

THE CHURCH PLANTING PODCAST

with Greg Nettle



Greg: Hey friends. I'm really excited about this episode of the church planting podcast, we have my friend and amazing woman, Reverend Lori Tapia with us. Lori serves as the national pastor of Hispanic ministries for the Christian churches throughout the United States and in Canada. She's an author, she's a church planter, she's a sought after speaker. We're gonna have a great time together. Let's welcome Lori Tapia to The Church Planting Podcast. Oh, welcome. My friend, Lori. It's so good to have you on The Church Planting Podcast.

Lori: Thank you so much, Greg. It's always a pleasure to be able to come into spaces where God is moving and God is doing things. Thank you for the invitation.

Greg: now I'm really excited about this, Lori, because you, I believe are the first female ever and first Mexican American elected to your position. So, talk a little bit about that. Talk about the position, the, I just wanna dive into this journey.

Lori: Sure. So yeah in the denomination that I serve Christ church disciples of Christ, I serve Hispanic ministries, which is known as the Obana about 350 churches or so in the United States and Canada. For the past 30 to 40 years all of my predecessors have been male, Puerto Rican and it has been an amazing journey to, to step into this role as the first female as the first Mexican American to walk alongside the, the Spanish speaking and bilingual church in the life of the universal church of Jesus Christ, right. To be able to pastor our pastors and be part. Forming healthy relationships with our pastoral families and their congregations and just the, you know, the work that we all do together inside and outside of denomination as the body of Christ to, to really do the work of kingdom. Right. And so in my role, I, you know, I have the blessing of, of living alongside churches. Churches who are, you know, celebrating 123 years of, of ministry churches who are celebrating two years of ministry. You know, walking alongside these journeys, as churches are planting, as churches are sending churches to plant new churches, watching how the discipleship shifts and moves with the times to be relevant so that we can continue to reach the world that so much needs the love of Christ. And so I am going on. From transitioning from six to seven years in this position one of the things that blows my mind is how God shows up and what God does. I was called into this role to serve in an interim two year period. To bring my gifts and talents to help kind of shift ministry to the next era, to prepare for another leader. And in that time, God's sense of humor touched the hearts of some people who said, why are we looking for somebody when we believe we already have our pastor.

Greg: Yeah, no surprise there with you, Lori. Lori, when we first stopped a few months ago and I started getting to know you, I was just absolutely fascinated by your journey. You, I mean, you're a church planter, you're an author, you're a community activist. You like won preaching awards and, and all kinds of stuff. I always say, it's just fascinating as I got to talk with you. And, and I know how passionate you are about church planting as well, specifically in the Latino culture.

Lori: Yes. I have been just really from what I feel God has placed in my spirit, you know, over maybe the last decade. I think one of the things that I have clearly understood in my call in my ministry, as I walk alongside the, the church in general. In particular, the Spanish speaking church, but the church you know, the multi multiverse church, right? One of the things that I just really feel is that God is, is, is trying to bring this breakthrough into the world. And God is doing amazing things through church planting, but

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there is such a rapid growth in church planting within the Latino community that it really speaks to just this. Relational role in, in how the Spanish speaking church does church how it, it starts from, you know, the birth birth to the, to the, to the grave, right? It's like people are in discipleship programs from the time they're two years old, you're you're already serving and you're doing, and you're living into the life. And so really seeing this, this wellspring. Church planting happening from within the Latino context, speaks a lot to what God is trying to do in this time.

Greg: Yeah. I mean, there's, there's so much going on with that. And that's one of the things, you know, so stadia has, is working really, really hard the past few years and currently, and in the future on kingdom diversity and how we can serve better to, to not just our white brothers and sisters who are planners, but you know, our vision for every child on the planet to have a church. Certainly all planters of color as well. And we've made some good strides in that we're still learning and so forth. But my goodness, there was so much as we were conversing about, you know, what I could learn from you personally, and from the Latino community, talk a little bit, you're talking about this, it's kind of, it's just born out of the natural relationship order. We need to learn that in, you know, in every culture. So if you don't mind talking a little more about that.

Lori: So. If I, if I were to unpack that in a quick summary kind of what I wanna say with that is that if, if we really look at the gospel. And, and take the gospel into our lives. It's relational. We can't live the gospel proclaim, proclaim the gospel, teach the gospel. We can't do the gospel without relationship, right? Everything that Jesus taught us is relational from relationships to those that nobody wants to have relationships with, to relationships that are close and intimate. Everything that he taught us is relational. One of the things that, that, that particularly I think is relevant as we think about. Empowering every community to, to live into relationship first with God. Right? How do we, how do we go deeper in our relationship with God, through Jesus, through the holy spirit. To find ourselves you know, I, I, I'm very passionate about identity and I, I, I think if we understand our call to be living stones who are building this spiritual house for God to dwell in, then we have to be well. And we have to know who we are as spiritual stones. Right. These living spiritual stones. We need to be empowered from within who we are. That's not different for the church. The church needs to be empowered from within so that we can reflect and be the light and the salt of, to the world, you know, outside the walls of the church. And so when I think about us being relational and things being birthed out of that, that means that our discipleship. Shifts from being I've done level one, level, two level three of this program. Now I can serve in this ministry, you know, I think we've, we've learned really well to disciple people, to serve in the church. We have not done really well at discipling people to be authentic human beings. Who are followers? Yes. Of Jesus who are light and salt in the world in every aspect of life. Right. It's not about what we do in the building. It's about what happens to us when we come together in the building, how God fills us to then go be the ambassadors of Christ in the world, in every aspect, in our business, in our, okay.

Greg: I've gotta stop you there. So. You know, I gotta gotta be honest. So for my first 15 years of ministry, right. I did the discipleship 1, 2, 3, and got people through the program and, you know, and then we're learning a lot about what discipleship really is, but for our church planters and church leaders, I need you to just dive a little bit deeper. Yeah. So, okay. If we're not doing 1, 2, 3, or we're not doing this new program or that new program, What's it actually look like in, in church planting world for discipleship to happen.

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Lori: So I don't think we're throwing those things out the window. I think what we're doing is we're going deeper. And so what we're, what we need to be doing is we need to be creating these relational spaces. To where we can start to practice what we're learning. Right. We're, we're learning it, but we don't always process what we learn. I come from a nonprofit world and one of the things that I did was I build lots of afterschool programs for school districts. And in that process, one of the things that I understood about the learning was that what we were doing in the afterschool program was taking the instruction that was being given to students in the school day. And then we were taking it into these different diverse learning environments where they could put it to practice. Right. And so I think it's the same thing. And so when we think about, I, I, so if I can create a visual for us if we are doing discipleship like this back to back, and we're trying to learn about each other and we're trying to build relationship. It's very difficult to have conversation and to build relationship when you're really not wanting to get to know each other right. When you're really superficially getting to know each other. And the word for that is a core right back to back. So a core, a core. But if we flip that around and think about the word pan, which really means the inner essence of the spirit, right. We begin to have relationships that are. Face to face Panem to name pan to pan pan, where we can now start to talk about life beyond level one, level two and level three, but then it extends to the coffee that we share. The, the meals that we share it it's. Extends to us going out and feeding others. It extends to the way that we can now start to get to know each other on levels where I know how you work, Greg, I know your gifts and your talents. I know your passions, and I know how to connect them with how I work and what my passions are. We may, we may not have the same passions, but when we know how each other works, we can empower each other to do our. In the work of kingdom. It's not about Greg. It's not about Lori. It's about Greg and Lori and everybody else coming together to do the kingdom work that we're learning from lessons one, two, and three, but that we're be we're, we're now taking into everyday life.

Greg: Okay. So, but I'm a church planter. I'm a church leader. I've got a zillion things on my plate, Lori, how do I, you know, seriously, how do I prioritize this? How do I make this happen? In the church that God's entrusted me

Lori: to. Yes. So as a church planter, I remember I was, my husband was working full-time as a chaplain in the hospital. I was working full-time as an executive director and a nonprofit. We were planting a church in the living room of our home with a core group of 12 that took every single ounce of breath and energy. My children were adults. They were. In their building, their families, but we were all part of, kind of this process, what, what I understood early on and my husband and I came together to work together, which we saw as very effective. And I've been doing a lot of research on this over the years. And I'll have a book coming out later this year that kind of unpacks this in a different way, really about understanding, empower. From a different lens, empowerment. Isn't just encouragement. Empowerment is getting out of the way to let other people fail. Empowerment is about giving somebody else the microphone empowerment is about removing ourselves from this idea that I'm the church planter. I need to be at the center of this to bringing people alongside, to embrace the. And so that we're all carrying this vision together. Right. And in the beginning, you know? Yeah. We're the, we're the janitor, we're the we're, you know, we're doing everything because we're creating this space to bring people in, but how are we taking the time? It's not a, it's not a rush job of 1, 2, 3 building relationships doesn't happen overnight discipleship programs of 1, 2, 3, we can set timelines. but building relationships that are authentic, that we can maintain that are strong, that are there for the long haul that takes hard work. And we have to learn to retrain our

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brain to be patient enough and to be willing enough and committed enough to make that happen. Does that make sense in,

Greg: in some of that It does perfectly, and I know it to be true, Lori, but I like everyone. I, I want the process to be microwaved. Right. But yeah, you just can't like you can't microwave discipleship and leadership development and all of those things. Yeah. Laurie, I just, I, so, you know, we're working with a lot of Latino and Hispanic church planters these days. And so I've been getting to know and get to spend and learn from some of those church planters. And one of the things I found really fascinating that I think. That the rest of the world needs to know. And that I'd love for you to speak in is I had, I was talking with one of our Latina, you know, female church planters. Who's who's who's who's the lead planter in a, in a church who's she's co vocational or bivocational however you wanna say it and just crushing it, just doing such a good job. But I I, it was fascinating cuz she said she came when she came to the United States. She had never had any pushback about being a lead planter in the Latino world until she came to the United States. Yeah. Can you speak to that a little bit about maybe the different viewpoint on even gender roles?

Lori: I think that part of that comes from the, just the patriarchal world that we live in as the church. Right. Much of what was created for the church. The United States is the only place where the Latino church is completely multi diversional, multi diverse. Right. And so if you're doing church planting in Mexico, you know, with the exception of, of a, a few, everybody is Mexican. Yeah. If you're doing search planting in Puerto Rico with the exception of a few, everybody is Puerto Rican. When you come into the United States and you begin to think about planting a church while your initial idea may be, I wanna reach the Puerto Rican population in this particular community. You may start planting like that, but God is really quickly gonna open your eyes to help you realize that there is no area in the United States that is not diverse in population when it comes to Latino communities. And so. The, the, the understanding that what the, the church here is is that there are no resources. There are now starting to spring up resources. There are no resources that were written for that context. And so what has happened is that the resources that our church in the Latino context has used for the last 50 years have been resources that were designed for the white church. I love you Greg, but by white male church leaders. Right? And so the white male church leader was creating so much resource for the church. And then that was translated into Spanish. And so translating the language will never make it culturally relevant. It will never make it linguistically relevant. And so we inherited. This. And so what happened with that is that leaders who have been developed over the past 50 years were developed with a lot of that indoctrination women are not leaders. Women do not preach you know, women have their role in the church, but, but this is the reality that we have inherited. And so now we're trying to work ourselves out of the inherit. To be the renewed church that God calls us to be, to be the relevant church that God calls us to be, but more so to be the relational church that God calls us to be. I don't think we could ever empower every leader and everybody in the church to be who they were called to be. If we're still going to live in structures that weren't built for us. So we gotta dismantle and rebuild. Yeah.

Greg: Okay. So, Lori, I mean, you just smacked me between the eyes. We've talked about this, you know, that the, I get the whole, we've designed it for typically white male leadership in the church planting world. We, you know, Stadia has repented lamented and working really hard, right. It building systems and processes. As we learn from our brothers and sisters of color about what church planting needs to be like. Right. And so I am so excited about where we're headed and why partnerships like this are so important. So

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talk to me because. The Latino culture is just like if I could be born in another culture, that would be it. And because I just think it's a beautiful celebratory warm like you said, relationship oriented culture for church planting and church leadership, what should we know? About the Latino world, the Hispanic world that is different, maybe from other cultures that would help us to understand better. We've talked about the gender role difference for sure. The relational role. Are there anything other things that, that we need to be aware of as we kind of work together? Try to come face to face if you will, as cultures? Yeah.

Lori: I, I think some of that has to do with, with the spaces that we create to be present with each other. Again, we expect things so quick and, and particularly outsiders looking in. Want to come and do relationship again from the night to the day, right? We, we, we had dinner with you last night. We should be ready to move forward today. And that's not necessarily the reality because relationship building is about trust building. And, and one of the things that I think is so beautiful about our culture and also so complex about our culture is because N not every culture is the same, but some of the things that we find similarity in is, is the way that we build relationships. And the way that we build relationships is around food is, is around being in space long enough together that we can, we can find each other in each other. Right. And so going back to that pan pan, we can't do that. If we're back to back, we can't do that from the night to the day over one dinner. But we can do that as we're journeying together, as you are showing up to worship to try and understand us, not expecting that everything has to shift in worship and that everything has to be translated so that you can understand, but being in the space together and letting the spirit speak, even if you didn't understand the sermon. Because at the end of the day, if, if, if an outsider has to come in and be able to understand the sermon, if I unpack that isn't that also patriarchal, right? Don't you also need to unpack the sermon so that you can judge if it was appropriate doctrine or not, you know? And so these, these are the, the real questions that we need to be asking who is the judge of, if this church is. Is aligned with what God is trying to do or not, and how we unpack that has to be built through relationships. And so that coming together in a cultural context means we don't make decisions from the night to the day. We don't make, we don't build relationships from the night to day. We wanna, we wanna know you, Greg. I wanna, why are we able to, you know, we've been together once, but we didn't spend five minutes together. We spent some time unpacking who we were together. And then we've, we've had to walk together through emails and stuff, but even if you and I tried to, to go out and build something and make some decisions for tomorrow, we don't have enough relationship and trust between us. We haven't shared a meal together. We haven't talked about our family. I want our community wants you to see my family. We want you to see my journey. We want you to see how my faith has been formed. And so these are all part of the storytelling, right? We're very famous for our music, which can be very similar to the country music style, which is about storytelling, right? And that's very similar to the music that you hear in the Latino culture. It's very storytelling. There's always some kind of component under that is very storytelling and. Generationally. That's how we continue to pass the Baton. We want to grow relationship on telling our stories together, but I don't want to have to edit my story as a Latina female to fit into somebody else's box. I want you to allow me to live outside of the box. And to meet me in my story so that I can be authentically who God created me to be. And you can be authentically who God created me to be going back to the living stones. Right? What a powerful church. If everybody were empowered to be their full and most plentiful, authentic self. Wow, what an impact we could have for the world.

Greg: Okay. So Laura, you have a book coming out the spa, I believe. Give us a little teaser. Tell us a little bit about your book.

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Lori: So the book unpacks, an idea of how mobilizing the church for the now right in the world that we live in now. Nobody can honestly say that we're the same people that we were in 2019. Pandemic came and. God kind of forced us into the change that we really needed. And so as we're, as we're doing all of these pieces and moving into the, now it really unpacks an idea of how to do mobilization from a strengthened discipleship, which leads us to, to so relational discipleship. Building structures that, that allow us to do that structures that that, that embrace everything of the church, right? The, the mission of the church, the, the, the governance of the church, the finance of the church, everything that we do, if there's a structure that is created, that is fluid enough, it will move with us and it will help us do these things to a church that is, is commit. In, in every aspect of life to being the church to a church that is empowering to a church that has attitude a, a kingdom attitude in their DNA. Right. And so it really will be about mobilizing us as the church into this new era that God has ushered us into. Because, and through the pandemic and through just the, the racial tension, the political division and all of the things that we're living in, particularly in the context of the United States, how do we mobilize the church today from within any cultural context from within any A community context to be able to truly break free from living within the walls and building empire within the walls to breaking down the empire, to truly be kingdom together. And so it's about community. It's about collaboration. It's about building on the strengths of the DNA of the church and building on the strengths of the DNA of the body of Christ.

Greg: Okay, so it's coming out this fall. What's the title, Lori. And when can we expect it?

Lori: It is called the which is actually an acronym. The se is desire. Right? It it's, it's a way to say the word desire. So God's desire for mobilizing the church today. It's an acronym that basically is discipleship structure commitments, empowerment. Kingdom attitude. And so in Spanish, it, it fits the acronym. Right? And so it will be a bilingual context. It'll come out in English and Spanish which really fits the different context. And, and that's what the title is the say out mobilizing the church for today. And so. It will come out on some different platforms, still kind of negotiating some things. Up until this point, I have been a self-published author by choice. And so really looking at okay, where, where, where is God calling this? I did a lot of the research in the work for this while I was on sabbatical in the fall. Because God has just really been working on my heart as I deal with church. Right. I deal. I deal with walking alongside the church in the most beautiful moments, but I deal with walking alongside the church in the midst of the most painful conflicts. And what I have learned is that every one of these conflicts, you can unpack it and find it the roots. A lack of strength and structure and empowered structure, not structured that controls, but structure that is fluid enough to let us be the church. But that also protects the church, right? Protects our leaders protects the people that are serving. But it, it also stems from building structures that are more about controlling people than empowering people. And so it's about dismantling. We can't continue to build the church forward until we stop and evaluate. And when we stop and evaluate where we are as the church, sometimes we really realize that we wanna clean some things, but we wanna continue to build on the same fractured foundation. What evaluation really invites us to do is to suspend judgment and to just look at things from an assessment lens. and to be honest and brutally honest sometimes with who we are, who we've been and how we've been so that we can now look at who God is calling us to be. So when I talk about structure, I think about who we are, how we are, what we do, why we do it, who we do it with. You know, what are, what are those pieces that need to be thought of in the structure? So that that structure can then inform that, right? I, I walk along cert alongside churches who have constitutions that they're trying to live into instead of having constitutions or bylaws for their church, that inform who they are. their life

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breathing documents that should be changing shape and form to help them live into what God is calling them to be and do. But they're, they're, they're doing it backwards, right? They're trying to work into this thing. And what I see in that if you'll allow me to share this vision, I think about this from the context of. The woman who was bleeding for 12 years and who was marginalized and forced because of a structure to live in an isolated space outside of community. She had to have a friend somewhere. She had to have someone who was risking their life to go and take her food and tell, tell her what was going on because she heard about Jesus, right? She heard about Jesus. And so she was very bold in taking the risk. Of taking that last step to try and get close enough to Jesus. How did she have to do that? You know, did she have to crawl to get there because she couldn't just show up. She couldn't just bump into people because somebody she bumped into could have recognized her and all of the attention could have shifted to her. She could have been stoned. She could have been killed all of those things, but if we look at that today, this woman's boldness trying to get into the middle. To be near Jesus. I think sometimes when we look at the church with a true eval to have lens today, it's almost like what we've done is we have now forced Jesus to try and push his way to the center. Through the multitude. Jesus is trying to push, push past our structures, push past our racism, push past our patriarchy, push past all of the things that we've done. Out of the good heart of serving Jesus, but we've kind of pushed Jesus to the outskirts. And now Jesus is trying to work through the multitude. Hey, I wanna get back in the center and I wanna help us build the church for tomorrow. And so that kind of unpacks, a little bit of, of, of what God's put on my heart and what I believe, God put that on my heart to share with the church.

Greg: Lori. I can't wait to say it coming out this fall. I, I will be one of the first to read it. I hope I can get an advanced copy from you. and then we can talk about it talking about it in another podcast as. But Lori, thank you for joining us. Love your work. We'll keep dialoging. And if you're ever up in Cleveland, Ohio, my wife and I would love to have you over for dinner and to share a meal face to face. So thank you so much for your time.

Lori: Thank you so much. And the same goes, we're a few hours away in Indianapolis as my husband and I. So if you work your way down this way, you'll get some good home cooked Mexican food.

Greg: I'll be there for sure. Thanks, Laurie.