

Women on the move: Her story

Name: Victoria Cortez Rodriguez
Country of origin: San Salvador/Nicaragua
Date of Birth: 29 June 1952
Church: Lutheran Evangelical Church in Nicaragua
Period of Mandate: LWF Vice-President for Latin America 2003-2010



Short biography:

Born in San Salvador, arrived in Nicaragua in 1983, Rev. Cortez Rodriguez was installed as bishop of the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope on December 5, 2004. Prior to the installation ceremony in the Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope in Managua, the church's synod endorsed a name change of the top leadership from president to bishop. The Salvadoran Lutheran Synod Bishop, Merdado E. Gomez Soto, presided over the ceremony assisted by Rev. J. Guillermo Flores, president of the Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras. The Nicaraguan Church has 4000 members and joined the LWF in 1994. (*LWI No 12, 2004*)

At the Tenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Cortez was elected LWF vice president for the Latin American region for a period of seven years until the next LWF Assembly in Stuttgart in 2010.

Interviewed in a LWI in 2004, she explained how she pioneered an HIV/AIDS education program within the Lutheran church: "the church are in denial. They say that AIDS is God's judgment on sinners. They do not admit that AIDS is in their churches because that would mean that their people are just like the rest of society. She underscored, it had not been easy but the head-in-the-sand approach was weakening in the Lutheran Church with the pastors' initial reluctance has gradually evolved into action with AIDS-awareness workshops conducted in 20 parishes so far..."

She further wrote: "To continue serving our lord Jesus Christ, I was ordained on July 24, 1990. Before studying Theology, I studied Economy and Sociology. After my undergraduate, I continued studying for Master Degrees in Education and Gender Studies and other post-graduate work the areas of project management and risk management, among others.

I was a University Professor from 1976-1982 until the National University of El Salvador was closed by the government. That's why I started to collaborate with the Salvadorian Lutheran Synod. In 1983 I arrived to Nicaragua to accompany my brothers and sisters from the church of El Salvador who had come seeking refuge, and in this context we founded the Salvadorian Lutheran Church in exile.

In 1990 for many different reasons the Salvadorians returned to El Salvador and I stayed and we founded the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church "Faith and Hope".

Through my walk I have understood that is because of God's grace that we were free to serve and that the gospel is life for life. You cannot talk about God's love if you do not put yourself in the shoes of the smallest, the poorest, or those who suffer. In 2004, I was ordained Bishop of the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church "Faith and Hope"; a position that I humbly continue to serve. In 2010 I got my Doctor of Ministry degree from The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

I am married to Rev. Ilo Utech (Brazilian) and I have three children."