

Way to go! Way to give!

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Holston Conference

Hispanic Ministries

**“God put the church
into my path to help me.”**

~ Maria Jimenez



Maria Jimenez was nine years old when she first encountered the United Methodist Church in Monroe County, Tenn.

She lived with several families, many related, in a rural neighborhood the locals called “El Rancho.” Many of her neighbors were born in Mexico and considered themselves to be Roman Catholic. Yet they were all grateful when churches in the Maryville District of Holston Conference sent volunteers to provide tutoring, Vacation Bible School, holiday parties, and Christmas gifts.

“They knew it was a low-income community, and they wanted to reach out and give us a hand,” says Maria, now age 23.

Maria and her friends and family grew close to the church workers as the new Hispanic ministry grew. Eventually, a church was built and Pastor Daniel Castillo was appointed to *Casa del Alfarero Iglesia Metodista Unida*, or Potter’s House United Methodist Church.

“Pastor Dani” and his wife Kayce came to know Maria through worship and a Wednesday-night youth group at Potter’s House. Maria began attending Holston events such as Senior High Assembly, Resurrection, and Divine Rhythm with her new church friends.

“It impressed me by how much fun it was, how people could enjoy just being crazy and free,” said Maria. “I also felt like I could express my own opinion about my faith. I felt safe.”

Maria was one of the first to become a new member at *Casa del Alfarero*. Soon after, she confessed to her pastor that she dreamed of attending college and

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The youth group at the Potter's House enjoys a game together.

becoming a nurse, but there were many obstacles. Her parents brought her to the U.S. when she was two years old, so she was not eligible for state or federal financial aid or other privileges.

“We can make this happen,” said Pastor Dani.

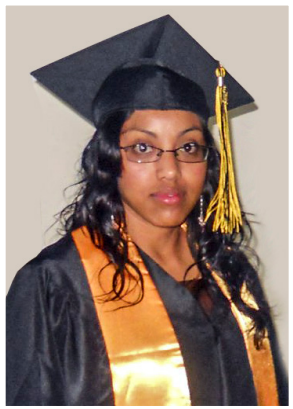
Dani got together with the senior pastor at Fairview United Methodist Church, Rev. Jerry Russell, and a schoolteacher, Bonnie Langner, who knew Maria was a good student and wanted to help. They enrolled her in Hiwassee College and – two years later in 2012 – she graduated with high honors and an associate’s degree.

Maria has spent the last two years working as a hotel housekeeper and attending night classes at community college, but she will finally be ready to continue her

dream this fall. With the assistance of mentors, pastors and others she met through Hiwassee and the Hispanic ministries of Holston Conference, Maria is now enrolled full-time in Lincoln Memorial University’s school of nursing. She has a 3.83 GPA.

“I have learned that when you put your heart into things, you will succeed,” Maria says. “But this could not have happened without God putting the church into my path to help me.”

Thank you, Holston Conference. You’ll never know how many lives you’ve changed.



Maria graduated from Hiwassee College and now attends LMU.

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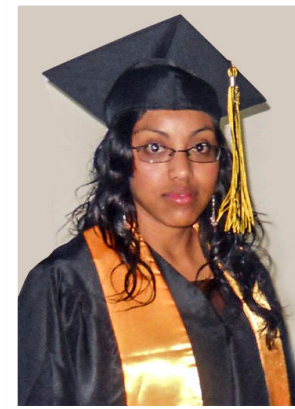
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