

PART IV.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY STUDIES

As explained in the essay included in Parts I and II of the report on the PARAL Study, the U.S. Census 2000 disclosed a dispersal of the Hispanic population in the United States. In addition to the sociological and demographic importance of this physical movement of Latinos, there is a pastoral and ministerial effect. In a relatively short time, Latinos born in this country and Latin Americans born abroad have moved into virtually every region of the United States. Migration and immigration have not only increased the number of Hispanics in locations with an already high proportion of Latinos, but have also created new communities in areas of the Southeast and Midwest where there was very little Latino presence. Although the number of Hispanics in some of these small towns is minuscule in comparison with far larger numbers in metropolitan centers like New York, Los Angeles, Miami or Chicago, the percentages are very high. Thus, in a typical town with about 4,000 total population, the presence of 2,000 Mexican and Mexican Americans represents 50% of the town -- affording Latinos a larger share of the population than they enjoy in Chicago where the number of Latinos is closer to a half-million. Moreover, even in cities such as Los Angeles, Miami and New York which continue to reflect characteristics of Mexican American, Cuban American and Puerto Rican leadership, there are significant increases in the numbers of different groups within those cities that require new strategies of coalition and incorporation.

A term used in the PARAL Study to describe this dispersal phenomenon is "Diaspora." Taken from the Greek language, the term has been used to refer to the Christian Church during the apostolic age. It is fitting then to apply this word to the contemporary sociological experience of Hispanic believers. PARAL designed the NSLLPC to address the cultural and pastoral dynamics created by these demographic changes. As a result of the Latino Diaspora, it is no longer effective to study Latinos by focus on a few metropolitan areas, such as might have been done in the past. "Enclave" is a technical word describing these areas where Hispanics were concentrated, although one finds words such as "ghetto" and "the *barrio*" in the literature. Certainly, San Antonio and Los Angeles contain largely Mexican American enclaves, and New York is home to many Puerto Ricans, just as Miami is to Cubans. But groups other than Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans are growing in numbers and importance among the Latinos in the United States. These immigrants from rural Mexico, Central America and Caribbean island nations such as the Dominican Republic challenge policies based on an exclusively Mexican American, Puerto Rican or Cuban experience. Moreover, one should note that the new groups sometimes include indigenous peoples for whom Spanish

is a second language. The Diaspora has afforded the Latino community a truly national presence in addition to the very recognizable enclaves. Policies about language use, bilingual education, and the definition of racial groupings are now required in a much wider range of U.S. communities.

Like people in so many other communities, Latinos/as rely on religion and religious institutions within their social networks. It is a seldom challenged axiom that poor or migrant communities do not easily acquire the resources to build new social networks and usually rely on existing community agencies. In locales where the growth of the Latino population is both sudden and significant, the importance of religious institutions is often enlarged, because the secular and public agencies tend to react only after the Latino presence is an accomplished fact. Consequently, the Diaspora has provided settings where public officials turn to faith communities for organizing services or for recruiting community leaders. Faith communities assume great importance in such scenarios for several reasons:

- First, churches enjoy prestige within society and the poor and migrant groups achieve higher status by association with the church than is possible by reliance on internal resources.
- Second, churches generally profess openness to new congregational members as a matter of an ethical principle that does not permit discrimination and also by the necessity of maintaining membership.
- Moreover, the social networks generated by religious communities are often surrogates for secular and political organizations.

Along with the Diaspora of newly arriving immigrants from Latin America, there is also a dispersal of U.S. born persons of Latin American heritage into the suburbs of U.S. cities. Often, these Latinos and Latinas have achieved upward mobility through education and professional employment. As noted in the essay cited above, a majority of Hispanics now live in the suburbs. While it might be true that these suburbs tend to be those closest to the metropolitan areas, where the housing is older, the 2000 Census shows that the urban quality of Hispanic residence throughout the past half-century has now changed in character. This aspect of the Latino Diaspora adds two additional factors to pastoral considerations:

- Pastoral needs for Latinos and Latinas in some areas may not be defined by a need to speak the Spanish language: rather, attention to issues of second-generation ethnic identity may assume greater importance.
- Hispanics in some parishes and congregations may be enlisted as lay and volunteer participants in ministry. In fact, some persons arriving in suburban settings may have considerable experience in ministry within the faith communities where they previously resided.

Criteria for the Choice of Community Sites in the PARAL Study

The PARAL Study sought to capture the full impact of the Latino Diaspora, not only through a national survey, but also with a wide spectrum of different types of communities. Through the eyes of an observer placed in the field, the dynamics of church and society could be studied with what is called “thick description.” Whereas in the questionnaire surveys, we inquired of religious persons what they did for the wider community, the field research would offer a perspective of how the communities were effected by religious persons.

With the assistance of the funding agencies that supported the survey, a fellowship selection process was conducted nationwide in 1997-98. This resulted a training session for some 15 PARAL Fellows that was held on the campus of Princeton University. In addition to many of the co-investigators of the project, the faculty for this training session included: **Nancy Ammerman** of the Hartford Seminary; **Helen Rose Ebaugh** of the University of Houston; and **Robert Wuthnow** of Princeton University. In the Summer of 1999, the fellows met with a team of the co-investigators in Orlando, Florida for an intensive week of planning about the selection of the sites for the community studies. Subsequently, several capable field researchers who had not been present in either Princeton or Orlando were added.

In selecting sites for community studies in the PARAL Study, three sets of considerations were used.

Colonial and Non-Colonial

We asked whether Christianity had been founded in the locale before or after it had been annexed to the United States. While this notion is axiomatic to Latino Studies, it has not always been part of the study of religion in the United States for persons outside that field of specialization. When Christianity was founded in a parish or congregation by the ancestors of today’s Latinos and Latinas, there is a dimension to their presence that is fundamentally different from places where they arrive as “newcomers” to a church established by members of another ethnic group. These dynamics are deepened when the entire city or town falls within the colonial ambit of Spanish settlement and evangelization. Recognizing that cultural and religious identities often overlap, the survey sought to include both colonial and non-colonial sites.

Incremental or Sudden Growth

As described above, the Latino Diaspora has created areas with differential rates of growth. We considered whether the increase in Latino population was within the general parameters of census rates of growth or significantly exceeded these parameters during the last ten years. In the first case, the growth was classified as *incremental*; in the second, as *sudden*.

Size of the locale

In the selection of sites, we sought to include a mix of regions: metropolis, city or town. These are size considerations that replicate census categories. We also used the notion of density, i.e. whether the Latino population in certain census tracts exceeded 50% of the total population and thus becomes an enclave.

Utilizing these criteria, we gained a cross-section of such types of communities, which are listed below for reference. In addition to the typological criteria, each of these communities offered a special dynamic of a civic or local character which corresponds to similar issues tracked by the questionnaire surveys.

Boston, Massachusetts = Non-colonial, sudden, metropolis (NE-New England), non-enclave

There were three neighborhoods studies: Roxbury, Jamaica Plain and East Boston. In Roxbury, the African American community is increasing its demographic and cultural presence, forcing many Caribbean Latinos to Jamaica Plain. East Boston is predominately Central American. There was great variety in the styles of leadership in each community, varying not by Catholic-Protestant categories, but also by the new immigrant status and the established born-in-the-U.S. generations.

San Antonio, Texas = Colonial, incremental, metropolis (SW), enclave

The areas of the city that were studied included a portion of the West Side but extending beyond this well-defined Mexican American neighborhood into Jefferson and Monticello Park, which are "changing neighborhoods." The issues concerned the stereotyping of the West Side, a poorer Mexican American neighborhood while the many in San Antonio's Mexican American population consider themselves middle-class. The research offered clues to how the churches accommodate class differences among Latinos/as.

Rural Indiana = Non-colonial, sudden, town (MW), enclave

Given the fictitious name of "Wheelertown" in order to preserve the anonymity of the respondents, this site is a small town of less than 4,000 total population where Mexicans of the first and second generations number slightly more than half. The largest non-Hispanic group is the Amish. This community has high visibility, especially in the downtown area which would be a desert town without the Mexicans. However, there are few leaders willing to represent community interests, except for the Assemblies of God pastor. The Catholic parish has a priest from Mexico on "loan" a Mexican American Sister and a Mexican American married deacon.

Fresno, California = Colonial, incremental, city (WC), non-enclave

This is a medium-size California city that long had an agricultural Mexican American community from colonial days. The city itself, however, was founded with the coming of the railroad and its political and economic organization displaced the existing Mexican Americans. As the community grows through immigration from Mexico, there are competing visions of who and what Latinos are as well as their place in Fresno. The various churches have developed "niches" to accommodate various segments of the community. One Assembly of God congregation appeals to ex-gang members, convicts and drug users; another Assembly congregation within a few blocks focuses upon Mexican American members who are English-dominant and integrates the congregation with Euro-Americans, most elderly, who felt their congregation was dying until they opened up to Mexican Americans. The Catholic Church serves best the immigrant families from Mexico who have spent 5-15 years in the U.S. and whose children have been born in the U.S.

Orlando, Florida = Non-colonial, sudden, city (SE), non-enclave

This is a city built upon tourism. In many ways, Orlando is one continuous suburb, meant to appeal to a general US tourist. Yet it requires a large workforce to employ in the various recreational and entertainment facilities. The community has a Caribbean base of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans who are at opposite political attitudes from the large, conservative and Republican Cuban population in the State of Florida. Yet these Puerto Ricans and Dominicans often come to Orlando from cities such as New York and Chicago. There is a simultaneous influx of Mexican, South and Central American workers, who immigrate directly from their homelands. The churches seek to accommodate the growing intra-Hispanic diversity, and virtually all the churches are new, since this is a site with rapid growth rates, not only for Latinos but for the population in general. Economic and generational issues affect Intra-Hispanic solidarity.

Brooklyn, New York = Non-colonial, incremental, metropolis (NE-New York), enclave

This research is in the Sunset Park area of Kings County in an area along the Brooklyn harbor that was once largely composed of Lutheran Norwegian seafaring families. It is one of the most heavily Puerto Rican areas of the city, with many churches and established social service agencies. In one side of Sunset Park, the housing stock consists of attractive and roomy buildings from the 19th century brownstone houses into elegant residences and apartments well beyond the economic resources of the Latinos in a wave of gentrification. There is also an influx of Mexicans for the cheaper housing in this working class neighborhood. The churches are somewhat ahead of the cultural and social service agencies in recognizing the demographic pressures, but they also need to provide continuity for their established Puerto Rican

members. Finally, there is pressure for housing and services from Asian immigrants, mostly Chinese or Arabs.

Santa Fe, New Mexico = Colonial, incremental, city (SW), non-enclave

This is a colonial site which has experienced gentrification during the past decade. The Hispanics were displaced by an artistic elite that enjoys the historic Latino character of the city, but recreates this character for forms of consumer art. An issue that brought these communities into confrontation was the inclusion in a museum exhibition of an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in the style of 21st century feminism. The study of the site included the political and social dynamics of the encounter with the artistic elites, but also in the linkages between the older Hispano population descended from the 16th century settlers of Santa Fe and the incoming immigrants from Mexico who form much of the labor force for tourism.

Union City, New Jersey = Non-colonial, incremental, city (NE- Middle Atlantic), enclave

This is a small industrial city across the Hudson River from New York, New York. In the 1960s a large immigration from Cuba made Union City an enclave. Long sullied by machine politics, and a lack of upper-middle class housing, Union City occupied a very different sociological space than Miami, Florida. During the 1980s, Union City began losing its Cuban American population as successful Cuban Americans moved out to New Jersey suburbs. There has been some gentrification, but there larger influx has been of Dominicans and Colombians. The churches have had to shift from pastoral identification with a majority of Cuban Americans to a more generic Hispanic population. The community study examines the role of established Cuban American church leadership in serving the newer groups.

The field researchers for each of these eight sites were required to organize their report in a format that allows for comparison. It is anticipated that from the reports, a digest will be prepared, suitable for inclusion as a chapter in a forthcoming book.