



FOR THOSE WHO SERVE

Story by Carleigh Watts
Photos by Raymond Rodriguez

For the last seven years, a Calvary Chapel-affiliate, The Ark Montebello in Montebello, CA, has hosted a ball honoring the birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps. Lead Pastor Pancho Juarez, a U.S. Marine veteran, invites born-again military men, women, and their families, to honor them in an atmosphere of respect and celebration without alcohol or profanity.

Maria Simpson attended The Ark's ball in honor of her late son, U.S. Marine Abraham Simpson, killed in combat in Iraq in 2004. "Jesus Christ is there and part of the whole event. I know that God uses it in the lives of people who attend to encourage those who know Him and to shine the light for those who don't yet know Him," she said, describing the ball as "such an honor of the service and the sacrifice of the Marines throughout the history of our country."

"[The idea for our ball] started with a Marine Corps mom in our congregation," remembered Pancho. "She wanted to honor all veterans. So, we just thought, since the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, and the Coast Guard don't have a ball, we could incorporate [and organize] an event where we can gather together and invite all the branches of the

service." Pancho continued, "So, what we wanted to do was create an environment where we can have joy, peace, and a fraternal meeting without the lubrication of alcohol."

The event included a sit-down meal, big band music, and husband and wife dances. A traditional cake-cutting ceremony took place where the oldest Marine, signifying their history, cut the cake and gave the first piece to the youngest, signifying the future. The Commandant's Birthday Message was read to attendees. There was also a table setting in honor of missing comrades who were MIA or died in defense of their country.

Senior Pastor Mark Ramirez of CC Fredericksburg, VA, a U.S. Marine veteran, was the guest speaker. He reminded attendees of the Marines' core values, motto, and mission. Mark explained, "I preached the Gospel to remind them that we need God. Honor, courage, and commitment are three values that the Marine Corps and all forces hold onto. Our motto is *semper fidelis*, which means 'always faithful'. We need to be reminded of what our [Marine Corps] values are, and how the Bible really spoke of them before our [Marine Corps] values were really even written out." Pastor Mark went on to say, "Our [Marine Corps] mission is to *make Marines and win battles*. Similarly, as Christians, we make disciples and help them to win battles against the [spiritual] enemy." 🇺🇸

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." JOHN 15:13
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Top left: Pastor Pancho Juarez, lead pastor of The Ark Montebello, raises a grape juice toast to military families in all branches on the birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps in November 2018. The ball included a meal, big band music, and dancing.

Bottom left: Pancho (left) and Senior Pastor Mark Ramirez of Calvary Chapel Fredericksburg, VA, both Marine veterans, stand at attention. Mark shared the Gospel with attendees.

Right: Guests at the ball honor the colors.