

## Iosmar Alvarez Biography

Awakening local churches for the glory of God is the call upon Rev. Dr. Iosmar Alvarez's life. A pastor to all, the Lexington District Superintendent who leads over 70 diverse churches of various cultures and demographics has spent over 20 years in the Kentucky Conference serving as a bridge between cultures. Rev. Dr. Alvarez has a proven track record of fruitful church planting and revitalization, caring for the sick and downtrodden, the burdened and the marginalized, across races, cultures, ideologies, and generations. As a Cuban-American, his courageous and yet humble attitude of relational servant leadership has enabled him to skillfully and powerfully bridge ethnic and racial barriers, powerfully reach communities and cultivate a spirit of collaboration. At the age of 27, Alvarez followed God's lead and left the difficulties and closed doors of his native Cuba to use his gifts of relationship building and cross-cultural faith sharing to come to America. A door was immediately opened to plant the very first Hispanic UMC in Kentucky. A sought-after coach and leader in the Commonwealth, he is now making history as the first Hispanic Episcopal nominee from the Kentucky Conference.

Alvarez formed the *Lexington Disciple Making Network* as a platform to launch district initiatives for church health, collaboration, multiplication, and to provide support and mentorship to young leaders. He founded *The Hispanic Christian Academy* in partnership with United Theological Seminary and the Kentucky Conference which is training leaders nationwide. He was elected to serve as Kentucky Conference Delegate in 2016, 2019 and 2020 and has worked on cabinet-level projects in several conferences. Through Alvarez's direct collaboration with *SBC 21* (Strengthening the Black Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century) in the Lexington District, local churches are awakening and revitalizing.

A visionary pastor and thought leader, Alvarez has authored five books and has been a frequent speaker for nationally recognized networks on leadership development and church growth. He is founder and CEO of *Disciple 21 Church Planting Network*, an international multicultural network with a goal of planting 2,500 churches by 2028. He has been recognized nationally by the UMC for his exemplary leadership in church planting, development, and transformation.

Alvarez believes his experience in leadership is both a gift of the Spirit and a skill.

"A leader needs to be able to discover, develop, and deploy passionate spiritual disciples," he said.

Alvarez's extraordinary and inspiring journey is a testimony to the United Methodist understanding of social and personal holiness; his life a reflection of prevenient, justifying and

sanctifying grace. Traveling light, he left Cuba in 2001, stripped of everything except a backpack and a heart for Jesus. Upon his arrival in Kentucky, he stepped into uncertainty, trusting God for his next move.

That year, Preston Highway UMC in Louisville happened to be praying for a leader to help reach their rapidly growing Hispanic population when Alvarez, unaware of the prayer efforts and need, joined the church. Within a year he became a disciple-making leader and a local pastor for the congregation as people came in droves to receive Jesus.

“It’s just part of my personality,” he said. “When I am a part of something, I am all in, 100%.”

Soon, a new church was born, becoming the fastest-growing Hispanic church plant in the Kentucky Conference. With a fire in his soul for cultivating transformation where the broken find hope and healing, Alvarez felt called to establish new spaces for faith communities to grow into United Methodist Churches. In the midst of his ministry and service, he earned a Master of Divinity from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, OH, and a Master’s in Christian Leadership from Lindsey Wilson College, and a Doctorate in Church Planting Ministry from Asbury Theological Seminary.

By 2003, The Kentucky Conference’s New Church Development Office recruited Alvarez to plant a new church in Hopkinsville at St. John UMC. The church grew rapidly, baptisms abounded, several small groups formed, and the community at large was transformed through outreach ministries. However, that year Alvarez faced his life’s most painful trial; his faith tested like never before. His loving wife, Janet, passed away in a car accident. Devastated, he re-evaluated his life. Once again, he was stripped of everything except his heart for Jesus.

“I realized that Christ was all that mattered,” he said. “The Holy Spirit said to me in prayer to just keep walking and that I would see my wife again, as she had become a part of that great cloud of witnesses, just as every loved one who has ever died in Christ.”

Urgency swept Alvarez after the tragedy; his awareness of human fragility more apparent than ever. His passion to bring others to Christ grew stronger. In 2004 he was appointed to pastor Fuente de Avivamiento (Springs of Revival) UMC in Lexington, where under his leadership the church lived up to its name, growing more than he could have ever imagined. The church led the Conference with the most professions of faith for three consecutive years.

He met and married Zulayne, who also became a licensed local pastor, joyfully shouldering the ministry alongside him. New leaders emerged and new churches were planted. Soon a second

campus and house churches sprang up in revival around the city and beyond, impacting Richmond, Georgetown, Springfield, and Winchester. The church became the fastest growing in the Jurisdiction, and Alvarez was honored by the UMC with the Harry Denman Evangelism Award.

“The opportunity to serve as a pastor to all has been a means of God’s sanctifying grace in my life,” Alvarez declared.

Today, all churches Alvarez has had the privilege of planting are flourishing and continuing to make disciples to advance the Kingdom of God around the world. Centered on building inclusive relationships, Alvarez’s goal is to live into the man God has called him to be. His wife, Zulayne, along with their young daughter, Sulam, are his ardent encouragers and supporters. He finds joy in adding value to others, identifying their gifts, and encouraging them through words and actions, eagerly responding to his call to awaken local churches for the glory of God.