

**Candita Bauzá-Mattos,  
First Hispanic Woman Ordained  
in the Evangelical United Church  
of Puerto Rico**



**1. Getting to Know You**

Name:	Candita Bauzá-Mattos
A.B. Recipient honor:	2009
Career:	Ordained Minister
Hair Color:	Brown
Eyes:	Brown
Siblings:	None
Favorite School Subject:	History
Hobbies:	Reading, writing poetry, painting
Mentors:	My mother, my pastor

**2. "I called myself 'the pastor'"<sup>1</sup>**

My mother led me to the church when I was very young. She was one of the leaders of the church. I was five years old when I went for the first time to that church. Then I joined that church, Iglesia Evangélica Unida de Cuatro Calles in Ponce, Puerto Rico. My mother decided that I would be one of the leaders for small children under eight. I called myself "the pastor" and used to preach to them.

One time a person came to preach to the church. I don't remember her name. I was ten. I asked why we didn't have women pastors. She said they did in Pentecostal churches. In our church, we want our pastors to go to college and seminary. I said I wanted to go to college. Why not seminary too? I kept talking about that.

### 3. "I heard that my heart was jumping"

My pastor was also my mentor. The pastor said that in the United Church of Christ you can become a pastor if you want to, if you study and work hard. Every year, the denomination had activities for high school seniors who might want to go to seminary. The Puerto Rican Conference invited young and old pastors to talk to us. The pastors led workshops.



CANDITA—FOURTH TO THE RIGHT



By the time I decided to attend, my pastor and mentor encouraged it also. I went to the hills of Yuquiyú to the conference campground in Luquillo, Puerto Rico. One of the places I liked most was the outdoor worship center. We were in the middle of the mountains with a lake as the background.

As I sat there meditating, I said to God: "I'm not so sure what you want for me. If you want me to be your servant, show me the way."

I opened the Bible looking for a sign. My sign was Isaiah 6:8:

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and Who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"*

While I was reading, I heard that my heart was jumping. It felt like a fire. "I will do it, God, but I need help," I said. I still wasn't sure. I waited for about ten minutes. A bell began to ring. They were calling us to assembly.

They started to sing a hymn – "Jesus Christ is calling you. Who is going to answer to this call? Send me." I felt that the hymn was talking to me. I was only fifteen. After that whenever I had any doubt, every time in some way, Isaiah 6 always came to me. It was like an assurance.

### 4. College Time, 1965 – 1969

I finished high school at fifteen and went straight to college. I received a bachelor's degree in philosophy with a minor in Spanish and in sociology.

I used to come back to my home church every weekend to help with the church in Ponce. The church in Ponce supported me financially. They gave

me a scholarship and helped me to drive back and forth by public transportation. Each way took one and a half hours. At 5 a.m. each Monday, I returned to college.

## 5. Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, 1969 – 1972



I had the privilege of being the first Hispanic woman to graduate from Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico in the first 60 years of its existence. Because there was no dormitory for girls, I was put in a house along with other women students. The two other girls had different studies. I was the only woman in the masters of theology program. Another woman began while I was there, but she did not survive the program.

In the classes, sometimes the teachers asked me to leave the room. "Would you like to go for a drink of water?" one teacher would ask. He had a bad mouth and wanted to tell a joke. He was an excellent teacher though.

While I was in seminary, I worked in the church with the Christian Education Committee. The committee members were mostly teachers. The seminary assigned students to small local congregations. Under supervision, we would serve, offer pastoral care, preach and teach. I was given special dispensation to do the sacraments and ceremonies because there were no other pastors. The dispensation was similar to a license for that particular area.

## 6. Church History

[EDITORIAL INSERT]. Before continuing with Candia's story, we insert here a bit of history. The Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico was a project of the American Missionary Association, as was Ryder Memorial Hospital. The hospital was started in 1914 by Congregational missionaries. Today, Ryder Memorial remains part of the UCC's Council for Health and Human Service Ministries (CHHSM).<sup>2</sup>

In the CHHSM Covenant Inclusion Manual, six Conferences in the Northeast – Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont – list Ryder Memorial Hospital as a special mission.

THE ISLAND OF PUERTO RICO.<sup>3</sup> In 1898, as a result of the Spanish-American War, Puerto Rico became American property. The island lies between



North and South America with the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Caribbean Sea on the other. Puerto Rico is about as long and twice as wide as Long Island, NY. Now home to four million people, the island had a population of one million in 1900.<sup>4</sup>

THE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN PUERTO RICO.<sup>5</sup> Today, the island is about twenty percent Protestant. In 1999, it was estimated that the Disciples of Christ was the largest Protestant faith group on the island. In 1898, Protestant churches immediately wanted to become active on the Roman Catholic island.

Missionary agencies shaped a friendly agreement called the North American Protestant Comity Agreement. To minimize competition, the city would be divided into church districts. As a result, the American Missionary Association reported:<sup>6</sup>

This cooperative action and the splendid impression of Protestant unity which it has made, is one of the weightiest elements in the remarkable progress of but little more than a decade [7].

The chief cities of San Juan and Ponce were left as open opportunity for all churches to occupy:

Even here there has been a general understanding as to the division of the work, one denomination emphasizing religious activities, another educational, and another medical missions; and all the forces cooperating heartily with one another [7-8].

In addition to missionaries from the Disciples of Christ and the Congregational churches, American Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Evangelical Lutheran, Christian & Missionary Alliance, and Evangelical United Brethren churches readied for education.

In 1899, the American Missionary Association came to Puerto Rico. The AMA was founded in 1846. Its founders were primarily Congregational church goers and abolitionists. The American Missionary Association was among the first in Puerto Rico. It sent an evangelist and eight teachers [7].

With typical educational, social, and medical goals, among its tasks was to determine "how to establish a free and democratic church in a society essentially without a middle class."

THE UNITED CHURCH OF PUERTO RICO. In 1908 as church organization evolved, the Federation of Evangelical Churches of Puerto Rico formed. By 1909, there were ten Congregational churches in the Congregational District. This district was located in the far eastern area of the island. Surrounding these churches were 22 chapels or preaching stations. Two missionary couples supervised the two main divisions. One couple was in the north eastern area centering around Fajardo. The other worked in the south eastern division around Humacao.

By 1916, the church would be known as the Evangelical Union of Puerto Rico. In 1931, Iglesia Evangélica Unida de Puerto Rico [IEUPR] (Evangelical United Church of Puerto Rico) was formed. It was recognized as a regional conference of the Congregational Christian Churches. It was also known as the Association of Evangelical Churches of Puerto Rico (1934) and the Evangelical Council of Puerto Rico (1954).

With the union that became the United Church of Christ, the church became the Evangelical United Church of Puerto Rico. In 1961, the IEUPR became a conference of the United Church of Christ. As of 2006, the United Church of Christ Yearbook listed 66 churches in Puerto Rico. That would be the last Yearbook that listed churches in the United Church of Christ in Puerto Rico.

A SAD DAY. On Saturday, June 10, 2006, during its annual Assembly, Iglesia Evangélica Unida de Puerto Rico (United Evangelical Church of Puerto Rico), voted to disaffiliate with the United Church of Christ. The final vote was 75 percent to 25 percent. The former United Church of Christ Conference now is known as the Evangelical United Church of Puerto Rico.

After General Synod 2005, when General Synod votes in favor of the gay coalition, the whole Puerto Rican Conference was divided, Candita said. The churches were distressed over the stance of the United Church of Christ on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues.

It was a sad day for Candita Bauzá-Mattos. "For me, it was so sad when they voted in 2007 at General Synod. It was painful, too painful," she said from her office in Cleveland:

All my life in Puerto Rico, I grew up not too related to the United Church of Christ, but when I came here and saw the relationship that the United Church of Christ and my church had, and as I learned all the history between the United Evangelical Church of Puerto Rico and the United Church of Christ, I felt that I belonged to something that was not only brave but a gift that gives meaning to my life and to my ministry.

It was a good relationship between the two denominations. Many people in local congregations in Puerto Rico are still crying [because of the decision]. Part of me is there. My roots are there. I cannot deny that or forget that what I am now is because of that church. What that church gave to me I will keep forever. What I am is what they gave to me, their gift to me.

A SAD DAY, ALSO, FOR THE UCC. The Rev. John H. Thomas, then United Church of Christ general minister and president, called the action “deeply painful and profoundly disappointing,” but said that the denomination “respectfully, though regretfully, honors the decision of the Assembly.”<sup>7</sup>

While the action draws to a close the formal partnership, John Thomas said the UCC is committed to finding a way for retaining the important relationships, if desired.

Some links do remain, Candita said, in the campground, Ryder Memorial Hospital, and the denomination's support of the Church's Global Mission network, and the seminary.

## **7. First Hispanic Woman Pastor**

Thirty-four years earlier on November 10, 1972, I became the first Hispanic woman ordained from the Evangelical United Church of Puerto Rico. After seminary I worked with the Iglesia Evangélica Unida, Calle Arzuaga in Rio Piedras. The church invited me to be the associate pastor. That was one of the first times that a church had two pastors. They asked that I be ordained. Since I had just finished seminary, I met with the Church and Ministry Committee. I served the church for about seven months.

In January 1973, I was called during a time of crisis to Iglesia Evangélica Unida Cuatro Calles, Ponce, my home church. The denomination took note that I was a member of that church. They wanted me to serve as an interim until the situation improved or until they could find a pastor willing to pastor the congregation for a longer time. I served my home church and another congregation with whom they were yoked until September when they hired a minister.

## **8. "The students, teachers, and administration were my congregation."**

I also had married in 1972. My husband and I worked hard for years. We had been engaged for nine years. Hector wanted to be a pastor, too; but then he was drafted by the Army. After that he said: “You are the one who will be the pastor.” He always supported me, my best and strongest

supporter. I was 13 when I met him. He was 17. We did everything together.

We have a boy, Hector, Jr. and a girl, Heidi. I had to leave the ministry when my son was born. I had to make a decision to some dedicated time for him. I asked for a leave of absence. During that time I worked part time at the seminary library.



CANDITA & HER HUSBAND HECTOR

When Hector, Jr. was three, he started school at a Seventh Day Adventist school. The owners of the school asked me to work with them as dean of students because I was an ordained pastor. I worked in that capacity until 1988. I was also the counselor for the teachers, administration, and students. They were my congregation. During that time our daughter was born.

## **9. Project 1990**

One century after the church came to Puerto Rico, I came to the mainland and introduced Hispanics to our new church home. My family moved to California for my husband's work. My husband came first in 1988. I wanted for the kids to finish the school year in Puerto Rico.

While he was waiting for us, he looked for a church with the UCC logo. He found First Congregational Church in Moreno Valley and joined it. We started communication with the congregation. When we all finally arrived in California, the church people were waiting for us. The whole family joined the church.

We were the first Hispanics to join that congregation. Hispanics were not so familiar with the United Church of Christ. Two blocks away were a big Catholic Church and Pentecostal churches – easier for some Hispanic people to find.

Then we started Project 1990 to bring more Hispanics into the congregation. While doing that project, I introduced myself to the conference and found myself on the church development committee. I transferred my standing. I joined the conference and the association.

When the conference minister of the Southern California Nevada Conference left to serve in the national structure, I was called to the interim position. For the two years that the conference was in transition, I was both administrator and overseer of the church development project.

The conference then called me to be conference minister for Eastern Association. I served in that position until 1998 when the conference decided to have two conference ministers without associate ministers.

## 10. Consultant

I went to Hershey, Pennsylvania, and worked with my husband as a house parent. From there I went to Cleveland and my husband and I joined La Iglesia Unida de Cristo Buenas Nuevas UCC, the first Hispanic church in Ohio. From 2000-2008, I supported that church by preaching every other Sunday.

In 2005, I became a consultant to the Council of Hispanic Ministries. I coordinated the work of the Council for Hispanic Ministries. In the national structure, there are four desks, African American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and Hispanic. We worked with the President.

The Council is an autonomous body working cooperatively with Council Regions and Associations, Conferences, and Ministries of the United Church of Christ. We promote its work among Hispanics/Latinos/Latinas in the United States of America, Mexico, and other nations of the Caribbean, Central and South America.

As Minister for Hispanic Relations in the Office of General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, my work has many arms. I



coordinate all the work of the Council of Hispanic Ministries, follow up the actions of the Council, administer the Brown scholarship for Hispanic seminarians, and do work for annual meetings, the President, and General Synod.

I feel satisfaction to know that I am at this moment helping the Council to do its coordinated work and to represent what the Council does in a dignified fashion. I also guide the Hispanic community to become aware of what it means to be a member of the United Church of Christ.

I am proud of being a pastor in the United Church of Christ. I want for my Hispanic colleagues to be as proud as I am and to support the denomination. I want them to understand why the United Church of Christ is the way it is.

## 11. So What about You?

- *I heard that my heart was jumping.* Candita was just completing high school when she happened upon the call of Isaiah and it spoke to her. Reread Isaiah 6:8.

**What earlier signs did she have that might have helped her to trust this sign?**

**Tell about a time that you opened the Bible looking for a sign. Did you trust the words as meant for you? Why or why not?**

**How did you act on what you read?**

- *If you want me to be your servant, show me the way.* Sometimes we recognize that God is showing us the way by a sense of confidence in what we are doing, a sense of "this is who I was meant to be."

**Write or tell about a time that you experienced this confidence.**

**Write or tell about a time that you recognized you were on the wrong path.**

- *I'm not so sure what you want from me, God.* Discernment is a careful process of deciding wisely using keen insight and good judgment.

**List the steps you usually take in the process of deciding wisely.**

**Where does "the leap of faith" [Tillich] fit on your path toward making a decision?**

- *After that, whenever I had any doubt, I returned to the Isaiah passage and felt reassured.*

**When you are in doubt, where do you go or what do you do to regain your courage?**

**Is there a particular passage from the Bible that encourages you to keep trying?**

- *I will do it, God, but I will need help. I still wasn't sure.*

**Tell about an "I will do it, God, but I will need help" time in your life.**

**What are your thoughts about needing to be completely sure when making a life-changing decision?**

**What do you think about moving forward when you are still uncertain that you can do what you set out to do?**

## **12. Church Family Project**

Visit with your pastor about becoming acquainted with the work of COREM, the Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries. Consider having a Sacred Conversation on Race. (See the new resource guide in Advocacy Resources on the Justice Page of ucc.org.)

## **13. Still Curious?**

### **Read about the UCC:**

- Go to <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/>  
Scroll to Los Primeros or UCC Firsts.
- Read about the Racial/Ethnic Ministries of the UCC. Scroll to COREM at Change the World at ucc.org.

### **Read about Education:**

- Read about six colleges founded by the American Missionary Association in Education and Equality: A short History of Six [African-American] Colleges. WE803. Call 866-822-8224, ext. 3848.
- Read about colleges, and theological schools of the UCC in Education to Engage the Soul: The Schools Related to the United Church of Christ. WE053. Call 866-822-8224, ext. 3848.
- Read Informando, Investigando: Lo que significa ser miembro de la Iglesia Unida de Cristo. Also in English as Inquiring and Exploring: The Meaning of Membership in the UCC.

### **Read about Marriage Equality:**

- Download God is Still Speaking about Marriage at [www.ucc.org/justice/marriage.htm](http://www.ucc.org/justice/marriage.htm) WCMGSM.
- View Sacred Covenants, Faithful Conversations, the DVD companion to God is Still Speaking about Marriage. The DVD is for individuals, congregations, and other groups engaging in the study of marriage equality as called for in the General Synod 25 resolution, "In support of marriage equality for all." \$20.00. WCMSCFC. Call 866-822-8224, ext. 3217.

### **Read about Global Ministries:**

- View the DVD, Connecting Threads around the World. Learn more about Global Ministries. WCMCT. Call 866-822-8224, ext. 3202. Free

- Read the Global Ministries Area Brochure

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1 With the exception of historical perspectives, Candita's story is a transcript of the writer's phone interview on November 6, 2009.

2 CHHSM at <http://www.chhsm.org/members/covenant-manual/section6.html>

3 <http://www.worldconvention.org>

4 In 1917 the Puerto Rican people were granted U.S. citizenship. In 1933, they voted to remain a self-governing commonwealth. Deciding against becoming a state, Puerto Rico remains a Territory.

5 From Clinton J. Holloway, National Profiles Editor, "National Profiles; Commonwealth of Puerto Rico" July 2007. Visit <http://www.worldconvention.org/country.php?c=PR>.

6 From AMA Constitution. From the Introduction to the 60- page pamphlet written from the perspective of the American missionary in Puerto Rico.

<http://www.archibe.org/details/congregationalmi00doug8>

Congregational Missionary Work In Porto Rico

By HARLAN PAUL DOUGLASS, Corresponding Secretary. New York: AMERICAN MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION

7 From "Vote by UCC Puerto Rico Conference to disaffiliate "deeply painful" says UCC Leader" reprinted from United Church News on Tuesday, June 13, 2006 and Chuck Currie Blogs

<http://www.chuckcurrieblogs.com/chuchcurrie/2006/06/votebyuccpue.html>

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Dallas (Dee) A. Brauninger. *Antoinette Brown Women: Finding Voice*, May, 2009