



# minister

## MAGAZINE

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## Our Sense of Call

**Missionary Calling**  
Ketly Pierre



**K**etly and Vital Pierre have visited our congregation, First Baptist Church of Colorado Springs, several times over the past ten years. We have sent short-term mission teams to Nicaragua on three occasions, and we partner with the Pierres in their ministry. I had the opportunity to interview Ketly at the recent Regional Gathering of Churches from ABC Rocky Mountains. – Michael Saylor

*Q: When you were younger, who influenced you to explore the ministry?*

**A:** When I was a little baby, my life was in danger. I was living in Haiti. I was very sick, and my mother was so desperate. She told God, “If you save my daughter, I’ll dedicate her whole life to you.” My mother read for me every evening Psalms 91:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.  
I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge  
and my fortress,  
my God, in whom I trust.” *NIV*

I knew it by heart in French. From a young age I knew that God had set me apart for something special; I just didn’t know what.

*Q: As you grew up in your faith were there other people besides your parents that were significant to you?*

**A:** We moved to Puerto Rico when I was six years old, and I had a cousin who was an Episcopal priest. He used to take us to church. He was like a father figure; I was very close to him. I never saw him as a missionary, but he had a lot of influence on me.

Even when I was growing up in the Episcopal church I had a deep sense that God had something special for me, and at age 21 I was in college at University of Puerto Rico. I had a big spiritual emptiness in my heart, and I wanted to know why God had created me; I wanted to know what I was here for. It was on a Sunday evening when I asked God, “Are you real or not? Because if you are not real, I would not go any more to church.”

I was desperate. It was the following day, I was having lunch at the University, when a youth group from the University was having an open-air service where I was sitting, and I had forgotten my prayer from the night before. A young woman who was singing with the group came to me and started talking about the Gospel, and asked me to be a part of that group. Then in one of my classrooms one of the class members was also part of that group, and I started attending. That’s when I really got to know the Lord. I was there for three years – they even baptized me – it was an interdenominational group, and they

were really fired up for the Lord. That's when I started to have a deeper understanding of who God is and to understand God's purpose for my life.

We met every day from noon until one; we used to go to places the church usually would not go to evangelize, like to bars and movie houses, and we had retreats together. On one of the retreats they invited a missionary from Latin America to speak. At the time I heard that young man talking, I literally saw myself on a big TV screen, and in the picture I saw myself in the mission field with a little girl. That's when I knew that's what God wanted me to do.

And I said to God, "Are you kidding? You want me to give this up?" Because what I really wanted to be was a university professor. I had always said I was going to go and live in New Orleans, so after my Bachelor's degree that's where I was going. I said, "God, what is this all about?" And this young missionary gave an altar call. I don't remember exactly the call, but I knew if you weren't called you wouldn't even dare to stand up when a call was given. I couldn't stay still. I said, "God, I will accept your call - but please let me be sixty-five years old."

But the Lord did not let me wait. The Bible verse that God used to literally chase me was from Acts 26,

'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' - Acts 26:16-18 NIV

That group really taught me the Bible. God is my Lord. So I thought from my early days, in that group, I should surrender myself to him and be obedient to his call. That verse spoke to me so much; it was like the letters were coming out of the book. I couldn't resist it. And then there was seminary.

I did not want to go to seminary. That's the last thing I wanted to do. So I said, "God, no seminary." But God had another plan. In 1985 I was working, I had finished college, and was going to go back and work in the University, and my church in Puerto Rico had a mission trip to the Dominican Republic - it was a trip I did not want to take, because I had it in my mind I wanted to go to Haiti, but at the same time the Lord was really leading me to go to find out about the mission field and to go to seminary.

I knew I didn't have the foundation yet to be a missionary. So two things were happening - the mission

trip, and this call to seminary. I said to God, "Ok, you want me to go to seminary? I want to go to the United States, and I want a full scholarship, and I am not going to go looking for it." In the Dominican we finished the mission trip and then the medical mission team asked me to stay longer. I was planning to go to Haiti to spend the New Year with my family. I said, "I don't want to stay here." But I said, "God, again, what do you want me to do?" And God said "Stay."

It was very clear to me. I had no money to stay, but I stayed anyway. And someone from the team said, "Talk to the people at Eastern Seminary," so I did, and they sent me all the material, and offered me a full scholarship, and in September I was in seminary.

*Q: What advice would you have for someone who said, "Kety, I'm interested in being a missionary?"*

A: I would say, "Has God called you?" Because it is very serious. Have you had God's confirmation in your life that this is what you should do? God gives me his confirmation with a burning in my heart, plus the affirmation of the people in my Baptist church in Puerto Rico. I stayed there only three years. But in that time God surrounded me with people who confirmed me in my call. God arranges things in your life. He affirms your call the same way. There is that urge that is greater than your own will.

*Q: Has God's call changed for you over the years?*

A: Oh, when I first received my call I wanted to go to Haiti. I couldn't see anything else until I went to Zaire to do my internship for my economic development work (when I went for my MDiv I also took a masters degree in economic development - also a free ride!) During that internship the Lord showed me that he doesn't just love one people, he loves the whole world. God said, "I'm not sending you to a particular people. I'm sending you to whom I want to send you. And God poured into my heart a love for the whole world. So therefore my love for mission wasn't only for my own people. That was the change - a love for the whole world.

I was in the Dominican Republic, and then in Bluefields, Nicaragua, but I would go wherever he sent me. As for ministry, it was never in my whole life I saw myself working with children. I had no ministry with children before I came to Bluefields. In Dominican I worked with young people, I worked as an Associate Pastor, I worked in the batays with the medical teams, doing the spiritual work of accompaniment. But children - whoa! Children? That had to be God.

*Q: What do you see as some of the biggest successes you've experienced? Over twenty-five years, what did you do well?*

A: The last ten years of my life in Bluefields I have had a

lot of work spiritually in accompanying people to come to know the Lord, sharing the gospel, watching those people receiving Christ, and then those people going out and doing the same thing I did with them.

*Q: What about challenges?*

A: At the same time I've seen people with some great gifts, and they're resisting God's call, and I've had to wait upon God. I'm the kind of person who's always had to have an answer. I've wanted to fix something right away, and in this ministry I cannot do that. I had to, in humility, I had to say to God, "I'm giving you permission to do the work," so I have to wait on God. It's been a challenge for me. I'm a fixer.

*Q: Have there been times when you've just questioned the call? I have no idea what I'm doing here? Or have you always been clear about it?*

A: I say, "God, I did not invite myself into this, so you go ahead and do what you have to do. Even my marriage to Vital – we married when I was already a missionary, I was thirty-five. Vital's mother accepted the Lord when he was a teenager, and his mother prayed for him to be a pastor, and it was at age 19 he accepted the Lord.

When I went to the Dominican I was engaged to a man from Liberia. I saw him there, in September '93, and he said, "Ketly, this thing of being a missionary is not for me. You come back with me and we'll get married." I was 33 years old at that time.

And I said, "You're not the man for me," and I let it go. I let it go. And then I met Vital, and I was very sure there wasn't a man or a woman or circumstances in my life that could make me turn back. No matter what happened this is what God wanted me to do.

*Q: The city of Rama (Nicaragua) is your newest outreach. How did you focus on it instead of some other place?*

A: The Baptist convention of Nicaragua has tried to establish a church there – it's a very strategic place, it's the last city by road from Managua to Rama, and from there we have no other road, you have to take a boat. It is the biggest port on the Nicaraguan Atlantic coast. So the Nicaraguan Baptist Convention asked us to start a church in Rama. So here we are.

*Q: What's your vision for tomorrow? What do you see on that "big TV screen?"*

A: Bringing new people to Christ. Working with the children there. We started the church with the after-school program. God is using the children to bring the adults to the church. Then we can go to the homes.

*Q: What are some of the things people here can do to support you?*

A: Lots of prayer, because this is not an easy job. To keep us focused on Him, because then everything else will come, everything else will be added. God says, "All this will be added unto you." To pray for that focus – and to accompany us with their prayers, their visits, and when people are engaged with the ministry they will give. The money will come.

*Q: You seem to be very open to the leading of God's Spirit. That approach might seem strange to some people. Do you ever tell this story and have people say, "I don't know what you're talking about – being led – you aren't making any sense."?*

A: They haven't told me that yet. That is my story, and I have so many witnesses, so if they want to go and check, they can go and check it out. If they did say that I would say, "Come and see. Come and see."

*Thank you for spending some time with us.*

Thank you.

*Ketly Pierre and her husband Vital work on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua to strengthen local churches and encourage existing churches to plant new ones. They began their work in Bluefields, Nicaragua twenty years ago, and have since established a new church in the village of Kukra Hill, with another to follow in the port city of Rama. Their ministry is a holistic, "hands on" endeavor in which they walk and work alongside people to build relationships.*





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Published periodically as a forum for issues and events that pertain to ministry as observed and practiced by ministerial leaders of the American Baptist Churches USA

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You are eligible for membership if you are either

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Join the Ministers Council through your local constituent council. Contact information is posted on the web at [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org) under the "Who We Are" link.

# mission

The Ministers Council is the professional association of ministerial leaders within the American Baptist Churches USA. We are working together to:

- Connect colleagues through Together in Ministry groups and Communities of Practice
- Establish and maintain professional and ethical standards of the Christian ministry
- Give support to the members of this body and be an advocate for them in their professional relations
- Resource ministry through our web site at [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org)
- Interpret the appropriate roles of professional ministerial leadership to the constituent parts of our denomination, and to our local American Baptist Churches
- Encourage the recruitment and nurture of candidates for the various church vocations
- Provide a means of expression and debate by members of this body on issues that affect the professional ministerial leadership of the American Baptist Churches USA
- Cooperate with the appropriate units of the American Baptist Churches USA in matters of mutual interest and concern, including recruitment, placement, compensation, continuing education, and counseling

