

My name is Karen Zavala. I am 28 years old and I am a mother of two boys, senior and graduating in a couple of weeks. Attending Dominican has been a challenge because of my immigration and economic status but my persistence has allowed me to make it this far.

When I joined Ministry en lo Cotidiano, I was seeking faith, I was seeking truth and love, and now that I am a Mom of two toddlers, I want to be able to guide them on this path of faith, this path of truth and love. As a child, I remember going to church on Sundays but as time passed, my family became distant from the Church and less active in their faith. This withdrawal left me with questions. When I applied to Ministry en lo Cotidiano, I saw it as an opportunity to ask those questions and, perhaps, discover the answers. MLC, was a tool that helped me pursue my truth and a vehicle to discovering the caritas and veritas that became absent in my life.

One of my first Theological Reflections brought up the question “Who Am I”? The answer was not in front of me in the beginning of my journey in Ministry en lo Cotidiano. Even more, in order to know who I am, I was inclined to first answer the question, Where am I from?

I always had a hard time answering this because I was brought to Chicago when I was 2 years old but have lived here for 26 years without returning to Mexico. Every time people asked me where I was from, I would answer, “I am from Mexico”. Then their next question was, “What part?” If I answered D.F., then they would keep asking questions that I could not answer. Other times, conversations led to an awkward feeling when they talked about food, or traditions from Mexico. When I was not able to follow through their conversations, it made me doubt whether I was Mexican.

In our Theological Reflection we read an article by Roberto Goizueta, where he says “I was not and could never be either: instead, I was both, I was in between.” His words spoke to me. All these years, I struggled to find myself and fit on either side. As I got older, I became distant from my Latina identity. Even more, I had not realized or reflected on what it meant to be Latina. I had become alienated from my parents’ culture, religion, and traditions. I began to think it was only my parents’ culture and not mine. Through the community that I found in MLC, my idea of what it means to be a Latina expanded and caused me to take ownership over my own identity. I have come up with the conclusion that each encounter cultivates our-self.

As an MLC intern for the past two year, I had the privilege to work at Catholic Charities and at St. Joseph Services. As an intern I have; helped in a food pantry, tutored 3rd to 5th graders, taught Adults ESL, and Citizenship classes. In exchange for my service, they gave me love truth and love. When assisting with the food pantry I met a woman who would come with her 3-year-old son, and every time I saw him, I remembered my son, Evan. The last time I saw her come in, she told us about her husbands’ diagnosis of cancer. She gave me strength. Witnessing the love of a mother and the sacrifices she made for her family allowed me to relate to her on so many levels.

In theological reflection we were introduced to the term “Accompaniment”. One of my favorite quotes from Roberto Goizueta says, “to relate to another as a person, I must ‘fuse’ with him or her ... as whole human beings”.

When assisting at, Catholic Charities, with their food pantry that is exactly what I did. Race and economic status did not exist. We shared la lucha, and what the day had brought us. Of course we had different struggles but, we walked hand in hand.

Despite my schedule of a full-time job, school, and kids, I still found the energy and enthusiasm to go to St. Josephs and Catholic Charities. For me, it was Caritas Veritas that drove that desire to make a difference. Through reflection, I found it easier to listen to God. Many times, I found myself at the right time and the right place. In our last retreat, we were asked to take a sheet of paper without looking at it. Each piece of paper had a station of the cross and we were to read and reflect on it. I got station number 4, Jesus Meets his mother, which was providential for the one mother in the room. Reflecting on the mother and her son in the food pantry, reflecting oh who I am as a mother and my struggles, reading about Mary's suffering helped me find strength every morning when I leave my two boys fast asleep. Without the understanding of Caritas and Veritas, of my own faith and culture, that MLC has helped me to work through; I would not get through tough times.

Through MLC, I realized I have parents who sacrificed their home, their culture, and family so that they could provide a better life for me. **Their sacrifice is now the foundation of my aspirations. I want to make my parents and family proud of my accomplishments in this country.**

One of my struggles was involving my parents in my schoolwork who were Spanish speakers. My Mom raised me and my three younger brother and sisters, while my dad worked day and night. Through my college, my path alienated me from my parents. But being part of

Ministry and *lo Cotidiano* made me realize how my parents accompanied me in my education. In *Theological Reflection*, I recalled my dad teaching me to read in English despite his accent. My mother was not able to help me with the research or the content of the assignment but, she helped me to make my projects stand out; we used cotton balls to make letters in three dimensions for my posters. My mom, to this day, has always pushed me forward when I want to give up. When tutoring children in the SMART after-school program, I took the opportunity to sneak in some cotton balls to make their work stand out.

Mi nombre es Karen Zavala y tengo 28 años. Soy madre de dos niños, Aiden y Evan. Me graduo en un par de semanas con título en ciencias de computación y administración. Soy una mujer, soy Latina. Son las razones que me han hecho levantar cuando caigo en mis rodillas. Todas estas cosas me han hecho fuerte. Cuando caigo me levanto para seguir luchando. Como Ada María Isasi-Díaz escribió “la vida es la lucha”. No tengo todas las respuestas a mis preguntas pero MLC ha marcado el principio. Una cosa sí, ahora veo a mi comunidad que camina paso a paso alado mio y espero permanecer alado de ellos. Esto es mi Caritas y Veritas.