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11-4-2021

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**November 4, 2021**

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## **From El Salvador to Ohio: Faith Journey Leads College Student to Study Abroad**

**CEDARVILLE, OHIO** -- When Ligia Benitez started high school in Central America, she thought she had her life mapped out. She expected to graduate and move to El Salvador's capital, San Salvador, to pursue a degree in international studies while staying connected with friends from high school.

What she never expected was a commitment to study abroad in the United States or pursuing a degree in [business management](#).

Benitez attended a private Christian high school in San Miguel, El Salvador, and during her senior year, she was presented with the opportunity to attend a summer camp at Word of Life Bible Institute in Hudson, Florida. Benitez first attended the camp in 2018, and then again, the following summer.

"The summer of 2019 was when I rededicated my life to the Lord," said Benitez. "I grew up in a Christian home and always thought I was saved, but it was at that Word of Life camp that I was actually saved."

This radical change threw a wrench in her original plan of pursuing a degree in international studies. Now, Benitez felt called to attend Word of Life Institute for her first year of college in the United States.

"I didn't tell anyone in my class, any of my friends, that I was going to study in Florida. They all found out at our senior prom," Benitez remembered. "I was the only one in my class who was going to study in the U.S."

However, Benitez's plans were once again disrupted before she could leave for college.

"Because of COVID, I could not get into the U.S. My student visa required me to be in the U.S. within five months, but I could not enter Florida," said Benitez. "It was truly God's provision that I made it to Word of Life. I ended up receiving a letter from the embassy right at the end of the five months and was able to attend school in the spring of 2020 after months of quarantining at home."

At the end of her year at Word of Life, Benitez' advisor recommended she apply to Cedarville.

"It really didn't seem like a possibility, but the more I read about it, I started to think 'Maybe?'," Benitez said. "I started to pray a lot about the decision, and just had to say, 'Lord, if you provide, I will go to Cedarville.'"

When filling out the application, Benitez had to make another choice: pursue the international relations degree she had always imagined or consider a major she felt aligned with her faith.

"When I was reading about the majors, I kept looking at business management. I thought it sounded interesting, but it was really the emphasis on leadership classes that I felt called to," said Benitez. "That was really the reason I wanted to attend a Christian university, to learn to be a leader in multiple ways."

Ironically, Benitez said that her parents had always wanted her to pursue business.

“My dad is in marketing, and he always told me to go into marketing as well,” she shared. “I was against it, mostly because of stubborn disobedience. I wanted to make a decision on my own.”

Benitez enrolled in Cedarville as a [business management major](#) and came to Ohio in 2021, just in time for spring semester. While at Cedarville she found community in her classes and through intramural soccer, as well as Multicultural International Student Organization (MISO), and Mu Kappa, the student organization for international students and children of missionaries.

“The international students have really become a family,” said Benitez. “Sometimes you are homesick, and it is nice to have people who are going through the same thing.”

When Benitez is homesick, she has found that going to Lola’s Mexican restaurant feels a little like home. “My mom loves tacos and Lola’s reminds me of food from home. I am becoming a regular customer there,” Benitez laughed.

In spite of some culture shock, Benitez said that she has enjoyed many of her new experiences in the states.

“I had my first snow here. Snow is so cute!” said Benitez excitedly. “I was not prepared for the cold, but I love snow.”

During her year at Cedarville, Benitez has grown to love management. Now, she is beginning to see how this major may one day lead her back home.

“Over Thanksgiving break 2020, I was really thinking about my mom,” she said. “She started a business selling lotions and oils back home about two years ago. Right now, she only has one shop, but once I graduate, I want to move back to El Salvador to help her with the business.” Benitez hopes to expand her mother’s business into the United States.

Over the course of three years, Benitez has changed her plans from the capital to cornfields, from dreams of pursuing international studies to bringing international education back to her hometown. And through it all, Benitez says she is learning to trust in God’s leadership.

“This last year has been incredibly humbling for me,” said Benitez. “It was one of the hardest of my life, but it also shaped me and my habits. I really saw the Lord convicting me through his Word. He changed my plans and taught me trust and humility.”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,715 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including the [school of business administration](#), strong graduation, and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit [cedarville.edu](http://cedarville.edu).

Written by Halle Johnson