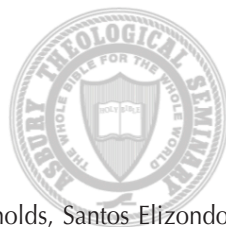


Stephanie Rountree

Women in the Early Nazarene Mission Among Spanish Speakers: Maye McReynolds and Santos Elizondo

Abstract:

This paper examines the early Nazarene holiness mission among Spanish speakers, specifically focusing on two women foundational for this ministry. It argues that with the example and encouragement of Maye McReynolds before her, Santos Elizondo became a trailblazer and minority voice in implementing holistic mission within Spanish speaking communities in El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico at the turn of the 20th century. Maye McReynolds initiated the Spanish mission of the Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles, California, where she was instrumental in converting and discipling Santos Elizondo. Elizondo moved out in her own ministry to El Paso, and this paper examines her life and border work there, including her successes and obstacles as a woman and minority in ministry. Finally, there is a discussion of underlying power systems and structures pointing to the importance of developing character within communities. This paper presents a marginalized perspective and examines what the modern Church can learn from the ministry of McReynolds and Elizondo for multicultural ministry.



Keywords: Maye McReynolds, Santos Elizondo, Church of the Nazarene, Hispanic ministry, Mexico

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Introduction

For hundreds of years, the Americas have held a singular perspective of the gospel. This perspective was that of the White American male. Periods of European colonialism and the silencing of women in the church most likely contributed to this singular perspective. In truth, Christian history is full of various individuals, including women and minorities, who have shaped and contributed to the spread of the gospel. The lives and stories of these individuals are important because they give us a better picture of God's story through multiple lenses. Their perspectives matter because they shape the way in which we see and interact with the ongoing story of the gospel. If there were only one perspective within Christian history, then it would be difficult for "outsiders" to see themselves within God's story.

A perspective that has been dismissed not only in America, but throughout Christian history is that of women. Women have played a major role in the growth of Christianity. "Some of women's most significant contributions to church history continue to be overlooked because the church has not deemed their work important enough to remember."¹ These women were mothers, sisters, aunts, and caretakers to the same men who chose to silence them. The telling of their stories can give us another perspective, including their struggles, successes, challenges, and the ways they have made an impact by overcoming adversity.

Maye McReynolds and Santos Elizondo are examples of women, whose faithfulness and practicality, have made a major impact on the spread of Christianity among Spanish speakers in America and Mexico. McReynolds began the work of the Nazarene mission amongst the Spanish speakers in Los Angeles, California. Her passion for the Mexican people² brought about many converts, including a woman named Santos Elizondo. Elizondo's ministry was a continuation of what McReynolds had begun in Los Angeles, but her mission extended southward to El Paso, Texas and later into Juarez, Mexico. With the example before her, Santos Elizondo became a trailblazer and minority voice in implementing holistic Protestant mission within Spanish speaking communities, located between the United States and Mexican border at the turn of the 20th century.

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McReynolds and Nazarene Spanish Work in Los Angeles

The story of early Nazarene mission among Spanish speakers begins with Maye McReynolds. McReynolds was born in Green Lake

County, Wisconsin, which is where she worked many years as a teacher. In 1883, she married Aaron McReynolds and moved to Pasadena, California.³ After their arrival in Pasadena, Aaron opened the first general merchandise store.⁴ In doing so, he became a local agent for the San Gabriel Valley railroad. When the Santa Fe transcontinental railroad was built, Maye took over the agent's work while Aaron devoted more time to the upkeep of the store. During one business trip to Los Angeles, Maye McReynolds attended a revival where Dr. Phineas Bresee was preaching. Bresee was the primary founder of the Nazarene Church, which had emerged from the 19th century Wesleyan-Holiness movement.⁵ Early believers felt that the term "Nazarene" embodied Jesus Christ's simple lifestyle and service to the poor. Along with their service to the poor, the Nazarene Church's mission was to serve as a center of holiness in the west. It was under Bresee's preaching that McReynolds experienced entire sanctification, which was a central doctrine of the Nazarene Church and the Holiness Movement. The 2017-2021 manual of the Church of the Nazarene defines this idea as,

We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect. It is wrought by the baptism with or infilling of the Holy Spirit and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer for life and service. Entire sanctification is provided by the blood of Jesus, is wrought instantaneously by grace through faith, preceded by entire consecration; and to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.⁶

Before her holiness experience, McReynolds had converted at the age of twelve and practiced her faith within the Baptist tradition.⁷ E.A. Girvin, a pastor and writer who had met McReynolds during this time described her as "a radiant Spirit, with "a great passion for souls."⁸

After her sanctification experience, McReynolds felt a calling towards the Spanish speaking people of Los Angeles. She encountered them daily as she worked with the railroad.⁹ McReynolds's passion and desire to reach this community led her to learn Spanish. She became fluent in the language, writing and preaching with full competence.¹⁰ In 1903, McReynolds left her job and began to travel door to door, visiting

Spanish speaking people and handing out scripture.¹¹ First Church of the Nazarene, the “mother church” saw her passion and calling towards these Spanish speakers, and as a result, she was ordained as a pastor of a Mexican mission and eventually as pastor of the First Nazarene Mexican Church in Los Angeles.¹² McReynolds’ passion for Spanish speakers was palpable. As she continued to teach and preach amongst the community, she grew in influence. By the year 1904, a permanent location for the mission was obtained.¹³ Details from the first meeting are recorded by McReynolds:

Our first meeting April third at 2 p. m., was a very extraordinary one, children and people standing at all the doors and windows and although forty chairs stood inviting each an occupant, all persuasion failed to overcome their timidity or fear to enter, but we proceeded to organize and hold a Sunday School, enrolling six beside our workers. At this time reading the Word and talking to those on the outside. At night a goodly number were present, and some interest manifested.¹⁴

In 1905, McReynolds crossed paths with Santos Elizondo, who would become an integral part of the Nazarene mission on the border between the United States and Mexico. The details of Elizondo’s work on the border will be discussed later in further detail.



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Maye McReynolds with Santos Elizondo, Founders of Nazarene Spanish-Language Ministries

(Santos Elizondo Collection, Nazarene Archives. Used with Permission)

During some time at the border with Elizondo, McReynolds reported that “The very air seemed to breathe the Spirit of hatred to Protestants and Federals.”¹⁵ In another account, McReynolds states her concern for Spanish speaking people. She felt the redemption of Mexico

would be a difficult task and only those with the heart of the Lord and knowledge of God's power would be willing to undertake the mission.¹⁶ According to McReynolds, Mexico needed to be redeemed politically, socially, religiously, and morally. For over four hundred years, she felt Mexico had been exploited by the church and by men in power. Socially in her view, Mexico was filled with drunkenness, ignorance, and poverty. Women and men alike were dull and unprogressive. The people were content with intolerable conditions and the degradation of women was exacerbated by the Church. Human and divine laws were set aside, because there was not enough money to pay the priests for the marriage ceremonies, and so many couples were not formally married. Religiously, the people were Roman Catholic and "scrupulously religious."¹⁷ McReynolds stated,

The churches are numerous and costly, the principle one being the great cathedral in the city of Mexico, which has very many interesting histories in connection with its building. It is named for the patron saint, Guadalupe, and costs two and a half million dollars in itself, besides its costly adorning. Oh. How I wish I could have half of that sum to put into the preparation of a score or more young Mexican people, who would go as firebrands among their people with the message of a salvation that frees from sin and makes the weak strong!¹⁸

Upon returning to her work in the southwest United States, McReynolds aimed to establish practical ways to serve the Mexican people. First, she initiated a sewing circle, which helped Mexicans in need of clothing. According to McReynolds, they gave to all no matter the denomination or creed.¹⁹ Many people were introduced to Jesus through the sewing circle. They met physical needs, while also meeting spiritual needs. Next, McReynolds worked to increase educational opportunities. Having worked as a teacher previously, McReynolds had a natural concern for the educational opportunities of those to whom she ministered. According to Rebecca Lair, by 1909, McReynolds was directing a class of twenty while studying the Spanish language and learning the Bible in Spanish.²⁰ She had a hope to see Spanish educational work as part of the Pacific Bible College. Also, during her ministry, McReynolds founded a publication titled the "Herald of Holiness."²¹ Through this publication, she was able to reach many lay workers in the southwest, who began to convert and take the gospel into New Mexico, Arizona, and Mexico.

Discussions on naming McReynolds as a superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene arose and some were not as open to the idea of a woman in that leadership position. In one letter from McReynolds to H.F. Reynolds, she wrote:

From the day that Bro Hampton heard of the action of the two Gen Supts, in making me Dist Supt, he immediately sent me his resignation and he and his spent two and a half months and money visiting the churches trying to stir up dissention [sic] with the result to them of the loss of the confidence of our people. As I have written to you before the churches have worked with me, evidently in perfect harmony, as evidenced by the presence and blessing of God in the Assembly. The enemy said, "We cannot hope to gain, if the people are allowed to vote, so we will PREY AIL upon Bro. Reynolds to APPOINT instead of allowing them the right of Women Preachers in the West 53 ballot, our people said if we are not allowed to vote, it does not look like liberty of thought or action."²²

McReynolds had already been recognized as the superintendent of the Spanish missions of the southwest. It was during the Third General Assembly of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene that McReynolds was named a regular district superintendent and seated in the assembly.²³ By that time, only one other woman had served in a district superintendency role.²⁴

Over the next couple of decades, McReynolds continued to work with the Spanish speaking community. She passed away on May 2, 1932, but her work would continue to live on. She should be remembered as a dedicated teacher, leader, advocate, missionary, and preacher. Her holistic approach to the gospel and her passion for the people brought in many converts, who would carry on the work that she had begun.

Santos Elizondo: Cross-Border Mission Work in El Paso and Juarez

The work of the Nazarene mission among Spanish speakers had started with McReynolds, but Santos Elizondo, one of McReynold's converts, took the message south, to the border with Mexico. Elizondo's story begins in Chihuahua, Mexico, where she was born in 1869. During this time, there was an ongoing tension between the United States and Mexico. There were also growing tensions among the Mexican states. Juarez, a city in the state of Chihuahua, was known for its violence and poverty.²⁵ Elizondo grew up Roman Catholic and according to her,

she hated Protestants with a “murderous hate.”²⁶ In an interview where Elizondo tells her story, she states that her hate was encouraged by a Roman Catholic priest.²⁷ Whenever Protestants would come into their town, the priest would advise her to molest them in every way she could to obtain the blessing of the Lord.

Around the age of thirty-seven, Elizondo and her family moved to the United States to seek better healthcare.²⁸ Soon after her arrival, Elizondo had an accident while working in a laundry that brought her to Los Angeles for major surgery.²⁹ It was there, on the operating table, that she faced a new reality. She concluded that if she were to die that day, she would be lost forever. In one account by Elizondo, she states that she prayed and when she woke up, she heard, “the Nazarenes are singing.”³⁰ During her hospital stay, she encountered “Brother Bowen,” one of the students from the Pacific Bible College.³¹ While speaking with Bowen, Elizondo began to weep. The students from the college began to sing and God “sent the witness of acceptance into her heart.”³² After leaving the hospital, Elizondo connected with Maye McReynolds, who gave her a testament and some tracts. After three months of being disciplined by McReynolds in Los Angeles, Elizondo returned to her family in Arizona. With her family, she experienced immense hatred and persecution. From Arizona, Elizondo traveled down to El Paso, Texas. There, she experienced daily domestic abuse from her lame husband, who wanted to make her “give up her religion.”³³

While under the persecution of her husband, Elizondo longed for what she had experienced during her time in Los Angeles. Through her conversion, she had experienced freedom. She had a new identity, and her hope was in Jesus. So, Elizondo continued to press forward in her faith. She attended church in El Paso, but she felt that the services were “cold and strange.”³⁴ Elizondo greatly desired to share her testimony, so she decided to make an inquiry with one of the pastors there. The pastor’s response to her inquiry was that he did not allow women to speak in his church.³⁵ For Elizondo, this was more than upsetting. Through much prayer, Elizondo felt the Lord calling her to ministry.

Elizondo felt the Lord calling her to recreate what she had experienced in California. For her, this was unimaginable. Even the thought of a woman preacher was blasphemous.³⁶ At night, Elizondo dreamed of preaching to the multitudes. The more she prayed, the greater the burden grew. After overcoming her initial fears, Elizondo started with a practical approach. She took her Bible, a songbook, and a lamp and began to preach

on street corners.³⁷ It is likely that Elizondo had no idea that this would be the start of her first church plant. Most of Elizondo's early conversations about her ministry were between her and God. Prayer and being led by God was of the utmost importance to her. Elizondo's street preaching led to conversations with her neighbors and eventually, she began to invite neighbors into her home, where she led services. For a while, Elizondo was a "one woman show."³⁸ She even took organ lessons to provide music for the gatherings. She was faithful and resourceful with what she had.

After about twenty-five people had joined the church, Elizondo felt things needed to be more organized. She wrote a letter to Maye McReynolds and soon after, they established a church in El Paso.³⁹ According to Elizondo, a man named Speros Athans came to take charge. Athans had been superintendent of the Northern Mexico Work and was overseeing Santos' ministry. Elizondo did not become stagnant, nor did she fall back under Athans' shadow. Elizondo had recently been ordained in the Church of the Nazarene, and it was at this point that she decided to move to Juarez to start another church.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, El Paso became the center of operations for Elizondo and McReynold's work amongst the Spanish speaking community. Many of the Mexican men could not find work, so they traveled to El Paso looking for jobs. There, Elizondo and McReynolds were able to reach hundreds of men by street preaching between two rancheros.⁴¹ McReynolds described these men as lost souls, groping in the darkness.⁴²

Elizondo and McReynolds also partnered in starting a Sunday school in El Paso⁴³ These services were held every night, except for Saturday nights. The services included teaching, prayer, testimonies, and baptisms.⁴⁴ McReynolds shares this about the work in El Paso:

God is favoring us with offered services in ways that will be a great blessing and help to our work. Physicians from two sanitariums have offered services free. And other physicians and specialists also have been giving valuable service to her for the sick ones. A public school teacher and the charities interpreter are helping her with music and English.⁴⁵

Although this was a shared work, Elizondo took on a great amount of the responsibility. Up until about a year prior, Athans had been helping Santos with the El Paso work. But, according to Elizondo, Athans spent a great deal of time with his family. There were also political accusations that kept

Athans from being able to travel to Juarez.⁴⁶ Both Elizondo and McReynolds would have agreed that anyone permanently chosen to help with the work should have the real stamp and seal of the Church of the Nazarene.⁴⁷

Although great progress was being made, it was not without criticism. McReynolds reported on Santos' work in a letter to the General Missionary Board on October 5, 1910, stating, "There is great opposition to our doctrines of holiness by five or more other established missions in that city, the feeling encouraged by many against a woman leader." Elizondo also met opposition from her close colleague, Speros Athans. In one letter, he states:

It seems to me that Bro. Gay and Sister McReynolds of Los Angeles, are and have been trying for some time, to put the Mexican work here and in Juarez, and especially Sister Santos Elizondo under their thumb. There has been a sort of correspondence, I believe, between them and Santos for some time, and judging from the attitude of Sister Santos toward me and the work in El Paso, they are influencing her against me to the detriment of our work. Gay feels that I do not place Sister Santos high enough before the people and I ought to recognize the fact that she is an ordained minister in our church and as such she ought to be in the fore front but poor Bro. Gay and also Mrs. McReynolds don't seem to know the nature of the Mexican people well. I have told Gay that my experience in the work among the Mexican people has convinced me that, they will not have a woman as a pastor over them, they resent having a woman assume authority over them. The men in our Mexican churches especially are those who oppose woman's ministry as pastor, and I have not yet met a woman in the Mexican work anywhere who has any marked success to speak of in that capacity, but I believe in the ministry of women in the Gospel, and my honest conviction is that the best any woman missionary can do among the Mexican people is personal work, especially among those of their own sex, they can do successful deaconess work, teach in the Sunday School and exhort, teach in day schools, if they have the ability, but as pastors, my dear brother, in this work, a woman can do more to retard the work than to advance it. My impression is that Gay is hoping that if Mrs. McReynolds and Santos could work here together, they could turn the world upside down ... I believe I have worked harmoniously with Sister Santos, and she is a good woman, teachable and humble, and I think I have tried to put her as high as common sense allows me to.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, Elizondo continued to build a ministry in Juarez. In a 1912 letter to the General Missions Board, McReynolds shares how the mission in Juarez gained approval from the Mexican government.⁴⁹ McReynolds recalls:

I remember with joy being in El Paso with our Sister Santos three years ago when General Madero and his troops were encamped across the border waiting to attack Juarez. Multitudes were crossing to visit the soldiers and officers so Santos and I decided to go over perchance we might preach the Gospel to the soldiers. We took with us about a thousand tracts. Almost immediately after crossing the improvised suspension bridge which swayed under its human load and threatened to precipitate all in the waters below, the way opened to give out the portions and Gospels which proved an opportunity to "Preach Jesus" as they gathered together to receive the tracts, and we saw the tears flow from the stolid faces as we lifted up Jesus the Savior of the world. We had the pleasure of speaking personally with Gen. Madero and the other officers ... The battle of Juarez came on ... 47 wounded soldiers were taken to El Paso hospital from Juarez to be cared for and ministered to by Santos and her faithful helpers in an improvised hospital ... We soon opened a Mission in Juarez as Santos had almost immediately gained permission of Madero to preach in the public Plaza ... Our Pen't Ch. of the Nazarene has the honor of having the first ordained Mexican woman preacher and also that of being the first to gain permission to hold public services which is great gain for us.⁵⁰

The Mexican Revolution was leaving a trail of dead men in its wake. The result was a growing number of widows and orphans. Citizens were encouraged by the Roman Catholic priests to trust in the leaders of the time.⁵¹ The people could find no comfort nor fulfilment in this solution. The leaders only seemed to care about power and influence and not the current state of the average citizen. After the Battle of Juarez, the atmosphere began to shift. The Mexican people needed answers. Elizondo claimed to have a solution. The Mexican people saw something hopeful within Elizondo which was also tangible. Many of the people began to seek Elizondo and her God. During prayer, many were heard saying, "No one has ever told us... no one cares for our souls."⁵² Elizondo felt the best thing the ministry could do was "represent that there is a Father merciful and kind in all physical and moral anguish."⁵³ She also felt that if they could win the women of Mexico, they could win the home.⁵⁴ The war had resulted in a great loss of

Mexican men. Although this was heartbreaking, it was an opportunity for Santos to minister to the women of Mexico, as well as the children. In time, Elizondo received full liberty to practice as a midwife among the poor, and permission to call the city physician anytime she needed help.⁵⁵ Elizondo attributed her influence and authority to God.

Soon, Elizondo met a large family of believers that she referred to as the Quesada family. One of the family's daughters felt a burden to help her people. She desired to open a school and promised to help teach the children if Elizondo promised to share her savior.⁵⁶ Together, they worked towards opening and growing a school in Juarez. Many of the children that came to them were from unbelieving families. This was mainly because the parents wanted their children to learn English. In one letter, Elizondo expressed how she could not afford an English teacher. She did not want to miss the opportunity to minister to any Spanish speaking people, so she began to learn and teach herself English.⁵⁷ When the time came, she started her English classes one hour before worship. When they were done with lessons, she would hand out hymns and start worship. Soon, another girl from the Quesada family came to the school to learn English. Santos invited the girl's father and shortly after, the two were converted. By the year of 1915, the Sunday school in Juarez had the following staff:

Bro. Quesada- Superintendent of Sunday school
 Transito Quesada- Youth teacher
 Elizondo Santos- Women's ministry
 Juanita Cruz- Teacher of young ladies
 Maria Quesada- Treasurer⁵⁸

By the year of 1916, the Nazarene Church of Juarez included the following:

Services:

Sunday

10 am: Sunday School

3 pm: Work in Jail

7:30 pm: Preaching

Wednesday

3 pm: Dorcas society⁵⁹

7:30 pm: Bible study

Friday

7:30 pm: Prayer and testimonies⁶⁰



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The day school had ninety-five pupils enrolled with an average attendance of sixty students.⁶¹

Between the years of 1915 and 1920, Elizondo continued her border work between El Paso and Juarez. Elizondo's efforts were heart-felt and palpable by the Mexican community. Many of Elizondo's colleagues did not feel the same admiration for her ministry. She continued to face great opposition from her male counterparts. Around the same time that she was facing opposition in ministry, Elizondo suffered the death of her mother and a brother-in-law. Two years later, she would suffer the death of her husband.⁶² Though she faced great personal sorrow, Elizondo felt an even greater sorrow for the Mexican people, so she continued to move forward in her ministry.



**Santos Elizondo During the Time of her Mission Work
to Mexico from El Paso**

(Santos Elizondo Collection, Nazarene Archives. Used with Permission)

By 1921, the work in Juarez was under the direction of Elizondo and the work in El Paso was under the direction of Rev and Mrs. E. Y. Davis.⁶³ It was around this time that Santos was willed seven children by a widow who she had cared for in the hospital.⁶⁴ Because the children had nowhere to go, Elizondo took them in. Elizondo's care for the children led to her affection for other children who had no place to go. She began to take in more children, which led to the formation of an orphanage.⁶⁵ Within a short time, the orphanage housed sixty-five children. Elizondo took things one day at a time and fully trusted the Lord to provide for her and the children. In 1923, Reverend J.D. Scott, superintendent of the Mexican district wrote this about the orphanage:

Recently on a cool morning, about four o'clock, Sister Santos got up to cover some of the children, and said she realized keenly how near the winter was and no cover for the children. For a minute there was fear, and then she said, "Lord, you have those blankets somewhere for me. Make the one who has them bring them in." About nine o'clock that morning someone knocked on the door, and when she opened it there stood the president of the Catholic societies in Juarez, a beautiful cultured woman, saying, "Sister Santos, I woke up this morning thinking about you and your children and wondering what I could do to help you, and I thought of these blankets I had and was sure you could use them. Here are a dozen." Sister Santos said, "So you are the one who had my blankets..."⁶⁶

The Foreign Missions society confirms Elizondo's care and impact in a newspaper article reading:

Caring for 45 children and 10 destitute old folks seemed a task beyond a lone woman's strength and missionary's pay. Yet the matron could turn no one away ... visitors at the home found 15 little girls huddled in a single bed! They were circled about the mattress, feet toward the center and covered by a bit of a blanket. Sister churches including Trinity Methodist bought 15 mattresses for the orphanage when the need was discovered.⁶⁷

By 1923, Elizondo had a church membership of sixty-one members, a day school with about fifteen children,⁶⁸ a Sunday school and a hospital room where she gave aid to many who were in distress.⁶⁹ Some

of Elizondo's male colleagues had a different outlook on her ministry. One male colleague wrote this about his visit:

I was over in Juarez last night and at the end of the service some six came to the altar and I think about that number were baptized. Sister Santos is surely worthy and has suffered many things of the devil. She is getting things done. Anyone who is not prejudiced will never speak evil of the work of women after seeing what she has done and is doing. She is not faultless nor are any of us but for real performance she is way ahead of many of us.⁷⁰

Although she was gaining some respect from her male counterparts, Elizondo continued to experience opposition from others. In 1926, the governor summoned her to register as a "woman of the gospel."⁷¹ According to one document, the Church of the Nazarene stood out amongst all the churches in Juarez and the Catholics were putting up a fight against her. After investigation, it was concluded by the city that Elizondo's ministry should stay because the people and children had nowhere else to go. With the support of a Roman Catholic banker,⁷² Elizondo was given the opportunity to preach the gospel with full liberty.

Throughout the years Elizondo continued to make breakthroughs, but not without opposition. In 1931, she received a threat that read:

We warn you that within a certain time you will be robbed of something that you will never be able to recover. We do not rob without giving warning. After the robbery, you will receive a letter. Guard your house, the children of your asylum, and ESPECIALLY YOUR PERSON. THE SCARLET VIPER DEMANDS VENGEANCE.⁷³

Elizondo responded in a letter stating that she was at perfect peace because persecution brought great triumph, and the Lord would keep her. Overcoming opposition and persecution was a regular theme in Santos' ministry, but she continued to press forward allowing the Lord to strengthen her. In the mid 1930's the superintendent said this about the Church in Juarez:

The Juarez church is in the best condition I have ever seen it. The religious laws and recent restrictions of the government have only served to make our people more faithful and determined. Many new people attend the

services, even Catholics are coming. And thank God for Sister Santos Elizondo and her faithful workers. The Lord has prepared them for such a time like this. They are wise enough not to infringe upon the laws and spiritual enough to feed the people the bread of life. Our church at Juarez is a spiritual clearing house doing business for the Lord and taking care of the needs of the people systematically and thoroughly. I do not know of any church so well organized and actively functioning in every way as this one. And it has all come about thru prayer. Sister Santos is certainly a woman of God and mighty in prayer.⁷⁴

In 1941, after battling a sickness, Elizondo passed away. For nearly thirty-five years, she lived her life for God's purposes. The result was a flourishing community of disciples in El Paso and Juarez. Elizondo's life was one of great hardship, filled with poverty, hatred, violence, and sickness. The fruit of Elizondo's life points to her heart for God's care of the marginalized and oppressed. Within her realm of influence, she broke down many barriers, which left the door wide open for the gospel in Mexico.

What We Can Learn from McReynolds and Elizondo

There are a number of things that today's Church can learn from McReynolds and Elizondo's work for modern multicultural ministry. The first lesson is to recognize underlying power structures and seek to change them. More often than not, the marginalized struggle to see themselves as part of the ongoing story of God. In "Outsiders in the Gospels," Jane Kopas notes,

Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna describe the margin as the context in which those who suffer injustice, inequality and exploitation live their lives. At the edges of abundance, they lack sufficient material resources that others have, and they lack the voice to make their experience count as worth knowing. In many societies, insiders, a small group of people in positions of influence, present their views as objective truth. Those who live at the margins of influence do not participate in the production or shaping of knowledge. When the marginalized can make their voices heard, they challenge the powerful to re-define truth.⁷⁵

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In the Gospels and throughout history, the marginalized have been those who are poor, ill, and lack social status. Both men and women can be

marginalized, but women are a part of a unique group that can have an inherent mark of exclusion.⁷⁶ Elizondo was marginalized in multiple ways (she was a woman, poor, had a chronic illness, and was from a marginalized ethnic group, while her own people would not often accept her chosen faith) and because of this, her leadership was crucial for reaching Spanish speaking people. As a whole, the Spanish speaking community and local government did not want anything to do with the Protestants. This was not because there were no other Protestants that looked like them, but because the details of their lives and stories did not seem significant to those in power. For Spanish speaking people in the border regions, American Christians were known for their tactics of power and control. Seeing Elizondo as a marginalized person, in leadership and modeling this new way of life, helped the Mexican people she ministered among. Many of the Mexicans, especially in El Paso and Juarez did not feel seen nor validated by the Church or by their country's leaders. How could a gospel of justice be preached when the ones preaching the message were continually turning a blind eye on the injustices that many were experiencing daily? How could love for one's neighbor be expected when those who had the power to help were only helping themselves? Esau McCauley writes:

According to Isaiah, true practice of religion ought to result in concrete change, the breaking of yokes. He does not mean the occasional private act of liberation, but "to break the chains of injustice." What could this mean other than a transformation of the structures of societies that trap people in hopelessness? Jesus has in mind the creation of a different type of world.⁷⁷

No matter who Elizondo was or where she was coming from, what she offered the Spanish speaking community needed to bring insight and value to their unique experiences. Their experiences needed to be validated and addressed. Along with this, it is important to note that Elizondo was empowered by Maye McReynolds, who was also a marginalized person as a woman within a White male dominated world. McReynolds ability to break the structures in her own society was key to helping Elizondo break the structures in her own situation.

Elizondo faced a great amount of opposition in her ministry, but for every roadblock, there was an open door of opportunity that changed the narrative. "Attitude reflects leadership." Speros Athans' attitude towards

Santos' leadership affirmed the validity of this statement. He claimed that the Mexican men did not want a woman leader all while abhorring the thought of a woman preacher himself. How could the people within his own congregation learn to value the leadership of women when he, himself did not value women's leadership? If that narrative was not challenged, there would be no change. The opportunities that Elizondo was given challenged the narrative and the underlying power structure.⁷⁸ As a result, Elizondo was able to give a voice to those who were otherwise unheard and defenseless. Once again, Elizondo saw leadership from the margins exemplified through Maye McReynolds, who by challenging the narrative of women in ministry within the Church of the Nazarene, gave Elizondo a vision and encouragement to challenge those narratives which oppressed her as well. The fact that McReynolds apparently supported Elizondo over the White male leadership of Athans, must have greatly encouraged Elizondo to continue to challenge the limits found within Mexican culture and even the patriarchy of her own family.

If today's Church desires to be successful in multicultural ministry, leadership must reflect the current and desired community of believers. Building a multicultural ministry requires shifting the way we think, not only in the Church, but in our workspaces and in our communities with people who come from different social classes and cultures. According to David Anderson, multicolored does not mean multicultural.⁷⁹ Adding in women, or those who are disabled, to leadership is not acceptable as being multicultural. Many ministries have placed people from different cultures and races on their leadership teams just to meet the quota for what can be considered diverse or multicultural. This cannot be where it ends. If a ministry wants the honor of calling itself multicultural, it must allow room for non-dominant cultures to express themselves in ways that are authentic to themselves. This is what can be seen by how McReynolds allowed Elizondo the freedom to create a ministry in El Paso on her own terms, and not one rigidly following the model of Los Angeles. If ministry like this does not occur, non-dominant cultures will most likely be left feeling tokenized. Leaders who do not usually hold positions of influence within society should be entrusted in making important decisions and creating topics of conversation within the larger Church. According to Austin Channing Brown, if diversity efforts are not paired with greater change, they can have the opposite of their intended effect. They keep the Church

feeling innocent and progressive, all while serving the roots of injustice.⁸⁰ Members must truly seek to understand the experience of others who are not like them. This is a lifelong dedication that involves allowing different cultural groups to share their experiences without expecting them to do so within the dominant culture's framework. This is how Maye McReynolds appears to have worked in her ministry relationship with Santos Elizondo, and it remains good ministry practice today.

The second lesson that the Church can learn from McReynolds and Elizondo's ministry for multicultural ministry is that character building is far more valuable than the perfect execution of our techniques. This is important because the Church can become fixated on technique and methodology. According to Yount and Barnett, "mission agencies⁸¹ tend to be pragmatic problem solvers, seeking effective ways to motivate, enlist, organize, and replicate success in ministry."⁸² The issue with this approach is that ministry can be condensed to technique alone. The Church has been commissioned to make disciples of all nations. Being a follower of Jesus is not bound to one race, gender, culture, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Techniques have become the way by which many churches believe success is achieved. These techniques are then taken into different contexts where culturally they cannot be applied. When results are not congruent with the model's intended outcome, the church perceives it as a failure and begins to move on and seek out the next best method. This mindset causes the Church to focus more on numbers⁸³ as a picture of growth and success rather than a genuine character and life which is transformed through discipleship. This leaves the Church populated with an overabundance of nominal Christians⁸⁴ with unchanged hearts and lives. But such an attitude was not part of the Holiness Movement of which McReynolds and Elizondo were a part. In their view, individual transformation or sanctification was an essential part of the conversion experience.

Yount and Barnett use Jesus as an example to address three dimensions of spiritual character.⁸⁵ Their perspective will be used to analyze Elizondo's ministry, highlighting what spiritual character may look like for the multicultural mission of the Church today. The first dimension of spiritual character is *prayer*. Both Reynolds and Elizondo were women of prayer. In every decision and in every need, they sought God. Elizondo and her peers recognized the value of method and order, but without inviting the Holy Spirit into the ministry, even a perfect plan could fail.⁸⁶ A church can be built, but that does not mean the presence of the Lord will be there.⁸⁷

The methods and practices of both McReynolds and Elizondo reflect this key holiness attitude of reliance on the Holy Spirit and prayer for mission success.

The second dimension of spiritual character is *priority*. Today, there are numerous models for church planting that prioritize numbers rather than people.⁸⁸ What is often missing is true discipleship. Elizondo's devotion to character building in others was a greater priority than how many people became members of the church. Likewise, McReynolds speaks about her and Elizondo's mission in El Paso when she states, "There are about a hundred who gave their names desiring membership, but we could not receive some until we know of conditions in their lives and souls."⁸⁹ According to Mike Breen, "A gifted discipler is someone who invites people into a covenantal relationship with him or her but challenges that person to live into his or her identity in very direct, yet graceful ways."⁹⁰ Elizondo lived a life of holiness, modeling its tangibility within her community based on what she saw and learned from McReynolds and the Nazarenes in Los Angeles. She shared the culture of the Spanish speaking people, but she presented something vastly different from the hopelessness of their pain and suffering. As Yount and Barnett express, there is a visible difference between those who are in their hearts prayerful, humble, and caring and those who merely clothe themselves in these behaviors.⁹¹ Through Elizondo's example and teaching, the Spanish speaking community realized that they could also have joy, peace, faith, and hope in the midst of suffering. Once again, a transformed life is a key part of the holiness teachings of groups like the historic Church of the Nazarene.

The third dimension of spiritual character is *position*. As we are repeatedly shown, the values of the world are vastly different from the values of the Kingdom of God. Some would even say the Kingdom of God is an upside-down Kingdom.⁹² The world grasps at power and authority, while the Kingdom requires becoming a servant. In Philippians chapter two, we see Jesus giving up his divine privileges and humbling himself to the position of a slave.⁹³ Elizondo constantly submitted herself and her ministry to God, as did McReynolds, even while their male counterparts often seemed to use their position to remain "in power." Both McReynolds and Elizondo could have used their newfound influence for their own benefit, but instead they chose to use the influence they had been given to empower the marginalized.

In Ephesians chapter four, Paul discusses the gifts of leadership that God has given to build up the Church. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are five of the leadership roles that are named. In Ephesians 4:12, Paul writes that it is the responsibility of those with these gifts to equip God's people to do God's work. It is also implied that all Christians have a spiritual commission or work of ministry as a functioning part of the body. This is not to say that technique and methodology are in no way effective. Different techniques have proven to be helpful in short-term ministry and have led to swift developments and effective delivery to audiences where there is an appropriate emphasis. Although this is true, building an effective ministry that impacts hearts and lives demands more than technique alone. God's word has impacted people through the ages and across cultures because of the unchanging principles that are contained within it. "Character anchors itself in unchanging principles."⁹⁴ Maybe this is how the Church can become all things to all people, while not being conformed to the world and its ways.

Conclusion

The ministry of Maye McReynolds and Santos Elizondo to the marginalized Spanish speaking communities shook the power structure and changed the narrative for many others. Although remarkable, their story is like many others who have been marginalized; forgotten in a history written by the dominant power brokers. Systems and structures evolve just as time evolves, leaving the marginalized hanging on to hope. It seems to take one or more lifetimes of struggle to see any progress. What is more disappointing is that the attitude and response of the Church towards the marginalized has changed very little. Throughout scripture we see God's care and concern for the powerless. Jesus' ministry was a threat to the dominant culture of his time, but nowadays it seems like culture is threat for the Church. The marginalized continue to grow weary, while those in power cannot seem to get their fill. Deferred hope makes the hearts of those who desire justice sick. Where is justice for the marginalized? How can the Church be unified while also celebrating diversity?

The hard work that comes with uprooting unjust systems and structures does not guarantee our remembrance. Those who choose the side of justice must realize that the marginalized of the future may not be told of their work. Does this mean that our work towards justice does not matter? Absolutely not. Our work matters today because there are others who need

us now. There are still people being oppressed by age old systems, who need what we have to give right now when the stories of yesterday have been forgotten. They need to see people who look like them changing the narrative, even if the change seems small. Many of my African American ancestors were able to bear wrongs patiently with the hope of a better future. They are not able to see me today, but a lot has changed in America. That does not mean there are not still systems and structures in place which need to change, but I have the opportunity to speak and act against unjust systems without the same fear that my ancestors once held.

The Church that chooses the side of justice must continually submit their hopes and desires to God. We should take courage in keeping our eyes open and caring for the people around us, using our power to empower the marginalized. We must show up every day even when it seems like our work does not matter, because someone is always watching. Someone will be blessed. We must use our gifts and talents to serve one another. Our service should flow out of our identity in Christ and like Maye McReynolds and Santos Elizondo, we should use every opportunity to minister the gospel. Finally, we must take the words of God seriously when God said in James 1:2-4 to count it all joy when troubles of any kind come our way. For when our faith is tested, endurance has the chance to grow. When that endurance is fully developed, we will be perfect, complete, and needing nothing.

End Notes

¹ Leanne M. Dzubinski, *Women in the Mission of the Church Their Opportunities and Obstacles throughout Christian History*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic (2021): 4.

² "Mexican people" is used interchangeably with "Spanish speaking people." Modern day California was once a part of Mexico. It was not until 1848 that California became a part of the United States. Many of the Spanish speakers were of Mexican decent.

³ E.A. Girvin, "The Passing of Mrs. A. F. McReynolds," *Herald of Holiness* 21(1) (March 30, 1932): 16.

⁴ Rebecca Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene*. Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House (1993): 50.

⁵ Zavada, Jack. "Nazarene Churches Were Founded on Holiness Doctrine." Learn Religions. <https://www.learnreligions.com/history-of-the-nazarene-churches-700057>, Accessed February 18, 2020. "Holiness Movement." Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica, inc. Accessed October 27, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Holiness-movement>.

⁶ "Christian Holiness and Entire Sanctification – MANUAL 2017–2021," accessed January 7, 2022, <https://2017.manual.nazarene.org/section/christian-holiness-and-entire-sanctification/>.

⁷ Stan Ingersol, "Maye McReynolds- A Heart for the Spanish Speaking People." *Past to Present E-News Column*. Pension and Benefits USA, Church of the Nazarene.

⁸ E.A. Girvin, "The Passing of Mrs. A. F. McReynolds."

⁹ Steve Cooley, "Nazarene Roots: The First Hispanic Nazarenes, 1903-1906" *Herald of Holiness* 72(24) (December 15, 1983): 9.

¹⁰ Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene*, 50.

¹¹ Mrs. M. McReynolds, "The Work and the Workers," *Herald of Holiness* (1912).

¹² E.A. Girvin, "The Passing of Mrs. A. F. McReynolds."

¹³ Cooley, "Nazarene Roots," 9.

¹⁴ Mrs. M. McReynolds, "Our Spanish Mission." *Nazarene Messenger*. 8(41) (April 21, 1904): 7.

¹⁵ Mrs. M. McReynolds, "El Paso Mexican Mission." *Herald of Holiness*. 1(8) (June 5, 1912): 8.

¹⁶ Mrs. M. McReynolds, "The Redemption of Mexico," *The Other Sheep*. 5(6) (December 1917): 1–2.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene*, 51.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 52-53: ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

²³ Ibid., 52.



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²⁴ Elsie Wallace was the only other woman besides McReynolds who had served in the role. Cf. Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene*, 62-68.

²⁵ Amy N. Hinshaw, *Messengers of the Cross in Latin America-Santos Elizondo*, 1927. Hinshaw passes on Elizondo's story in her own words.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Elizondo apparently suffered from some sort of unknown chronic illness.

²⁹ Mrs. M. McReynolds, "Spanish Mission." *Nazarene Messenger*. 11(36) (March 7, 1907): 7.

³⁰ Amy N. Hinshaw, *Messengers of the Cross in Latin America-Santos Elizondo*. 97.

³¹ Mrs. M. McReynolds, "Spanish Mission," 7.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Amy N. Hinshaw, *Messengers of the Cross in Latin America-Santos Elizondo*. 97. Santos may have also suffered physical abuse from her husband before her conversion, but there is no evidence to confirm this suspicion. In general, there is not much documentation of Elizondo's personal life and her family. Besides her husband, sources also show she had at least one daughter.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 98

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ "Church of the Nazarene," *Journal of The Seventh General Assembly* (1928): 92-93.

⁴¹ Mrs. M. McReynolds, "Spanish Mission," 7. These rancheros were where hundreds of Mexican men from all over found work.

⁴² Mrs. M. McReynolds, "Spanish Mission, El Paso, Tex." *Nazarene Messenger*. 13(38) (March 18, 1909): 3-4.



⁴³ Mrs. M. McReynolds, "Gospel Work Among the Mexicans of El Paso, Texas." *Nazarene Messenger*. 13(42) (April 15, 1909): 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Santos Elizondo, "Report of the Work of the Lord in the City of Juarez, Mex.," August 25, 1915. From scanned material from the Santos Elizondo Collection provided by Stan Ingersol, the archivist of The Church of the Nazarene Archives in Lenexa, KS. There is no documentation about what the political accusations might have been.

⁴⁷ Reynolds, "Gospel Work among the Mexicans of El Paso, Texas," 1. McReynolds writes about not being able to "receive" some who want membership until they knew the condition of their lives and souls.

⁴⁸ Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene*, 55-56. It is perhaps important to note that Speros Demetrios Athans (1883-1969) was also a bit of a marginalized voice as well. He was born in Turkey, raised in the Greek Orthodox Church and spent time in Corfu, Egypt, and Great Britain before he arrived in America as a sailor in 1903. While being processed as an immigrant he was given a New Testament in Greek and became a Nazarene. He studied Spanish in California to work with the Hispanic community, especially in evangelism. In 1931 he joined Methodist mission work in Latin America, later retiring in 1949. He would become a major translator of hymns into Spanish.

⁴⁹ Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene*, 54.

⁵⁰ Ibid. The Battle of Juarez marked the end of the first phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910-20).

⁵¹ Elizondo, Santos. "Report of the Work of the Lord in the City of Juarez, Mexico." El Paso, Texas, August 25, 1915. General Pancho Villa was one person who the priests in Juarez encouraged the citizens to trust.

⁵² Mrs. M. McReynolds, "El Paso Mexican Mission," 8.

⁵³ Santos Elizondo, "Report of the Work of the Lord in the City of Juarez, Mex."

⁵⁴ Amy N. Hinshaw, *Messengers of the Cross in Latin America-Santos Elizondo*. 100.

⁵⁵ Santos Elizondo, "Report of the Work of the Lord in the City of Juarez, Mex."

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Santos Elizondo, "Report of the Work of the Lord in the City of Juarez, Mex."

⁵⁹ A Dorcas Society was a local group of people, usually based in a church, with a mission of providing clothing to the poor.

⁶⁰ Santos Elizondo, "Letter to E.G. Anderson," April 15, 1916. From scanned material from the Santos Elizondo Collection provided by Stan Ingersol, the archivist of The Church of the Nazarene Archives in Lenexa, KS.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Amy N. Hinshaw, *Messengers of the Cross in Latin America-Santos Elizondo*. 97. According to Elizondo, her husband died as a saved man in 1917.

⁶³ Rev. J.D. Scott, "Mexican Assembly." General Board of Foreign Missions (1921): 27. From the Nazarene Archives file.

⁶⁴ Amy N. Hinshaw, *Messengers of the Cross in Latin America-Santos Elizondo*, 99.

⁶⁵ Ibid. There is no substantial documentation about the development of the orphanage.

⁶⁶ Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene*, 58.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ About six or eight of these children were from her orphanage.

⁶⁹ J.B. Chapman, "Foreign Missionary Work on Our Own Border." *Herald of Holiness* (January 10, 1923): 2.

⁷⁰ Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene*, 57.

⁷¹ "Church of The Nazarene," *Journal of The Seventh General Assembly* (1928): 92–93.

⁷² According to Elizondo, this banker had helped her comply with the laws in the past.

⁷³ "Threat Letter" to Santos Elizondo, Julio 31, 1931. Translation by H.T. Reza. From the Santos Elizondo Collection in the Nazarene Archives.

⁷⁴ Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene*, 60.

⁷⁵ Jane Kopas, "Outsiders in the Gospels," *The Way* 33(2) (April 1993): 117. Retrieved on February 2, 2022 at: <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/33Kopas.pdf>

⁷⁶ This is in comparison to their male counterparts. There are other groups today that experience inherent marks. For example, people of color in America can be marginalized before gender is considered.

⁷⁷ Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic (2020): 94.

⁷⁸ One great example of this was when Gen. Frances Madero (a wealthy male politician) gave Santos the liberty to preach in the public square. Madero used his power and influence to give power and influence to a marginalized individual. Today, power structures are still in place. They may vary by location but are identified by where power and influence are placed.

⁷⁹ David A. Anderson and Margarita R. Cabellon, eds., *Multicultural Ministry Handbook: Connecting Creatively to a Diverse World*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books (2010).

⁸⁰ Austin Channing Brown, *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*. New York, NY: Convergent Books (2018): 168.

⁸¹ Church ministries tend to be this way as well.

⁸² William R. Yount and Mike Barnett, *Called to Reach: Equipping Cross-Cultural Disciples*. Nashville, TN: B & H Academic (2007): 9.

⁸³ People can begin to be seen as numbers and not individuals. When this happens, numbers can often be celebrated more than changed lives.

⁸⁴ Nominal Christians or cultural Christians "practice" Christianity in a way that is ritual, but there is no heart/character changing or transformation.

⁸⁵ Yount and Barnett, *Called to Reach*: 15-24. Jesus should always be our example when it comes to character formation.

⁸⁶ The Church of Laodicea was a church that focused on wealth and culture. They measured success by wealth. As a result, they lost focus on what real success was about. Real success was obedience to God.

⁸⁷ God is always present in the sense that God is omnipresent. This statement is in the sense that the people would not experience the manifestation of God's divine blessing.

⁸⁸ These numbers can include people and/or material wealth.

⁸⁹ McReynolds, "Gospel Work among the Mexicans of El Paso, Texas," 1.

⁹⁰ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture : How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did*, Third edition. Greenville, SC: 3DM Publishing (2017): 14-15.

⁹¹ Yount and Barnett, *Called to Reach*. 10.

⁹² The values of the Kingdom are seen in an inverse relationship to the values of the world.

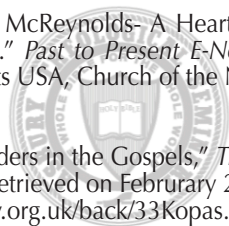
⁹³ This did not mean that Jesus had no power or authority. It showed that he took on a humble position, while knowing exactly who he was. This also contrasts with Adam and Eve, who grasped at equality with God. Their disobedience is what led to their separation from God.

⁹⁴ Yount and Barnett, *Called to Reach*, 10.

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