

Latino Religions in South Bend

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Profile of Denomination

Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States today. This phenomenon has not only brought changes in America's politics, business and education, but among congregations and parishes. Latinos as a whole are a highly religious ethnic group, with over nine-in-ten associating with a particular religion, according to the Pew Hispanic Center. While Latinos continue to be predominantly Catholic in both Latin America and the U.S., in the post-World War II period Protestantism has been gaining popularity. While there are 68% of Latinos identifying as Catholic, these numbers will fluctuate as conversion to Prot-

Mexican-Americans' Religious Affiliation

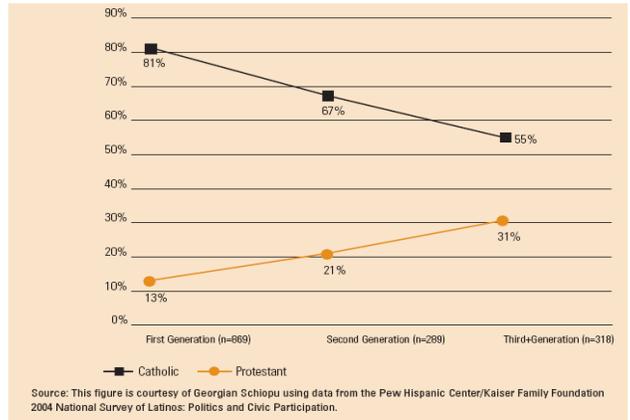


Fig. I Mexican American Religious Affiliation, 2004. Source: Georgian Schioppa using data from Pew Hispanic

estantism increases. Protestant churches tend to emphasize personal transformation and a more direct experience with God, eliminating the spiritual "middle-men" of the ordained clergy. They also attract Latin

Americans with the prospect of belonging to a close-knit community in contrast to membership in a spread out, territorially based Catholic parish.

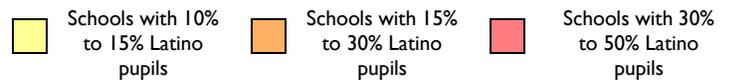
Hispanic Churches in South Bend

The map to the right shows a breakdown of Latino residency in South Bend as well as the location of the Latino churches. As seen in the map (right) the majority of the Latino churches can be found in the periphery of the region with the highest concentration of Latino students (red area), and presumably of Latinos overall.

Saint Adalbert and Saint Casimir parishes are both located in densely populated Latino areas of South Bend. Together they have about 4000 parishioners. Most of the other churches, although numerous, are much smaller.



Latino Churches and Latino Student Density in South Bend Area



Churches and Mexican Churchgoers in the United States



Saint Adalbert Parish

Until the second Vatican council of 1962, the Catholic Church did not explicitly recognize the value of ethnic diversity. The Catholic Church in the United States was not immune to prevalent racist attitudes towards Mexican Americans and Mexican migrants. Father Virgilio Elizondo, a Latino theologian at University of Notre Dame, describes the way the church handled racial relations in these terms: “Together, we (the association of Hispanic priests),

dared to explore what was obvious to us but as yet unsuspected by mainstream Catholics: that the church was a segregated, racist, and classicist institution.” The Catholic Church discouraged Mexican Americans from entering the priesthood and treated the Mexican American population more as a welfare and social problem rather than a religious and spiritual prospect.

The Catholic Church’s approach to Mexican immi-

grants changed in response to the inroads made by Protestant churches during the 1960s and 70s. The evangelization of Mexican Catholics both in Mexico and in the United States prompted the Catholic Church to put in place structures, procedures and guidelines to actively court and recruit Hispanics. The National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry was approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in November, 1987.

Table 1 South Bend Denominations	Name of worship	Religious leader	Total number Latino (%)
Catholic	Corpus Christi	Rev. Camillo Tirabassi	“A few Hispanic families” (1.13%)
	Holy Cross	Rev. Michael Mathews, CSC, Pastor	15 Hispanics (0.81%)
	Holy Family		A few Hispanics (0.63%)
	Little Flower	Rev. Cornelius Ryan, CSC	10 to 20 Hispanics (0.82%)
	St Adalbert’s Parish	Christopher W. Cox, CSC	65% Hispanic and from Mexico out of 6100 persons
	St Augustine	Rev. Charles Lavelly, CSC	10 Hispanics—2 families (3.33%)
	St. Casimir	Christopher W. Cox, CSC	6 Hispanics registered (4.52%)
Protestant	St Patrick & St Hedwig Parish	Rev. Leonard F Chrobot	St Patrick—40 Hispanics—10 families (6.45%) St Hedwig—10 Hispanics—2-3 families (2.49)
	Ambassadors for Christ	Linda Murphy	1 Hispanic family
	Faith Temple Church of God in Christ	Pastor Raphael Ray Thomas, Sr	Fewer than 5 Hispanics
	First Church of the Nazarene	Pastor David Bartley	
Evangelical	Iglesia Misionery Hispana	Angel Crespo (from PR)	100% Latino—Most of members from Mexico; 60-80 members of different countries of origin (Puerto Ricans, Ecuadorians, Salvadorans, Hondurans, Mexicans, and an African American family).
	Grace Christian Church		
	Iglesia Evangélica Apóstoles Profetas Efe.2: 20 de South Bend	Pastor Gilberto Acosta	100% with 28-30 members all from El Salvador
Episcopal	Iglesia Impacto de Dios		
	Holy Trinity Episcopal Church	Rector, Rev. Tima Velthizien	
Baptist	Progressive Missionary Baptist		

National Recruitment



Cardinal Mahoney at a Guadalupe procession

The leadership of American churches, whether Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist or other denomination, has developed Hispanic ministry plans detailing recruitment tactics directed toward Hispanics. What is common among all of the plans reviewed in this study is the need to aid the immigrants in their integration into society by providing services and materials in the Spanish language, incorporating some Mexican customs, and catering to the pressing needs of the immigrants, particularly the undocumented. A breadth of services to attract and retain Mexican congregants is enumerated in the following excerpt from the United Methodist Church's "National Plan for Hispanic Ministry":

"Can you offer some social services? What kind of social services? Do you have volunteers? There are simple and

easy ways to provide services, for example: Fill out their income taxes; Help to translate documents; Accompany them to social agencies; Provide a list of community services available; English classes; Ask the members of your Hispanic congregation what kind of activities they would like to organize. What about a lunch for Mother's Day? What about Our Lady of Guadalupe? What about any other festival appealing to the main ethnic group of the congregation? What about a fiesta to celebrate their Independence Day? What about Christmas or the Three Kings (Magi) bringing gifts to children?"

Another salient example of church support for immigrants is in the legal area of immigration. The Catholic Church in Detroit offers to help their parishioners with immigration issues. Their leaders state that, "the Immigration Services Office of the Archdiocese is at pains to meet the needs of those seeking to regularize their status." The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has strongly advocated for the undocumented migrants. Cardinal Roger Michael Mahoney, who visited University of Notre Dame at the October 2007 Forum on Immigration, indicated that the Catholic Church would take care of the undocumented—despite legislative efforts to make such advocacy a crime.

The Catholic Church has developed a

"*Pastoral de Conjunto*" (Communion in Mission) to reach out to the Mexican immigrant population. This program takes into consideration Mexican oral traditions and ritual practices. The *Pastoral de Conjunto* entails community building through encouragement of active lay and civic leaders. Hispanic heritage, now called "a blessing" by the U.S. Bishops, is embraced. Education is also promoted. The Church connects with the religious practices of the Hispanic community by incorporating familiar melodies and lyrics and facilitating the Mexican custom of reenacting biblical passages including *Las Posadas* in Advent, the three kings in the Epiphany procession, the December 12th feast of the Mexican Virgin, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the Stations of the Cross during Lent. Finally, to aid in the recruitment and continued loyalty of Mexican congregants, churches are actively recruiting and training Latino priests and pastors from the U.S., Mexico, and Latin America.

Churches in the United States have recognized opportunities to minister to the growing Mexican immigrant population. Their newly revised ministry and outreach offer attractive services to the immigrants, such as help with physical and social needs and a path to integration.

The Spiritual Marketplace

Recruiting is an important factor in understanding Latino churches. "The American religious economy is like a marketplace -- very dynamic, very competitive," states Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum. Since many churches expect parishioners to give ten percent of their taxable income, increasing the number of parishioners can be

significant. The language of some church memoranda indeed reads as if it were a business plan, including detailed figures on the average income of the population targeted for recruitment: "The medium income of white households in the United States is \$45,904; for Hispanics it is 27 percent less at \$33,455." An Episcopalian clergyman expressed a similarly candid recognition of

the anticipated economic contributions of Mexican American congregants in official statements.



Outreach to Youth

In the United States, Latinos already represent nearly half of the parishioners under age 40 within the Catholic Church. The Latino youth therefore offer special contributions to and opportunities for Catholic (and other Christian denominational) churches in the United States. There is a clear reciprocal need. Many, if not most, churches see their numbers of Anglo parishioners declining, while the numbers of young Latino people are growing. The new Latino youth congregants present important challenges not only in meeting their spiritual needs—a special challenge for adolescents at an age of self-questioning—but also helping to smooth their integration into a new society.

Gang violence, drug use and teenage pregnancy are real threats for teens, especially those raised in poverty. Churches in South Bend have developed programs to meet these challenges. They offer Latino youth a supportive community and form an extended family of sorts. They organize retreats for young Latinos and a welcoming setting for vibrant worship. They also provide services to youth that enable them to enter society successfully, through education and through the formation of young leaders within the church ministry and the community.

Saint Adalbert and Saint Casimir church, located at the center of the Latino enclave on the west side of South Bend, are very active in promoting leadership skills in the Latino youth through a combined Latino

Youth Ministry. The objectives of this program are: to help the students grow in their love of God; to help the teens know themselves; and to encourage education through identifying vocational training programs, colleges and scholarships for the teens; to reach out to youth in prisons, which is perhaps the most significant aspect of the work that the Catholic Church is doing with the Latino youth.

Latino Catholic teens meet once a week at St. Casimir parish with mentors from a Latino student organization at the University of Notre Dame called MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán). The mentors establish close working relationships in order to guide these young Latinos into becoming successful, motivated, conscious leaders of their South Bend community and of their country. By educating and mentoring these teens, the *hermanos y hermanas* pinpoint the importance of Latino unity. *Chicanismo* is the strength pushing for the creation of new leaders as social, economical and educational struggles are addressed.

Exposure to higher education is also fostered through church and university partnerships. The youth ministry organizes a weekend higher education fair where local youth can meet representatives from colleges in the area. Sueños Sin Fronteras, which takes place on the Notre Dame campus, is an annual event for Latino junior high and high school students from the South Bend community. They are introduced to



the college experience, and participate in workshops in leadership and character development.

Latino youth are in general very religious and exhibit an active image of God in their lives through personal prayers, shrines and alters in their homes, and even by wearing religious jewelry. Special religious celebrations further engage Latino youth with their church, family, peers and community. The celebration of the *quinceañera*, the rite of passage of a girl into a Catholic woman, is one such important, unifying occasion. The annual December ritual honoring the Virgin, Our Lady of Guadalupe, also involves teen girls in performance activities at the church.

Latino parents and extended family members also play important roles in the religious lives of Latino teenagers. To support this influence, St. Adalbert provides religious education courses to parents and elders as an indirect way of inspiring youth. The church offers classes for the study of the scripture in Spanish for adults.

The ministries offered by Saint Adalbert and Saint Casimir allow young Latinos participants to grow in their relationship with God, to value their history and identity, and to access higher education resources.

“Do you want to become like the other ‘gringos’ that buy more and have more (things)? You cannot give in to consumerism.” Fr.

*Cox’s homily,
December 2007
(translated from
Spanish)*

Quinceañera

Quinceañera celebrations happen all over South America, Central America and in the Hispanic Caribbean Islands. The Quinceañera is a Hispanic tradition that celebrates the transition of young girls from childhood to adulthood. It can be compared to 'sweet sixteen' celebrations or debutante balls.

Quinceañeras are being celebrated in the Mexican community of South Bend. This celebration is planned and carried out almost like a wedding. The birthday girl wears a dress similar to the wedding gown, but usually in pastel colors instead of white. She usually has a court of 'damas' (maids of honor and 'chambelanes' (young men), who dress formally for the occasion. A religious service is typically followed by a lavish party with music, dance, food and many guests. Usually relatives and *padrinos* (godparents) are co-sponsors of the event, and are in charge either of playing music, providing the food, or helping out financially. Sometimes, families go to Mexico to purchase the dress and other items for the party or have relatives in Mexico send supplies for the party. In Mexico City, for instance, a Quinceañera dress will sell from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars. The lavish spending and guest list can be a way for a family to establish its social importance, but perhaps also, as in the 'dowry' tradition, to signal potential availability of the girl for future suitors. The money involved has led to a niche business opportunity in the United

States, with special party planning, bands, catering and limousines for the event. In South Bend, it is possible to buy special Quinceañera dresses.

However, the Quinceañera celebration, with all of its formalities, the religious blessing and the difficulty in managing the event, serves another important purpose. As "padrinos", "damas" and "chambellanes" agree to participate, lifelong social bonds are created. The ceremony signifies that the girl is now a mature person, with more autonomy from her parents. At the same time, a larger network of caretakers, including many non-family members, is somehow signaled by the ceremony. So the *padrina*/*padrino* system not only helps keep costs down for the parents as others pitch in (sometimes very successful Quinceañeras are created almost entirely through this solidarity), but there is a blessing and celebration of a social network which helps the girl in this new phase of her life.

The religious aspect is very important. Quinceañeras are now celebrated in Catholic as well as Protestant churches in South Bend and nationwide. The religious ceremony is fairly open and can be celebrated in different ways within the Catholic Church and Protestant churches. A thanksgiving mass (*Misa de acción de gracias*) or a simple blessing can be conducted, as the birthday girl is seated in the front of the church close to the priest.



Karen Lopez celebrating her Quinceañera surrounded by her family and friends. The mass was held in Holy Family Church and the parents organized her reception at Paul's Ballroom in South Bend.

"All of the neighbors were related. They were our parents' surrogates [...]. These people were either actual relatives or members of our large extended families, linked together by formal or informal ties, part of a system I like to call *compadrismo*. [...] Each one of these rituals is a way of extending the family, Mindiola explains. The system is designed, he adds, to increase the number of people who would help you out in times of need. In short, it's a form of insurance." (Juan R. Palomo, *USA Today*, 1999).

"Kaley Escobedo renewed her baptismal promises as a woman. [...] four boys who serve as protectors. Her mother, Kathy made all 14 damas' skirts, necklaces and earrings. [...] The protectors, damas and sponsors of gifts lined the dance floor [...]" (V. Ransbottom, *South Bend Tribune*, 2006).

"There are the *padrinos*, or sponsors, who helped pay for the event and who gift the quinceañera girl a number of traditional gifts, including a rosary, a sash and roses for the Virgin of Guadalupe. The result is an event where many members of a community take part and contribute to in their own individual ways. The roles they play and their sharing of expenses strengthen the ties between them." (P. Ros, *South Bend Tribune*, 2007).

"About four years ago, a young woman and her mother came to church and asked me to conduct a *quinceañera*. [...] I agreed to do this before I really knew what I was promising. After some investigation, I learned that most Mexican people are willing to allow the *Misa* (the mass) to be conducted as the priest saw fit. [...] While I felt that Jesus had placed a challenge in front of me, I soon realized again that He was also opening a door. [...] With the help of a brother pastor I prepared a worship service which was the Common Service in Spanish with a couple of changes. [...] Some of the girls have asked if, at the very end of the service, they can place their flowers on the altar as a gift to Christ. I allow this and make it a very clear point that this is a gift to honor Jesus Christ." Rev. Bodjanac relating how a request for a traditionally non-Lutheran rite can be used to proclaim the Gospel message (*Suite101.com*, an online magazine, 2003).

Latino Spirituality and Beliefs

Latinos are quite religious; most participate in daily prayer, attend religious services on at least a monthly basis and believe that miracles still occur. The religions with which Latinos most commonly associate are Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, and Mainline Protestant, all of which are Christian but have variations within their beliefs and traditions that make them unique.

The Latino population is more conservative in terms of faith than other segments of the population. They are very devout and are concerned with making traditional Catholic devotions and going to shrines and services. Latino Catholics strongly believe that divine intervention is a component of modern life. The Pew Hispanic Center has found that the majority of Latino Catholics have such a faith that has led them to believe that miracles still occur in

the present day and that Jesus will make an appearance on this planet during their lifetime. Their belief that Jesus will come back to earth stands in contrast to non-Latino Catholics, where a minority hold that belief (Pew Hispanic Center 19).

Latino Catholics also hold the belief commonly expressed as the “prosperity gospel,” in which God rewards those who are loyal and true with health and financial success during their physical existence (Pew Hispanic Center 19). A central core belief among all Catholics including Latino Catholics is that the Virgin Mary is the mother of God and protects those who believe. Furthermore, although Latino Catholics read and generally follow the Bible, they are less likely to believe everything in the Bible word-for-word (Pew Hispanic Center 21). Corresponding to the fact that Latino

Catholics are less likely to believe in the literal truth of the Bible, they read the Scriptures on a somewhat infrequent basis (Pew Hispanic Center 17).

According to the Pew Hispanic Survey, a majority of Latino Catholics (64%) engage in daily prayer. They often ask for intercession from the saints or the Virgin Mary when they are experiencing trying times in their daily lives (Pew Hispanic Center 18). Many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans participate in *promesas*, which are promises made “to demonstrate devotion or gratitude” (Smith 178) to the saints or Virgin Mary for their assistance. These promises usually consist of physical acts, such as participating in a relay race or walking in a march, which allows Mexicans to incorporate their spirit and bodies (Smith 178). For Mexican Americans,

promesas allow them to maintain transnational ties because the participants will often travel back to their home town in Mexico for a devotion that they had previously promised the saint (Smith 149). Mexicans will ask for help with everyday events, such as tests or protection when away from the house, from their patron saint such as Padre Jesús, or the Virgin Mary (Smith 149). Also, they will erect statues of their patron saints in their churches (Smith 157). Although they do pray on a regular basis, most do not participate in prayer groups, such as Bible study groups or other religious meetings (Pew Hispanic Center 17), demonstrating that individual prayer is preferable to group meetings as a means of spiritual expression.

Latino Protestantism

The majority of Latino Protestants believe that miracles continue to occur in the modern world and they believe that Jesus will return to the physical world while they are living (Pew Hispanic Center 19). They also believe in the prosperity gospel (Pew Hispanic Center 19). On the other hand, the Pew Survey found that a smaller percentage of Latino evangelicals and mainline Protestants see Mary as the Mother of God, protecting people as her own children (Pew Hispanic Center 20). It is not uncommon for Latino Protestant churches to deter their members from performing devotions to Mary, a

frequent occurrence among Latino Catholics (Pew Hispanic Center 20).

Recently, Latino Protestant churches have been able to access other religious viewpoints from evangelical television (Piedra 45). Transnational television and radio have helped Protestant churches become more consumerist in nature. They can choose the church to which they would like to belong based on the church’s ability to meet their own personal needs (Piedra 46). Similar to the consumerism seen in material culture, the use of technology in spreading the word or evangelizing has also resulted in competition between

the churches and the pastors’ ability to spread the faith to larger groups (Piedra 46). A primary deciding factor in followers’ choice of churches is the magnitude of their ability to feel God’s presence during their everyday life (Arturo 47). Many Latino evangelical churches have focused on theologies of prosperity, which gives the impression that the Christian faith provides the means for attaining material goods and physical health (Piedra 50). To Latino evangelicals, religion lies at the base of health, social, and economic issues and can provide solutions to any problem that people may encounter (Piedra 50). These Latino evangelical beliefs reflect the growing fascination that the modern

world has with material acquisitions and the idea that “God’s presence has to be reflected in a lifestyle suitable for ‘children of the King’” (Piedra 51). In other words, Latino evangelicals believe that their good fortune is directly due to God’s immediate involvement in the physical world.

Another characteristic of Latino spirituality is a special need for music during religious services. The catholic church has certainly integrated this desire in its Latino parishes, and it is especially true for evangelical, but also mainstream protestant churches.

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Our Lady of Guadalupe is the central figure in the religious beliefs of Latinos. The story of Guadalupe began in the 16th century in Mexico, shortly after the Spanish invasion. She appeared to an Indian named Juan Diego and through several miracles a Spanish bishop was convinced and built a Basilica in honor of Our lady of Guadalupe near Mexico city.

The story of Guadalupe holds special significance for many Mexican and Mexican-American Catholics because it provides the foundation for Mexican Christianity, linking Indian culture and religion to the Catholicism of the Spanish invaders (Rodriguez 45). The appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe helped to convert the Aztec Indians to the Catholic Christian faith, starting what has become known as Guadalupe Catholicism (Rodriguez 45). Mexican Catholics interpret Our Lady of Guadalupe as both a spiritual mother who protects the people and as Mother of God (Sager 10). Playing a role similar to an earthly mother, Guadalupe is always available for help and assistance and provides infinite love for her children, or followers. Because of her dual role as Mother of God and mother of human people, Guadalupe relieves the pain of humans in addition to holding considerable weight in Heaven, helping people enter through Her grace (Sager 10). For Mexican Catholics, no other religious devotion can compare to Guadalupe's relationship to their self-identity (Crane 97).

Because Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have a long-developed faith tradition with Our Lady of Guadalupe, it follows that She plays

a significant role in their daily lives. Mexicans showcase the icon of Guadalupe in their homes, churches, cars, and on murals (Sager 10), demonstrating both their practice of displaying religious objects in their personal lives and the fact that She is a crucial point of their culture. In fact, the priest of a Chicago suburban church with a large Mexican congregation has said that Mexicans are first *guadalupeños*, and then Catholics (Badillo 140). Churches with a significant Mexican population also have formed organizations that are responsible for planning yearly Guadalupe celebrations.

The centrality of Our Lady of Guadalupe to the faith and beliefs of Mexican and Mexican-American Catholics, and their focus on Mary of Guadalupe as Mother of God and mother of the people on earth, attests to the matrifocal emphasis of their religion (Sager 10). As such, Mexican women initiate and engage in church activities more than do men (Badillo 140), and they are primarily involved in the organization of the Guadalupe devotions (Badillo 141). Grandmothers make sure that the future generations are baptized into the Church and attend services (Sager 10). Religion is an important element of the Mexican woman's experience as a human being, and they take to heart the esteemed role Our Lady of Guadalupe played in the life of Juan Diego (Rodriguez 52). Mexican women understand Our Lady of Guadalupe as representing what it means to be a woman, mother, dark-skinned, and mestiza (Rodriguez 48). To the Mexican woman, Guadalupe possesses the characteristics of strength, stamina, empathy, and patience. Whenever they feel as if they are lacking a certain beneficial quality, they look



Very pervasive faith echoed in artistic expression. This painted and decorated door panel is found in the Annex building of the Latino Studies Institute on Notre Dame Avenue.

to her for guidance (Rodriguez 48). Mexican women see her as possessing a wealth of positive qualities, such as “being both meek and strong-willed, independent and dependent, assertive and shy – all at the same time” (Rodriguez 130), and draw on her for help in basically any situation.

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