



Episode 81: Preparing People to Lead in a Multi-Ethnic Reality

Featuring: Mingo Palacios & Larry Acosta

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Transcript:

Mingo Palacios: [00:11](#)

Hey everybody, thanks for tuning in to the PD Podcast. You know, from time to time we get the luxury of traveling around the country and actually bringing our podcast to conferences and events that are happening all over the country. This conversation took place at Urban Youth Workers Institute conference. It was a collaboration podcasts where we combined both our efforts and Urban Youth Workers efforts to bring one cohesive podcast. I hope you enjoy it.

Mingo Palacios: [00:37](#)

Welcome everybody to the Urban Youth Workers podcast. A first so far that I'm sure we are putting out

to the public. It's been great all day. We've been on the platform talking to pastors and leaders and speakers alike about the value of urban ministry and I'm sitting across the table at the moment from me right now, the founder of Urban Youth Workers Institute, Larry Acosta. Thank you so much for making time to come and talk to our audience about ministry.

Larry Acosta: [01:11](#)

Yeah absolutely love being here, man.

Mingo Palacios: [01:12](#)

It's great because this is a collaboration of podcasts. So, Purpose Driven Ministries, Saddleback Church, Rick Warren, as the Pastor, Urban Youth Workers Institute your efforts as a pastor here in the urban areas of Los Angeles and beyond. This speaks at a larger level of what I think the Lord is doing across so many ministries, the collaborative spirit of the capitol C Church on display. And so I love it too. It's my honor to be here. I have watched and engaged with so many of the people that have been on the platform today and some of the people that have been just navigating the blacktop in the heart of every person is to see God more elevated, more present, more glorified in each of their expressions. As the founder of this conference, the institute, the cohorts, what's it been like to father this movement?

Larry Acosta: [02:14](#)

You know, it's interesting how God put a vision inside my heart. At that time, I didn't even know one urban youth worker, I just knew He was calling me to go be a role model, a mentor and a coach to emerging ethnic leaders. At the time I was emerging Mingo,

most of my mentors or have the lighter hue and they were awesome. They were professors and pastors and people that were in leadership in the church. But I knew that this day would come when this multi ethnic reality would be upon us. You see right now, over half the world's population lives in cities and 60 percent of those are 18 years old or younger. So this is a young, an urban world. And so we need these emerging leaders of color to be equipped, to be empowered, to be mentored, to be disciplined so that they can be the face of the Church, big C, to translate the Gospel to kids who would otherwise may be not be in some of our churches that are focused maybe in the burbs or some of those places. So it's just a different reality. And I think the Lord stirred in me that, "Hey, this day was coming. I want you to go prepare some of those leaders, empower them, equip them, and prepare them to lead the Church into this multiethnic reality."

Mingo Palacios: [03:36](#) And the fact that the Lord gave You the vision before the tide came in.

Larry Acosta: [03:40](#) Yes.

Mingo Palacios: [03:43](#) Certainly there had to have been seasons where you're asking God like, is this going to happen?

Larry Acosta: [03:47](#) Right.

Mingo Palacios: [03:48](#) Right.

Larry Acosta: [03:48](#) Definitely. At the time when we first started there, there was actually a youth culture. Suburban youth

ministry and urban youth ministry were quite a ways apart. And over the last 15 years we've seen urban youth culture and suburban youth culture come progressively closer through music and fashion and media and now they actually overlap a little bit where you'll get kids that even growing up in the burbs, but they're still rocking music, urban hip hop music, you know? And so we've seen these youth cultures come closer together. But when we started they were definitely a distinct thing. No doubt about it.

Mingo Palacios: [04:34](#)

So amazing that word came out of both of our mouths is the exact same time. It's interesting too that culture has been your probably ally over the years in certain senses because I think of how many things have celebrated the fusion fact, right? So you think of like food becoming something that is celebrated when it crosses over. Right?

Larry Acosta: [04:59](#)

Yes.

Mingo Palacios: [04:59](#)

And I think of collaborative work spaces; this is no longer just one company's space, but it's a blend of several. So as there has culturally been a permission for things to combine and blend, so follows the Church, right?

Larry Acosta: [05:16](#)

Yes.

Mingo Palacios: [05:16](#)

Unfortunately we're still in that season where-

Larry Acosta: [05:18](#)

Catchin' up a little bit.

Mingo Palacios: [05:18](#) The Church oftentimes is playing catch up. But, what a perfect time because I think that the local church needs an example of a blended community more than ever. And it's funny because as a Mexican American kid, man, my youth was riddled with, am I this or am I that? And some people will make you ask; they'll make you choose. And you know, I've got an American mom and I've got a Mexican dad and it's almost more celebrated today that I've got both backgrounds in my DNA-

Larry Acosta: [05:55](#) Absolutely.

Mingo Palacios: [05:56](#) Than the opposite, right? So, as somebody who was like a forefather to the urban ministry and to really pay into the urban youth worker, what does the landscape look like today that you get excited about? And then, what is just around the corner maybe as you dreamed about it so many years ago, what are you dreaming about now that we're going to see unfold in the next season?

Larry Acosta: [06:24](#) Yeah. So when I get really excited about now is that I see all these emerging leaders that feel empowered and equipped and they're leading in significant ways. When I was first emerging, I was this young Latino kid that was the first in my family to go to college. And the first job I got at this church that was predominantly my Anglo brothers and sisters that were in leadership and I was like the chip in the chocolate chip ice cream, the one brown kid on the team, right?

Mingo Palacios: [06:55](#) [laughing] And you got a shot, right?

Larry Acosta: [06:55](#) I got a shot, right. But really into that, there were times when my insecurities and like, "Hey, am I enough" or, "Do I have what it takes?"

Mingo Palacios: [07:06](#) Comparison factor.

Larry Acosta: [07:07](#) Exactly. And I always felt that the brown kid man had to show up and I better not screw up because I got approved to the dominant culture that I-

Mingo Palacios: [07:17](#) So you had to work twice as hard.

Larry Acosta: [07:18](#) Exactly, that I have a seat at the table. And so I don't see that as much anymore. I'm seeing this emergence of urban leaders, ethnic leaders that are at the table and leading things. And, and so it's been fun to be a part of maybe fanning into flames some of the gifts in them through mentorship and equipping. And then now to see our platform even here at the UYWI national conference and the diversity and the representation. And so I'm excited. So what God called me to do 20 plus years ago, now we're seeing a wave-

Mingo Palacios: [07:54](#) The fruit of that labor.

Larry Acosta: [07:56](#) The fruit of that. And now these leaders that are leading in and key ministries and key ways now in the future, what I get excited about is think about reaching this fatherless and broken generation. And the need to translate the gospel in ways they can connect to it.

That's going to have to mean that we're going have to have leaders of color building diverse leadership teams that do church in this multiethnic array of leadership that makes the Church relevant to these emerging generation.

Mingo Palacios: [08:31](#)

Yeah.

Larry Acosta: [08:31](#)

It's not going to be able to happen like it-

Mingo Palacios: [08:40](#)

Traditionally has.

Larry Acosta: [08:40](#)

Yeah. Traditional. Previous generations. So let's just say that. And so the intentionality behind building multiethnic teams and having those hard, awkward conversations and creating a culture in the Church where we actually wrestle through those urban issues and those challenges.

Mingo Palacios: [08:56](#)

Misconceptions.

Larry Acosta: [08:56](#)

Misconceptions. We're going to talk about it right here. But that's what's going to help make Jesus known to people that maybe are currently outside the four walls of the church. That's what's going to help translate the Gospel in ways when they can see reconciliation in the lives of leadership and leaders that have gone past racial barriers

New Speaker: [09:19](#)

[crosstalk]

Larry Acosta: [09:20](#)

Love for one another. That's going to be a powerful apologetic of love and reconciliation and grace that's going to authenticate the power of the Gospel that's

going to authenticate who Jesus is in and it's going to allow some of these emerging generations that are a Gen Z that's supposedly the most atheistic generation ever to be born in the US. And some of these kids, when they see that kind of reflection of Jesus and the Church, I believe it has hope for the future and what the Church is called to.

Mingo Palacios: [09:52](#) It'll be hard to refute, right?

Larry Acosta: [09:53](#) Yeah.

Mingo Palacios: [09:53](#) It's hard to refute relationship and real love on display despite what you might read on a blog or what your social community might be speaking in opposition to what you're seeing with your own two eyes and feeling with your own heart. You know, it's funny, I heard Rick say just the other day, he said, "If you have a hard time with diversity as a believer, you're going to hate heaven" because God made them every creed, every race, every pace, every size, every shape. And he celebrates every single one because he knows stamped in his image is the opportunity to reach every single color and kind and everything in the middle of it. And so if you're locked up because somebody makes you feel uncomfortable because they're not like you in any sense of the shape or form and eternity is going to be a challenge, right? So better to deal with it on this side of the grave. Right?

Larry Acosta: [10:53](#) Yeah. Get ready.

Mingo Palacios: [10:53](#) Right. Than that side. And we'd help you figure that out. I'm sure. [laughing]

Larry Acosta: [10:57](#) Now what's crazy is that when you think about, when you see what God is doing to advance his kingdom and the church and all throughout Latin America and South America, there's going to be so many brown folk in the Kingdom. Right? And when you think of the church growing and expanding all throughout Africa and Asia, I mean, it is going to be an incredible, rich display.

Mingo Palacios: [11:23](#) It'll be a display. Yeah. It will be a display.

Larry Acosta: [11:25](#) It will be awesome. Yes.

Mingo Palacios: [11:26](#) Larry, I've got a question for you. As an emerging leader myself, what did you do in the season of planting before you saw the fruit? What did you do to keep yourself focused on the goal? I know that God gives you the vision and then the payout comes seasons later. So, what were some of the things that you did? Who did you surround yourself with that kept you aimed at that vision God had for you?

Larry Acosta: [11:55](#) So I would just tell young leaders that when God speaks to you in the light, that when the hard times come, don't doubt in the darkness what He showed you in the light. So there were times when I knew the vision He gave for me and there were times when fundraising was hard. There were times when maybe numbers weren't what I had hoped for at certain events or it was difficult maybe to go into a new city

and build a bridge, like, "Who are you? Who said you're trying to gather our folk?" I felt that kind of pressure like Moses in that season when he was trying to lead change and it wasn't exactly embraced. So, I would just tell young leaders, man, if God gives you that vision, you've got to stay at it and wake up every day and keep doing what He told you to do when He told you to do it, keep doing it faithfully until you get that breakthrough and see the results. And so, I think I was just kind of tenacious enough to stay at it long enough to see the fruit. And so that's the one thing.

Mingo Palacios: [13:07](#) Ignorant enough to kick in and just go for it. [laughing]

Larry Acosta: [13:10](#) Ignorant enough to say yes and then stubborn enough to stay at it.

Mingo Palacios: [13:14](#) Yes.

Larry Acosta: [13:14](#) So a lot of people tap out prematurely because it's hard. And I'm not saying it wasn't hard. You can ask my wife. There were times when funding wasn't coming in or where I was discouraged and she had to kind of compassionately encourage me and say, "Babe, stay the course. It's going to turn around. Get out there man." I think whether you're doing community development or you're building a church or you're reaching a gang influenced neighborhood, whatever God's called you to do, man, it's hard. It's hard to break up that hard ground. And yet stay at it, give yourself five, seven, 10 years and see what God

might do. But you know, the challenge is we come from instant everything.

New Speaker: [14:05](#) [crosstalk]

Larry Acosta: [14:05](#) Right? And we'll tap out prematurely and you never get to see the fruit. And so one of my greatest joys is to walk around here and see all these leaders. I think back, man, some of those nights I wanted to tap out and say, "Man, God call someone else to build this thing." You know? And then I would have short-circuited.

Mingo Palacios: [14:27](#) You would have shorted this opportunity.

Larry Acosta: [14:28](#) Exactly. I would have never been here to see the promise land.

Mingo Palacios: [14:32](#) I want to commend you because you had said something about the way that you want to lead this gathering and it's not just a desire, it's an action that you're doing. So, while there is a green room to serve, well I'm assuming there's a green room that's serving your platform speakers, you as the founder. I said the president and the word present rarely go together and yet that's the thing that you're really focusing on. Can you unpack that? Because there are. There will be presidents of organizations who will listen to this recording and there is a shift in your leadership style that I hope takes. Will you unpack it for me?

Larry Acosta: [15:10](#) So when God first called us to launch Urban Youth Workers Institute, I knew that I wanted to do urban

ministry different than when I was often modeled by previous boomer and builder generation leaders of color. Not trying to hate on them. I'm just trying to say we needed to get from behind the pulpit and behind the ivory tower and we needed to model what it looks like to be a shepherd. Shepherds need to smell like their sheep. They need to get from behind the pulpit and off the platform and among the people. So, we tried to create a culture for next-gen ethnic leaders to say, look, "I don't want you to replicate some of the unhealthy things that were modeled by previous generations, you've been called to reach a broken and fatherless generation. So you're going to have to be more relational than was ever modeled for you. You're going to have to look people in the eye. You're going to have to be accessible. You're going to have to speak words of life to people. You're going to have to let people get close to you."

Mingo Palacios: [16:13](#)

Proximity.

Larry Acosta: [16:13](#)

"You're going to have to have people in your home. You're going to have to take people with you when you go to speak; you're going to have to be relationally connected with people. One of our core values is relational youth ministry and I would be remiss if I didn't live that out at our conference. On my business card, people would always tell me, "Are you kidding me? You got your mobile number for any youth worker around the country that might want to call you." I go, "Yes."

Mingo Palacios: [16:40](#) Dangerous.

Larry Acosta: [16:40](#) "Because I want to model accessibility."

Mingo Palacios: [16:41](#) Yeah that's good.

Larry Acosta: [16:41](#) And they don't abuse it. They call sometimes and I'm privileged to pray over a leader from another city that just needed to test it and to feel like, "Is this dude really serious?" And yeah, I'm serious. If it goes to voicemail, I make sure I call them back and they always tell me, "I can't believe you called me back. No Way." Like, "This is real!" But now they're going to go be that kind of leader for the youth they're shepherding.

Mingo Palacios: [17:06](#) That's the model.

Larry Acosta: [17:08](#) Accessible, relational, affirming, encouraging, you know, I want this next gen of leadership to do it differently.

Mingo Palacios: [17:18](#) I feel like so many people fail to realize that their actions become models.

Larry Acosta: [17:23](#) Yeah.

Mingo Palacios: [17:23](#) Right? That every person who they have proximity to or access to, they're looking to build a framework and an expectation around the actions that they're seeing right in front of them. So you may not think that you're living a model, that you're building a model, but in fact you do because kids who have no model, they want to build one. Right? So if you're the person they have

proximity to and you're present and you're available and you're accessible and you're invested and you're making eye contact, that becomes their model.

Larry Acosta: [17:53](#) Yes.

Mingo Palacios: [17:54](#) Right? That becomes their model.

Larry Acosta: [17:55](#) They'll go and do likewise.

Mingo Palacios: [17:56](#) That's what my child does. I don't have to think about it too much. My son does that which he sees me do. And Larry, you've been a really incredible person just to shadow just for a few weeks from when I saw you at the conference that we were at in Coachella present with an entourage, not to support you, but just that they knew that this was the true you everywhere that you walked. And then up in Sacramento praying for me, even here, you had no idea who or what I was doing, but just going, "It's worth praying for you. If you're feeling overwhelmed. That's what we should do."

Larry Acosta: [18:37](#) We need each other man.

Mingo Palacios: [18:38](#) Yes! So good. So I got one last question because we could talk all day, but for our listeners, what is it that you are hoping every single one of these people on the platform are walking away with?

Larry Acosta: [18:54](#) I'm hoping that they feel encouraged in their calling that they feel like, "I'm still in. I'm still committed to reaching the last and lost and the least in my city. I'm

not tapping out. I'm not going to burnout, boil dry, I'm staying in it. God called me to this thing called Urban Youth Ministry and I'm not going to quit." So my goal for this conference is that they, at the end of this conference will say, "I'm in for one more year. One more year." And then I hope they come back next May and I'm going to ask them again, "Are you still in? Will you stay in to the call to reach urban youth for one more year?" And I hope they'll sign up again. And by God's grace that will, we said earlier about sticking to it, waking up every day and doing the last thing God's called you to do to reach urban young people, make urban disciples. I hope at the end of this conference they'll stay in it and they'll translate the Gospel in ways that kids can hear it, who would otherwise not engage the church, but they'll see the church in action as we go out to their neighborhoods and schools and communities and barrios and parks and all of that man. So I hope they'll say, "I'm still in. One more year."

Mingo Palacios: [20:14](#)

Larry, fire me up. If people want to get involved at a deeper level with Urban Youth Workers Institute, if they want to jump into a cohort or if they want to find where you guys will be next, how do they do that?

Larry Acosta: [20:27](#)

UYWI.org, Urban Youth Work Institute. UYWI.org and you can see everything about us. There's multiple resources. We have a free discipleship tool kit that helps you have spiritual conversations with churched and unchurched kids. Thirty-six videos that cover all the basics of the faith. It's called The Discipleship Tool

Kit. And so check us out. We want to journey with you. Stay at what God called you to do, especially if it's reaching the last, the lost and the least in the city.

Mingo Palacios: [20:57](#)

I love it. I'm going to hit you with this last one with a monster amount of listeners that this will end up reaching, how is it that this listening audience can be praying for you guys specifically? You specifically?

Larry Acosta: [21:11](#)

Yeah. I think for me, you know, I'm at that season where 25 years, coming on 25 years and I'm passing the baton to a lot of young leaders that I've been mentoring for several years now and I'm passing that baton of leadership in the Kingdom, other emerging ethnic leaders that I really want to lead this next season, this next wave. I feel like I was maybe one of those innovators to some degree or privileged to be in that space before multiethnic leadership development was sexy before people were trying to plant multiethnic churches, before it was the buzzword, we were trying to build this farm system of emerging ethnic leaders. So pray for me as I really pass that baton on to some of those emerging leaders that need to lead this movement, this Kingdom Movement for this next season. And so, there's a lot of great talent in the kingdom and we need to empower them there. There's churches right now that the demographics have changed in those churches and they need to relaunch with a multiethnic team of leadership, a pastor of color and a multiethnic team around them and relaunch that church in that urban

community. I feel like UYWI has the best farm system, if you will, of emerging ethnic leadership.

Mingo Palacios: [22:35](#) You've got a bench.

Larry Acosta: [22:37](#) A deep bench, but they don't maybe have that church facility, they don't have access to it, or those resources. But I've seen this already happened where we've seen multiple churches restarted, replanted and they're growing and thriving because they're more contextually relevant. So the demographics now represent that community. So anyway, thank you for this Mingo, it's been great to be with you today.

Mingo Palacios: [23:01](#) Larry, you are a force to be reckoned with man and from the millennial generation representing, I was born in '82, I'm thankful that guys like you crack open their lives and give just a little bit of a leash to follow along with. We need more of you, bro. We need more Larry Acosta's in this space. So, if you're listening and you're a seasoned leader, be encouraged that the more you make yourself available, the more potential you have to disciple and lead well. The false truth in this is that the more plat formed that you become, the more impact you'll have. And the reality is it's the more accessible you make yourself, that's where God will pour into you the next generation. That's where He'll bring up to you the next potential leader. You have to be found amongst the sheep not in a the ivory tower. I love that's what you said. And that's a battle man, because I know that media tells us the more popular you get, you can set yourself up in a way and

that's where you belong, and then you'll miss it. So Larry, thanks for smelling like the sheep, bro.

Larry Acosta: [24:11](#) All right.

Mingo Palacios: [24:12](#) For our listeners, if you liked this conversation, do me a favor and share it or tag somebody in it and that will help spur on the message, this gospel. There's more people that need to hear this heart across the table from me. So thanks for listening.

Mingo Palacios: [24:28](#) We appreciate you guys and we'll talk to you soon. We hope today's insights left you feeling inspired and propelled towards your greatest potential. Thanks again for joining us for another episode of the PD Podcast. Until next time.

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