wife and four children behind shortly after the loss of his youngest child, Pablo. In crossing the border, my grandparents became *bridge people*. My life, as a third generation native Tejano of Mexican descent, was made possible in part by their experience and sacrifice. They bridged two nations, two states, two cultures, two languages, and two ways of life. They gave me a heritage which has become more valuable to me as I have grown into the leader I now am.

As I reflect on my life journey as a leader, the metaphor of the bridge expresses vividly what has become a dominant feature of my own life. For this reason I have selected six *puentes* (bridges) to represent important areas of leadership in my life. I use these *puentes* also as a way to talk about my experience in the Leadership Program at Andrews University, from which I graduated in 2009 with a Ph.D. degree. I entered this program in 2001 as the president of the Hispanic Baptist Theological School (HBTS) in San Antonio, Texas, as I was leading the school toward full accreditation as a degree-granting university. This competency-based, job-embedded, international leadership program requires participants to be fully employed, but it also provided the needed flexibility to shape the competency requirements to fit my needs as a leader of an institution of higher learning that serves a cross-cultural student population. While this academic journey took me over eight years, it is rooted in the broader heritage my ancestors left me and in my lifelong journey as a *bridge person*.

I start my journey notes with the Harbor Bridge in Corpus Christi, Texas, the town where I was born; it continues with the San Francisco Bay Bridge, recalling my family's move to

California and the sense of mission I developed there; the El Paso/Juarez International Bridge highlights God's providence in reconnecting me emphatically with my bi-cultural heritage; then follows the San Antonio Riverwalk Bridge, connecting to my work as a change agent; the Tampa Bay Bridge reminds me of powerful times of renewal I needed to keep going; and finally, the Dallas/Trinity River Bridge leads me back to many beginnings, including my current assignment at Buckner International.

### **Corpus Christi Harbor Bridge—Leading With Heart**

I was born in Corpus Christi at the time when the Corpus Christi Harbor Bridge was being built (1956-1959) to replace a drawbridge. I remember growing up there and being told that my grandmother, Mrs. Jovita Garcia, had the biggest swimming pool ever: Corpus Christi Bay. The city's name, "Corpus Christi," means "Body of Christ"; it reminds me that I have been called as a Christian leader to serve God and the mission of His Kingdom in this world. This call requires me to be a reflective leader who is willing to come to grips with my inner life as a leader and face the question of identity. As a leader I need to know who I am.

In 1970, after living in California for 10 years as a child, my father moved our family back to Corpus Christi to be closer to his father who had turned 60 years old and was in declining health. My father took us to Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana (First Mexican Baptist Church), and we joined as members. While I had made my profession of faith at Memorial Baptist Church in Rialto, California, as a 9-year-old boy, it was at Primera that I matured as a Jesus follower in the body of Christ and became more familiar with my cultur-

al identity. I learned to speak Spanish and was exposed to the complexity of Hispanic culture. I also answered a call to vocational ministry under the pastoral leadership of Dr. Rudy Sanchez, and was grafted into the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas and its rich affiliation with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

The regained awareness of my Hispanic heritage also began to shape my leadership. Self-awareness has been identified as a key factor in leadership development. When the 75 members of the Stanford Graduate School of Business Advisory Council were asked to recommend the most important capability for leaders to develop, their answer was unanimous: self-awareness (George, Sims, McLean, & Meyer, 2007). The Andrews Leadership Program allowed me to hone three leader competencies which I consider crucial in the development of self-awareness of a Christian leader: committing to spiritual disciplines, replicating the *imago Dei*, and developing leadership values and ethics.

### *Committing to Spiritual Disciplines*

I came to these competencies with habits shaping my devotional life. But the academic requirements gave me an opportunity to go beyond the basics. One source of inspiration for me personally has been the regular devotional reading of Oswald Chambers' book, *My Utmost for his Highest*, and recording impressions and observations in a journal. As an educator I longed to share tools for spiritual growth with my students. So when I worked on a course in leadership development for emerging Christian leaders, I produced a tool called the Leader Development Profile (© Buckner International, 2009). This tool has greatly helped Christian leaders to recognize God's leadings in

their lives and to commit to daily spiritual disciplines.

It is crucial for a leader to stay grounded, connected, and in touch with the Lord on a daily basis. Spending time alone with God through prayer and devotional reading has become a habit for me, even though I have not been as consistent as I would like. But I have formed strong habits that have stayed with me as I have worked in different leadership roles.

Sometimes people have asked me what I did to ascend the ranks of leadership. As I have reflected on my path, I have come to the conclusion that my parents prepared me for leadership by teaching me how to obey. They taught me how to obey them first and to listen for their voice every day. So I had no problem learning how to obey God. I was conditioned to listen for His voice. As a child and as a teenager, when I sensed the still small voice of the Spirit of the Lord speaking to my heart through prayer, Bible study, and being in fellowship with other believers, I just did what I had learned to do—I obeyed. These habits of spiritual formation started with my father reading the Bible to us in the evenings after supper. In the best way they knew how, my parents, who were first generation believers, taught me the Holy Scriptures and taught me how to read them and respond to them for myself. This is a habit that I continue to cultivate as an adult. How can I know that I am led by the Spirit of Christ if I am not engaging Him through prayer and Bible study on a daily basis?

### *Replicating the Imago Dei*

One of the fundamental and challenging purposes of Christian leadership is the replication of the *Imago Dei* (the Image of God) in growing Christians. It was this challenge

that led me to a concept developed by Thom Wolf (2010), a Ph.D. graduate from the AULP: the Universal Disciple Pattern (UDP). In this concept, Wolf attempts to replicate the pattern of discipleship used by the leaders of the earliest Christianity in the first century, a pattern that was astonishingly fruitful in guiding new Christians and communities into a new way of living. I incorporated these concepts into a course called Contextual Leadership Development that I created at Baptist University of the Americas for leaders working in intercultural environments.

What I was not prepared for was the impact of this pattern of teaching in the lives of my students. The students were already followers of Christ. They had sensed a calling to prepare for vocational ministry, and they had already experienced some level of discipleship. However, many of them had never really been introduced to a systematic model of life transformation after the pattern used by the Apostle Paul in the first century. They reviewed the material over the span of a 16-week course of study in leadership development. The UDP reoriented their thinking regarding what it means to follow Jesus. They gained new ways of thinking about their life in Christ and they began to develop new convictions. I literally saw life transformation take place in the lives of these students.

### *Developing Leadership Values and Ethics*

The third competency focused on the development of leadership values and ethics. This focus encouraged me to learn more about how leaders grow and develop the ethical fiber of their character so essential to becoming strong and capable leaders in the Body of Christ. Clinton's (1988) *The Making of a Leader* provided a very

clear pattern to follow for developing leaders. His analysis of the spiritual leadership development of hundreds of Biblical, historical, and contemporary Christian leaders led him to create a generic five-stage model to explain how God develops leadership capacity in emerging Christian leaders. One of the fascinating insights of Clinton is the fact that in order to develop leadership character, God uses several types of testing: *word checks*, in which the emerging leader must demonstrate the ability to apply Scriptural insights to personal or organizational contexts; *obedience checks*, in which the emerging leader must demonstrate that he or she will obey God's leadings on a consistent basis; and *integrity checks*, in which the emerging leader demonstrates that he or she can be trusted.

One of these checks happened early in my career, an integrity check. I was going to seminary and working at Sprint, a long-distance company. One day I left the office for dinner and went to a local Wendy's for a hamburger. After ordering my food and sitting down at a table to eat, I noticed a bank bag on the chair at my table. I immediately looked around to see if someone might be coming back for it. I looked inside the bag for a name and number to call the owner and found about \$1,000 in cash, several thousand dollars in checks ready to be cashed, and a book of blank checks. I took the bank bag home and called the owner as soon as I got home. I made arrangements for the local police to pick up the bag and get it back to the owner. This was a time when I was struggling to work my way through seminary one semester at a time. But I immediately realized this was not my money and I needed to get the funds back to the owner. The owner offered a reward, but I refused. I was just doing what was right.

Knowing what is right is not always a clear-cut integrity check situation, especially when you work at the helm of Baptist University of the Americas (BUA) and serve as a pastor in a cross-cultural context. One issue was that ethical considerations take on different forms in different cultures, something I learned from Adeney (1995). This was a special challenge when leading organizations or leading emerging leaders through change.

A second, more difficult, issue that emerged for me was the lack of a clear faith-frame of reference for leading change in organizations. Christian organizations are built in harmony with specific traditions and values. Most common change models are presented by authors not writing specifically from a Christian perspective or with a specific faith-frame of reference. For example, Michael Fullan's (2001) otherwise helpful change model features a general moral point of reference, but he does not even try to define morality. I had to build this ethics bridge from the Biblical foundation of my Judeo-Christian values into the current context of change. This broader value- and ethics-base to lead change led me to also apply it in a mentoring relationship with two colleagues, which proved to be a fruitful experience for all of us in our leadership journey.

Thus this first bridge, symbolized by the Corpus Christi Bridge, stands not only for the need to nurture my spiritual identity as a Christian leader, but also for the ongoing quest to integrate ethical fiber and leadership values into the day-to-day operations of changing organizations and the lives of new Christian leaders.

### **San Francisco Bay Bridge— Defying the Odds**

The San Francisco Bay Bridge seemed like one of the eight wonders of the

world when I was growing up. My family moved to Southern California in 1960 and settled in Rialto, about 60 miles east of Los Angeles. Even though I lived in Southern California, I chose the San Francisco Bay Bridge as the metaphor for this part of my life. When the idea of the Bay Bridge was conceived, many experts said it couldn't be built. Despite natural and political opposition to the construction, the bridge was completed in 1937 and became one of the longest suspension bridges in the world (Bay Bridge Public Information Office, 2010).

Leading a Christian congregation to fulfill God's mission on earth is often an equally impossible proposition. I chose this metaphor to represent the tension leaders feel between impossible dreams and the down-to-earth experiences when they work to translate dream into reality.

It was in this Bay-Bridge spirit of defying impossibility that my father moved us from Texas to the land of opportunity and fair treatment in California. He did so at the height of the turbulent 1960s to shield us from overt discrimination in South Texas. Rather than face the daily experience of discrimination and marginality, he chose to move his young family to a better environment, sacrificing familiar surroundings and close proximity to his family to find a better place for us to grow up.

I never really understood the significance of this move for my family until much later. In the summer of 1998, during my ministry in El Paso, I attended a lecture of Dr. Oscar J. Martinez, professor of history at the University of Arizona. I remember him talking about the most discriminatory era in United States history: the 1960s. He went on to point out that the most discriminatory place in the country had been Texas, the most hostile and discriminatory region had

been South Texas, and the seed-bed of discrimination Corpus Christi, Texas—the place where I had been born in 1958. His words fell on me like a ton of bricks. It was only then that I realized why my father had decided to move us away from that environment to Southern California, a place where we would not face the kind of discrimination he was familiar with in South Texas.

Even in moving us, my father never really explained why we moved. He did not want to predispose us with attitudes of hatred or resentment. Many families stayed, and I respect them for staying. My father, however, decided it was in our best interest to grow up in an environment where we would not suffer from people treating us in condescending and discriminating ways. As a result, I grew up with a healthy unfamiliarity with discrimination and condescension. To this day, I am not conditioned to accept or tolerate that kind of behavior, especially in religious contexts.

Southern California represents some of the most memorable years in my life. I grew up in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood, but attended a mostly Anglo Baptist church with African American, Hispanic, and Anglo friends. This multicultural context shaped the way I see the world. As a consequence, the idea of being identified and related to only one cultural or ethnic group does not seem normal to me. That conviction was shaped by other experiences as well.

### **El Paso/Juarez Bridge of the Americas—Moving to the Borderland**

The Bridge of the Americas, completed in 1998, is the only toll-free bridge connecting the 4th largest city in Texas to the 5th largest city in Mexico. The region at the corner of far West

Texas, Southern New Mexico, and Northern Chihuahua, Mexico, is the largest “borderplex” in the world. Moving there as a family was the adventure of a lifetime and a step of faith at a crucial time in our life.

After spending the first ten years of our marriage in the Dallas area, Belinda, my wife, had completed her master’s and doctoral degrees in communication disorders from the Callier Center for Communication Disorders at the University of Texas, in Dallas. I had completed my master’s degree and was done with my coursework for the Doctor of Ministry degree when Belinda became pregnant. We had done all that we thought we should do in our early marriage and we were ready to begin a family with our education almost behind us. But about 13 weeks into the pregnancy we lost our baby. This devastating loss brought both of us to our knees spiritually and tested our marriage.

The move to the borderland came after we recovered from this experience. Ready to take on a new challenge, we moved to El Paso to start a new church under the sponsorship of Scotsdale Baptist Church of El Paso. We arrived as a young married couple with no children and left seven years later with a church planted and a family of three boys. Joshua, David, and Thomas were born while we were there, each two years apart. The church family also grew: from six family units to over 120 people in attendance. Thus Pueblo Nuevo Community Church was born, which gave birth to another congregation that gave birth to three more congregations that are still growing today. Almost 15 years later, Pueblo Nuevo Community Church has relocated to Clint, Texas, just east of El Paso, where it continues to minister to families in that part of the city.

During this season of my life, I

completed my field work for the Doctor of Ministry in Missiology degree and began to teach at the El Paso extension of Howard Payne University, which is affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas. It was in El Paso that I began to cross a cultural identity bridge. I had never lived in a city that was nearly 80% Hispanic in such close proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border. It was in El Paso that I began to see the pendulum of my cultural identity swing more toward my Mexican roots. I reconnected to my culture of origin as I embraced my identity as a “borderlander.”

We became familiar with Juarez, Chihuahua, across the border and with Las Cruces, New Mexico, about 45 miles to the north. I remember ministering to families in our congregation that would leave the country for the weekend, go into Juarez to celebrate family events, and return by Sunday for another work week. The whole region of Northern Chihuahua, Southern New Mexico, and far West Texas provided an environment unlike any other place I had ever lived. It was not uncommon to meet 5th generation native El Pasoans in our ministry.

It was Oscar J. Martínez (1994) who opened my eyes to understand this new world called the borderland. This place was not like Austin (the capital of Texas), Washington, DC, or Mexico City. It was not Mexican, nor was it American; it was the border. It was the zone of the third culture, a place of separateness and otherness, distinct from the interior zones of the USA and Mexico (p. 18). In fact, Martínez offers a border typology that identifies four different types of borderlands: alienated, coexistent, interdependent, and integrated (p. 7). He also provides for nine general types of borderlanders among three cultural groups—Mexicans, Mexican-

Americans, and Anglos—making a total of 27 different borderland socio-cultural identities (p. 68). I was in for a real education in this new ministry venue.

Part of my education was a re-orientation to the value of time. I was used to a strong emphasis on time and the clock. However, in El Paso, the value of time was more relative to relationships and other activities. The value and use of time was a secondary issue when it came to events and relationships. I remember the first day we moved into our new home in East El Paso. The plumber came by to let me know that he was missing an elbow shaped piece of pipe that belonged in one of the bathrooms. He said he would be back with the part and finish the work. I was not concerned at all since we were just moving in. I was under the impression that he would come the next day. Six weeks later there was a knock on the door. When I answered the door, the plumber joyfully said, “I’m back!” I asked him, “. . . and you are?” I had already spent time complaining to the builder about the plumber. The builder kept assuring me that the plumber would come back and finish the work. He was right, but our expectation of timing was very different.

A factor God used to expand my vision as a leader in El Paso was Thomas A. Wolf, a pastoral leader, missiologist, and futurist who had led his congregation to do what many thought impossible. I met Thom in the early 1990s at a conference for innovative pastors in Albuquerque, New Mexico. At the time he was the senior pastor of the Church on Brady, currently known as Mosaic. The Church on Brady was a midsize church tucked on a side street in East Los Angeles. What made this church so remarkable was the fact that it

ranked first among 47,000 congregations in the Southern Baptist Convention in deploying congregational members to overseas mission fields, a record the church still holds today.

This missionary vision resonated with me. So I enlisted my pastoral leadership team at Pueblo Nuevo Church in El Paso to travel to East Los Angeles for consultation and training with the Church on Brady, offered by Wolf and his staff. Visiting the Church on Brady was a transformational experience for the team. Wolf had developed a very intentional ministry philosophy with his staff. We caught that spirit of Biblical faith and intentional discipleship. We learned from their worship experience, the small groups, and their passion for global missions. Many elements were immediately transferable to East El Paso because there were so many similarities with East Los Angeles. Thus Pueblo Nuevo was infused with a new passion for evangelism, church planting, and global missions.

The El Paso/Juarez Bridge stands for that rich intercultural experience that became part of my identity. But God knew that I needed an even deeper awareness of multiple cultural perspectives and contextual realities for the challenges I would face at the Baptist University of the Americas, where 90 percent of the student body was from a Latino/Hispanic background. They come from nine Latin American countries, the majority from Mexico, in addition to a growing number of Tejanos (Native Texans born of Mexican descent). Working in this context prepared me for my current role at Buckner, where I supervise over 1,300 staff located in 93 cities across 10 states and 14 countries in Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Mexico and Latin America. In short, I am responsible for a multicultural and multinational staff that provides social

services and ministry to vulnerable children, orphans and elders.

The opportunity to go deeper came as I entered the Leadership Program at Andrews University. There I learned how knowledge is constructed socially and in context. Learning strategies must therefore be contextually appropriate. I developed a knowledge base in contextually appropriate instructional strategies that informs my current practice. I also had to develop expertise in technology for education. Since Buckner does not have a corporate trainer or director of leader development, I have had to improvise and develop an online program bridge for this purpose. While I cannot afford to spend my time on training and developing staff personally, the development of the Leader Development Profile online has made it possible to make training available to my entire management staff across our system. This is an amazing advantage, given our limited resources for training and development.

### **San Antonio River Walk Bridge(s)—Transforming the System**

In the summer of 1999 I received a call to serve as the sixth president of Hispanic Baptist Theological School in San Antonio, Texas. Although I had at one point thought I would finish out my vocational ministry career in El Paso, Texas—in fact, Belinda and I had even talked about retiring there and picked Albuquerque as a close second—we accepted this call as God’s call. Our lives changed when we moved to San Antonio. This move felt a little more permanent since we were moving to within a two-hour drive from both of our parents. This seven-year assignment was about leading change. I led the school through a total transformation from a

non-accredited, non-degree granting theological school to an accredited, degree-granting university.

The bridges across the San Antonio River are also about transformation. The first bridge was built in 1935 and was followed by a series of bridges across the river through the downtown area. At one point, city leaders of San Antonio were considering covering up the river and using it as a sewage canal/system. One visionary leader saw the river as a blessing rather than a curse, as a way to the future rather than a dead end or something the city needed to hide. During the 1920s, city architect Robert H. H. Hugman developed an architectural plan that included preserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the downtown river and river loop area (San Antonio River Authority, 2009). Today, the San Antonio River Walk and its bridges are among the top three tourist attractions in Texas.

The lessons learned earlier in facing impossible situations were a good preparation for the challenge of leading the Hispanic Baptist Theological School (HBTS) in San Antonio towards their dream to become an accredited institution of higher education. I have documented this process in my dissertation (Reyes, 2010) in some detail. The change process was an arduous process that required leading the faculty and staff through a strategic planning process for 2002-2006 and submitting our planning to the scrutiny of both the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Association of Biblical Higher Education (ABHE). I attended workshops at the annual meeting of ABHE and read books to be sure that I could demonstrate competency to the certification and accreditation agencies. Although we initially failed to receive accreditation, in January of 2003

HBTS was certified to grant degrees and in August of 2003 HBTS was accredited by ABHE.

To get to this stage required enormous efforts on the part of the whole leadership team of HBTS. After assessing the condition of the facilities and finances at HBTS, I developed a plan to repair and reverse deferred maintenance at the campus and launch a multi-million dollar campaign to build additional facilities for the school. The estimated cost of deferred maintenance on the 30-year-old facility was \$500,000. But through mobilizing volunteers and raising other resources, our leadership team was able to limit actual expenses on repairs to only about \$50,000. Still, HBTS was suffering from some 50 years of chronic under-funding and it was time to raise a higher level of funds. I led a \$9 million campaign and secured a \$3 million gift for the first time in the school's history. Amazing things can happen when the leadership is focused on solving problems and leading the way to effective decision-making. These funds were used to purchase 80 acres of land for expansion of the school and the construction of the Baugh Student Village that is now full of students and their families.

My work at BUA forced me also to develop competency in reading and analyzing local worldviews and narratives in order to carry out my personal mission and the mission of my organization. This global competence, stressed in the AULP, is essential for global leaders who work in multinational and multicultural contexts. My first language is English. But while at BUA I learned how to communicate effectively in Spanish. But language is not the whole story. To be effective I had to learn how to read the culture and use more indirect communication in a predominantly Hispanic/Latino

context. The AULP expects its participants to develop effectiveness not only on a professional level but also to underpin it with theoretical models. It is this knowledge base which gives me extraordinary confidence that I can lead in multiple environments. Now that I am in a predominantly Anglo/Euro-American context, I have learned how to switch again to a more direct approach to communication. And as I travel throughout Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, I have the advantage of being able to read the local worldviews and local narratives and break the code of effective communication.

Being part of an academic program while leading the transformation of a theological school into a university created unique opportunities to integrate theoretical insights with institution-changing practice (Reyes, 2010). During the last three years of my program, I moved to Buckner International, a multi-service, multinational agency which I had to lead through cyclical change for greater levels of effectiveness and efficiency. This synergy between theory and practice in the development of the organizational competencies has produced a broader understanding of change leadership and organizational theory than mere courses would have produced. Thus Fullan's (2001) theoretical model of change has become not only a reference on a test, but a theory of action that travels with me in multiple contexts as I grow into my role as a change leader at Buckner (see Fullan, 2009).

### **Tampa Bay Bridge— Managing Energy**

The Tampa Bay Bridge in Tampa Bay, Florida, is actually called the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. This 1200-

foot-long bridge was completed in April of 1987 and is equipped with a bridge protection system built to withstand an impact from an 87,000-ton tanker traveling at 10 knots.

For me the Tampa Bay Bridge represents a place for renewal, empowerment, and rest. Before there can be lasting result, leaders need to have energy, their relationships need to be strong, and they need space to be empowered for the task. On two occasions over the last eight years, I have taken my family to a place called Beside Still Waters (BSM) on Ana Maria Island, just south of the Tampa Bay. BSM is a ministry provided to ministers and their families for rest, relaxation, recovery from failure, and a time of rejuvenation. The toll that leadership can have on a marriage and relationship can be devastating if proper balances are not kept in place. Part of leadership is not only leading others, leading organizations, or leading change, but leading oneself. I struggle with proper balance between work, rest, play, and family. I tend to work more and play less. I tend to give more time to my profession and ministry, and less to my family. An occasional time-out has been helpful to keep me on track. I have also made it a goal to attend "A Weekend to Remember" by Campus Crusade for Christ with my wife. We have gone three times over the last 28 years of our marriage. I know enough about my imbalance to realize that I need healthy reminders periodically. The Sunshine Skyway Bridge in Tampa Bay is a visual reminder of the need for balance in my life.

Participation in a demanding Ph.D. program provided sufficient pressure beyond work and family to keep me at the point of need when it comes to balance in my life. The rest and times of reflection have served to empower me toward better relation-

ships and productivity and to protect my most important relationships. I take a vacation weekly during the Sabbath, monthly for a time of reflection, and annually for several weeks. But I have yet to take a sabbatical due to my changes in vocational assignments.

### **Dallas Trinity River Bridge—Serving as a Bridge Leader**

Dallas is the place where many things began for me. I was married to Belinda Ruth Alvarado in 1982 and moved to Dallas to attend seminary and begin a career in telecommunications. Dallas represents that place where I began my theological studies in preparation for a life of vocational ministry. About 28 years later, I have returned to Dallas to lead Buckner International. I am concluding my formal education here in Dallas as I begin to take on major challenges in my work at Buckner. The dissertation research I have done closes the loop on my academic-degree journey but opens new places, new vistas, and a value for life-long learning.

In 1855, Alexander Cockrell replaced the Trinity River ferry with a toll-bridge, and in 1859 Sarah, his wife, built an iron suspension bridge at Commerce Street, connecting Dallas with all major roads south and west to surrounding communities (Dallas Historical Society, 2009). The Trinity River Bridge is the ultimate bridge I am crossing to find my place in this world. I come to my new assignment at Buckner International with expertise in business, pastoral ministry, misology, and educational leadership. The Ph.D. in Global Leadership and especially the ability to do research have been an invaluable preparation for this part of the journey.

As I look back at my journey in the AULP, I realize that the program has put into my hands great research

tools to turn data encountered in the field into information for decision making in leadership situations. Dr. Freed impressed upon me the notion of “wonderment,” the search for knowledge, and the framework with which to establish truth based on research. Dr. Baumgartner posed some very difficult questions for me when I began the program. He said “You know how to do your work and you know what to do, but the question remains, why?” He asked me, “What is the knowledge base that informs your work?” Honestly, I had no idea. I had basic business principles in my arsenal and a pretty good biblical and theological foundation, but I could not answer his question with certainty.

Looking back on my experience in the AULP, one of the most valuable skills I learned is to read and evaluate research, conduct both quantitative and qualitative research, and report research. I use both methods in my own work. (Waller, Matos, Reyes, & Waller, 2008; Reyes, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

Bridges of leadership best characterize my life journey as well as my program at Andrews University in the summer of 2001. I arrived at Andrews at the suggestion of Carol Davis, Executive Director of Leafline Initiatives, Inc., and Thom Wolf, a participant in the program at Andrews who had recently transferred to Andrews from Oxford University. I was somewhat unsure if I had landed in the right program, but the opportunity to interact with Thom and study where he was studying was too valuable to pass up. Once I crossed the bridge and learned more about the program, I realized I had entered a program that was designed just for me. I have crossed over and found my place. The opportunity of

studying at a Seventh-day Adventist church-related Christian university that welcomed non-adherents to the Christian faith was actually refreshing and challenging. I felt, for the first time, that I had to articulate what I believed and explain why. I found fellowship, friendship, collegiality, respect, and a place to be myself.

I am a bridge leader. I have learned how to bridge cultures, experiences, organizations, languages, and learning for the benefit of the larger community. I have learned from, have been challenged by, and have found my place among the best scholar-practitioners I know in the country. In many ways, the AULP stretched me to my limits with regard to my work, my marriage, my sons, and my career. There were many times when I seriously considered dropping out of the program permanently because I doubted that I could finish, given the illnesses my wife was experiencing and the opportunities I had for service. Ironically, it was my learning partners in the LEAD Southwest Learning Group that became my salvation when I was discouraged. On many occasions, the group experience in the program sustained me through the pressures of life I was facing. The faculty, Dr. Erich Baumgartner and Dr. Shirley Freed in particular, encouraged me to continue and expected me to succeed. They helped to transform my fears into faith.

This journey began as a requirement while I was president at BUA. Later it became a dream. Finally it became a process of transformation. The motto of the Andrews School of Education is “*Educar es redimir*,” (To educate is to redeem). All that I have become after these past eight years has been redeemed into God’s purpose for me and my ministry, for me and my wife, and for our sons. If the goal of the AULP is to transform

participants into servant leaders, this mission has been accomplished in my life.

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