



KARLA NIVENS, BS, MAM

PASTOR | AUTHOR | WORSHIP LEADER | EDUCATOR | SPIRITUAL FORMATION COACH

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Who I am

Leadership Profile





Pastoral Leadership Philosophy

My Calling

I believe pastoral ministry is the sacred privilege of walking alongside people as God restores hope, deepens faith, and reveals purpose. Throughout more than three decades of leadership in churches, nonprofit organizations, higher education, worship ministries, and community initiatives, I have sought to cultivate environments where individuals encounter the transforming love of Christ and discover they are deeply known, genuinely valued, and intentionally called.

My calling extends beyond preaching to creating communities where people experience God's love through authentic relationships, meaningful worship, intentional discipleship, compassionate pastoral care, and opportunities to grow into the fullness of who God created them to be. Whether serving individuals, families, ministry leaders, or entire congregations, I strive to foster spaces where faith is nurtured, gifts are discovered, and lives are transformed through the work of the Holy Spirit.

I believe every person bears the image of God and possesses inherent dignity, regardless of ability, circumstance, background, or stage of life. This conviction shapes every aspect of my ministry and compels me to lead with humility, compassion, hospitality, and grace.

Karla Nivens





My theological formation has been shaped through graduate studies at Southern Methodist University, years of congregational leadership, nonprofit ministry, worship leadership, and faithful engagement with Scripture. These experiences have reinforced several convictions that guide my ministry.

The Image of God

I affirm that every human being is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27) and therefore possesses immeasurable worth and sacred dignity. This conviction shapes my understanding of pastoral ministry as one of welcome rather than exclusion, presence rather than performance, and accompaniment rather than hierarchy. The Church is called to become a living witness of God's Kingdom by creating communities where every person experiences belonging before achievement and grace before judgment.

The Ministry of Christ

Jesus modeled leadership that consistently moved toward those who were overlooked, marginalized, forgotten, or misunderstood. His ministry was characterized by compassion, hospitality, healing, truth, and reconciliation. Pastoral leadership therefore extends beyond preaching to cultivating environments where people experience God's love through authentic relationships, meaningful worship, intentional discipleship, and opportunities to serve according to their God-given gifts.

Spiritual Formation

Christian formation is the lifelong process of becoming more fully conformed to the image of Christ through Scripture, worship, prayer, community, service, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Healthy churches intentionally create rhythms that nurture spiritual maturity while caring for the emotional, relational, and vocational well-being of God's people.

Leadership as Servanthood

My ministry is rooted in servant leadership, spiritual formation, biblical teaching, and collaboration. I am passionate about equipping individuals to discover their God-given purpose while creating healthy ministry systems where people and organizations can thrive. My goal is to reflect Christ's compassion, wisdom, humility, and love as the Holy Spirit continually renews and equips me for faithful ministry.

Leadership within the Church is not about authority but the faithful stewardship of God's people. Following Christ's example, I seek to lead collaboratively, developing leaders rather than collecting followers and cultivating ministry cultures where people flourish through shared purpose, mutual encouragement, and service.

Theology of the Church

In John 17:21 God calls all to be unified as a witness to His power and authority. I believe our diverse backgrounds, experiences, and gifts strengthen the body of Christ and reflect God's creative design. The Church should be a community where every person is welcomed, valued, and empowered to participate in God's mission, embodying worship, hospitality, justice, compassion, and faithful service.

My leadership within the Church is grounded in servant leadership. Following Christ's example, I seek to shepherd with humility, courage, generosity, and wisdom while equipping others to use their gifts for the flourishing of the body of Christ.

Teaching Philosophy

Teaching is one of the Church's primary ministries of discipleship. My approach to education reflects the conviction that learning transforms lives when knowledge is integrated with spiritual formation, thoughtful reflection, and practical application.

Whether teaching university students, ministry leaders, worship teams, nonprofit professionals, or congregations, I strive to create learning environments that are intellectually engaging, spiritually grounded, and relationally authentic. I believe technology and digital environments can be flexible, constructive tools allowing equal access to information. I encourage students to ask meaningful questions, wrestle faithfully with Scripture, appreciate diverse perspectives, and discern how God is calling them to serve their communities.

I believe effective Christian education equips people not only to know biblical truth but also to embody it through lives characterized by wisdom, compassion, justice, humility, and hope.

Pastoral Care Philosophy

Pastoral Care attends to God's presence throughout our entire human story. The Church's role is communicating God as creator, full of grace, and abounding in love for each person's life. Faithful pastoral care allows space for people to draw from their internal resources, seeking healing from God, the source of life. Pastoral Care ministry can become a communal event where individuals give aid to others in the community.

Theology of Self-Care

In Genesis 2:1-3 God reserved an entire day for rest and worship, a holy day blessed by God. This is an example for all humanity, including pastors. Rest and self-care are essential parts of ministry. They are the format for loving others and loving self. I seek to show compassion to myself as a means of allowing an overflow of compassion for my community. Facing each day with faith, walking with the Lord, and balancing service with self-care is my goal as a disciple following Christ.

Mark 1:35-39 follows Jesus as he begins with quiet time then proceeds engaging in evangelism. Jesus began in a continuous time of prayer to connect with His purpose and His mission to restore humanity's broken connection with God (Luke 19:10). Balance is restored in quiet time so that I remain connected to God, the purpose for my life, and effective in serving others with the love of Jesus Christ (John 15:1-17). In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus extends an invitation to receive spiritual rest. Within this invitation is the belief in God, the Creator of heaven and earth (Genesis 1:1) and in Logos, present from the beginning of time. He is both God and was with God. Through Him, all creation came into being (John 1). I owe my existence to God, and I can trust Him as my source. Therefore, I trust Him to lead me into rest.



How I Lead **Resume**





KARLA NIVENS

BS, MAM

**WORSHIP LEADER | SPIRITUAL FORMATION
LEADER | MINISTRY STRATEGIST | PASTOR**

CAREER HISTORY

- **Worship Leader & Director of Justice Ministries**
Highland Park United Methodist Church
2004–2024
- **Board Member, Writer & Teacher**
Love Ministries | 1998–Present
- **Creative Writer Intern** Justice Ministries
International | 2025
- **Adjunct Professor**
Visible Music College | 2017–2020
- **Elementary Music Teacher**
Dallas ISD | 1999–2002

EDUCATION & CERTIFICATIONS

- Doctor of Strategic Leadership (DSL)
Liberty University | Accepted - Program Entry 2026
- Master of Arts in Ministry (MAM),
Perkins School of Theology,
Southern Methodist University | 2026
- Bachelor of Science in Speech Theology (BS),
Texas Tech University | 1998
- Elementary Education Teaching Certificate,
Dallas College | 2000

AWARDS & HONORS

- Best Faith Podcast Nominee | Christian
Filmmakers Network, Dallas, TX | 2025

LET'S CONNECT

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MINISTRY LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP & SPIRITUAL CARE

- Served the unhoused community through preaching, prayer, and pastoral presence during weekly worship services attended by approximately 100 individuals.
- Provided pastoral care, spiritual guidance, prayer, and crisis support to congregants and community members throughout 30+ years of ministry.
- Developed and led inclusive worship experiences and Bible studies for a community of 1,200, including individuals with disabilities, creating accessible opportunities for discipleship and spiritual growth.
- Preached and taught in churches, conferences, retreats, nonprofits, and community ministry events throughout the United States and abroad.
- Mentored emerging ministry leaders and young professionals discerning their vocational calling over three decades of ministry.
- Taught weekly Bible studies and discipleship classes for children, youth, and adults in church, educational, and community settings.
- Completed chaplaincy training in pastoral presence, compassionate listening, spiritual care, and crisis response, applying those principles to support individuals experiencing grief, illness, transition, and spiritual need.
- Authored the True Leaders with Heart devotional series, publishing multiple volumes that encourage servant leadership and spiritual growth.

WORSHIP LEADERSHIP & SPIRITUAL FORMATION

- Provided worship leadership within one of the nation's largest United Methodist congregations.
- Designed worship experiences for weekly services, regional retreats, leadership conferences, and special events.
- Recruited, trained, and shepherded paid and volunteer worship teams, cultivating spiritually healthy, collaborative worship cultures.
- Founded Every Heart Every Woman, a spiritual formation ministry that grew from a small-group Bible study into a broadcast ministry, annual retreat, and leadership platform reaching more than 9,000 individuals.
- Authored biblical leadership curriculum and devotional resources integrating Scripture, worship, prayer, spiritual disciplines, and servant leadership.
- Founded Karla Nivens Entertainment, producing faith-based leadership resources, original worship music, and inspirational media supporting congregational worship and spiritual growth.
- Served as a featured vocalist on Kirk Franklin's Grammy Award-winning The Rebirth of Kirk Franklin and ministered through gospel performances across Europe.

MINISTRY LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE CONTINUED

TEACHING, DISCIPLESHIP & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- Taught undergraduate courses in Spiritual Disciplines, Worship Leadership, Vocal Performance, and Christian leadership while mentoring future ministry leaders.
- Integrated biblical theology, spiritual formation, and leadership development into higher education instruction.
- Mentored emerging worship leaders in vocational discernment and ministry practice.
- Guided students in connecting theological reflection with practical ministry.
- Fostered learning environments emphasizing discipleship, collaboration, servant leadership, and creativity.
- Developed and implemented engaging music curriculum for diverse elementary classrooms.
- Established elementary choir and handbell programs that increased student participation, family engagement, and school community involvement.
- Designed curriculum and teaching resources supporting faith-based outreach and spiritual growth.
- Planned and led annual youth retreats integrating worship, discipleship, leadership development, and community building.
- Led Civil Rights pilgrimages for hundreds of diverse participants, facilitating theological reflection, racial reconciliation, and historical education.
- Developed volunteer leaders while cultivating healthy ministry relationships.

MINISTRY STRATEGY & ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- Facilitated ministry-wide strategic planning initiatives aligning organizational vision, leadership development, congregational engagement, and community outreach.
- Built collaborative partnerships across worship, justice ministries, missions, communications, education, and congregational care to strengthen organizational effectiveness, reaching over 3,000 people.
- Directed interdisciplinary ministry teams composed of staff members and volunteers to execute churchwide initiatives and large-scale ministry events.
- Guided teams through conflict resolution and healthy ministry practices. Fostered ministry cultures rooted in hospitality, spiritual growth, and organizational excellence.
- Developed and implemented churchwide unity initiatives.
- Provided strategic leadership supporting faith-based outreach ministries. Developed an online giving strategy that increased charitable giving by 30%. Served on executive leadership teams, governing boards, and strategic planning committees guiding ministry vision, organizational health, and long-range planning.
- Developed long-range strategic initiatives that expanded ministry impact and strengthened organizational effectiveness.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH

- Directed justice ministries serving diverse racial, cultural, socioeconomic, and interfaith communities through education, worship, dialogue, advocacy, and transformational experiences.
- Created worship opportunities and ministry programming for individuals with disabilities.
- Developed community engagement initiatives that connected churches, nonprofit organizations, schools, civic leaders, and volunteers in collaborative ministry.
- Partnered with residential recovery ministries to recruit speakers, strengthen discipleship programming, and encourage long-term spiritual growth.
- Supported breast cancer patients, survivors, caregivers, and families through worship leadership, keynote speaking, pastoral encouragement, and community outreach.
- Led worship, preached, facilitated panel discussions, and contributed to women's conferences focused on spiritual growth and leadership development, reaching over 1,000 women.
- Built collaborative partnerships with churches, nonprofit organizations, civic leaders, educators, volunteers, and community stakeholders to create transformational ministry experiences across multiple communities.

MINISTRY LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE CONTINUED

SIGNATURE MINISTRY

REST Retreats

Founded REST Retreats to create transformational experiences that invite individuals and ministry leaders into deeper spiritual formation through worship, Scripture, prayer, reflection, and intentional rhythms of rest. Designed as a ministry of renewal, REST Retreats equips participants to reconnect with God, strengthen their leadership, and return to their communities spiritually refreshed and purposefully equipped.

Highlights

- Founded a ministry dedicated to spiritual renewal, servant leadership, and holistic discipleship.
- Designed and facilitated retreat experiences integrating worship, Scripture, prayer, reflection, and spiritual disciplines.
- Developed original curriculum focused on leadership development, spiritual formation, and personal renewal.
- Created welcoming environments where participants experienced healing, belonging, and authentic community.
- Recruited, equipped, and led volunteers and worship teams to support retreat experiences.
- Produced original worship resources and teaching materials that extended the ministry beyond retreat settings.
- Inspired a women's small-group ministry that expanded into a broadcast ministry and annual retreat experience.
- Continues to provide leadership, vision, and strategic direction for the ministry.

CREATIVE MINISTRY

- Published devotional resources and leadership books centered on servant leadership and worship.
- Produced and hosted a weekly leadership radio program focused on faith, leadership, and spiritual growth.
- Hosted a faith-centered podcast exploring leadership, worship, and Christian living.
- Produced theological and educational content supporting justice-focused ministry initiatives.
- Authored articles and devotional content focused on leadership, worship, and spiritual formation.
- Created worship resources used by churches and ministry leaders.
- Served as speaker and ministry presenter for conferences, retreats, churches, and community organizations.

PUBLICATIONS & MEDIA

- **Books:** *True Leaders with Heart: Weekly Meditations for Leaders* <https://www.amazon.com/True-Leaders-Heart-Weekly-Meditations-ebook/dp/B07Z8C55Jj>
- *True Leaders with Heart: Generous, Passionate, Humble, & Wise* - https://www.amazon.com/True-Leaders-Heart-Generous-Passionate-ebook/dp/B0HF6DR4ML?ref=ast_author_mpb
- **Worship Resources:** <https://www.amazon.com/True-Worship-Karla-Nivens/dp/B00NTFUK3K>
- **Article:** *Meet Trailblazer Karla Nivens* <https://voyagedallas.com/interview/meet-trailblazer-karla-nivens/>
- **Podcast:** *Every Heart Every Woman Radio Episode 193* <https://everyhearteverywomanradio.podbean.com>
- **Ministry Reflections:** *A Voice that Echoes: Karla Nivens Reflects on 20 Years of Ministry* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdkTfUdqtvS>

References



REFERENCES

Rev. Elizabeth Moseley, UMC Reverend

First United Methodist Church Dallas
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Rev. Ramsey Patton Jay, Pastor of Adult Ministries and Modern Worship

Christ United Methodist Church
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Rev. Cottrell King, Associate Minister

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LaToryla Jones, Executive Director

Flames of Passion Women's Event
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Experience My Ministry

Ministry Portfolio





Watch Me Preach

[Karla Nivens at The Table, Dallas, TX Sunday, April 21, 2024](#)



Watch Me Lead Worship

[He is Lord](#)

[Falling in Love](#)

[True Worship](#)

[Love Divine All Loves Excelling/ Falling in Love Medley](#)

[La Verdadera Adoración](#)

[True Worship Playlist](#)



He is Lord



Falling In Love



True Worship



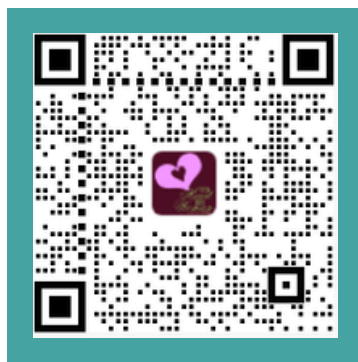
Love Divine All
Loves Excelling/
Falling in Love
Medley



La Verdadera
Adoración



True Worship
Playlist



Listen to My Podcast

Karla partnered with [Love Ministries](#), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, started a small group for women, and a radio show both titled "Every Heart Every Woman." Karla encourages her audience to quiet the noise and restore balance in their daily lives through inspirational entertainment.

[Every Heart Every Woman Radio](#) Episode 193



REST Retreats

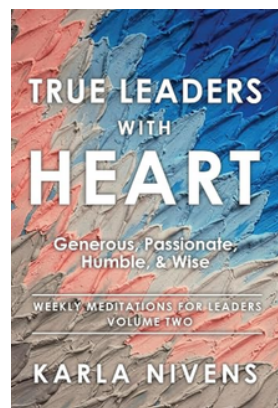
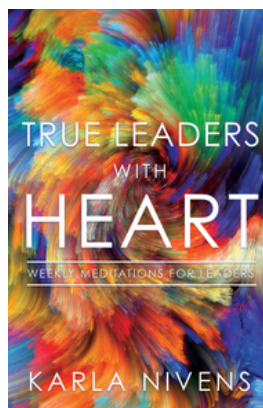
REST Retreats was founded from the conviction that lasting ministry flows from a life rooted in God's presence. REST provides sacred spaces where individuals, ministry leaders, and faith communities can step away from the demands of daily life to reconnect with God through worship, Scripture, prayer, reflection, and authentic community.

More than a retreat, REST is a ministry of spiritual formation that equips participants to deepen their faith, embrace healthy rhythms of rest, and return home to their churches and to their workplaces renewed in purpose and strengthened for service. Through thoughtfully designed experiences, biblical teaching, and meaningful worship, REST encourages attendees to cultivate lives marked by hope, healing, and wholehearted devotion to Christ.



Published Works

- Books: True Leaders with Heart: Weekly Meditations for Leaders
<https://www.amazon.com/True-Leaders-Heart-Weekly-Meditations-ebook/dp/B07Z8C55JJ>
- True Leaders with Heart: Generous, Passionate, Humble, & Wise -
https://www.amazon.com/True-Leaders-Heart-Generous-Passionate-ebook/dp/B0HF6DR4ML?ref=ast_author_mpb
- Worship Resources: <https://www.amazon.com/True-Worship-Karla-Nivens/dp/B00NTFUK3K>





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