Loving Thy Neighbor: How Latin American Immigration Revived the U.S. Catholic Church.

By

Caroline Jimenez

Submitted to the Department of History

School of Humanities

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College

State University of New York

December 2024

Sponsor: Dr. Leandro Benmergui

Second Reader: Dr. Laura M. Chmielewski

Abstract

This thesis examines Latin American immigration from 1950–2001, analyzing its profound impact on U.S. Catholicism. Through archival research and analysis of oral testimonies, this study challenges the notion that Spanish speakers are a minority in the U.S. Catholic Church by demonstrating how the decades-long development of Hispanic Ministry reshaped the Church's identity. Unlike Catholic immigrants of the past who had national parishes, Latin American immigrants used creativity and advocacy to establish cultural enclaves within parishes originally designed for assimilation. This research challenges the modernization theory that immigrants maintaining cultural and religious traditions are backward. Instead, their advocacy and preservation of traditions compelled the Church to implement progressive accommodations. Hispanic clergy and laity, influential in discussions of liberation theology and human rights, gained institutional representation in U.S. bishops' conferences, with their ideas integrated into U.S. Hispanic ministry. Although efforts to nationalize these initiatives slowed in the 1990s, continued immigration led to growing Hispanic membership in parishes across the United States. Latin American immigration has become inseparable from the U.S. Catholic Church's history, and its future is Latino.

The case study of Port Chester's Our Lady of Mercy Parish (Don Bosco) illuminates an underrepresented group in the U.S. Catholic Church's history. This research examines how Hispanic ministry evolved from 1970–2001 through the parish's interaction with Latin American immigrants. It explores how Hispanic ministry served a multinational Spanish-speaking community, revealing both progress and tensions between Latin American leaders and Euro-American clergy. The Spanish Mass, legitimized as central to the Catholic institution with attention to both spiritual and physical needs, transcended mere translation to become a "piece of home" for many Latinos.

Keywords: Latin American Immigration, U.S. Catholic Church, Hispanic Ministry, Cultural Preservation, Religious Identity, Port Chester.

Introduction

In many Catholic parishes of the archdiocese of New York, one can find a vibrant community of Spanish-speakers from a variety of nations who congregate together. One would

struggle to find seating in a Sunday service. Pews are filled up by dozens of families. The median age of the community appears to be in the early 30s. In many regions across the United States, Spanish-speaking communities appear to dominate the demographic of the churches they populate. With retreats and services catered to immigrant communities, to bilingual Hispanic American catechists, the church appears to successfully appeal Latin American immigrants. Currently, the very survival of the church is dependent on Hispanics remaining faithful and attentive as numbers from other demographics dwindle. This "appeal" that the church is reputable to currently have has been a historical development made in the past 50 years.

This paper explores the history of the relationship between the Catholic church and Latin American immigrants to the U.S. to understand the extent to which the catholic church changed from being an assimilation tool into American culture into a safe space where cultural identity and language are preserved, with the U.S. church being influenced, becoming more "Latin American". The chosen period of analysis, from the 1980s to the 2000s, aims at understanding a key moment in the configuration of these relationships in the NYC suburban area as migrants arrived in high numbers.

By the 1980s, immigrants from a variety of countries of origin are settling down and configuring a changing community. Local parishes within the community accommodated themselves to the challenges of welcoming new people with spiritual and material needs through initiating or expanding new ministries, coined "Hispanic ministry". Initially a pocket dimension of U.S Catholicism, Hispanic ministries grew larger in attendee numbers and in bilingual leadership. The influence of Hispanic ministry began a process of reshaping the identity of the Catholic church. There was revision upon revision on the efforts of the Church to "welcome"

immigrants, that resulted in the steady increase in the prioritization and care of Latin American immigrants. This paper will also examine to what extent that Latin American immigrants and their descendants were both the protagonists and the recipients of these historical efforts. This research seeks to center the leadership and experiences of Latin American immigrants in the United States and argue the importance of religious faith in the formation of solidarity, information networks, and community in the United States. There is impact the identity of the church, Latino leadership and efforts caused regional archdioceses to adopt more liberal practices to be able to recruit and maintain trust with the Latino community.

Methodology

In investigation of this relationship, I will analyze several documents to put into context where and when Hispanic ministries were being formed. Newspapers “The New York Times” and “the Daily Item”, a local newspaper of suburban New York, had articles highlighting specific people and events occurring in New York’s local parishes. These sources included pages of mass times and the churches they were located at, including the ones conducted in Spanish. Through the availability of mass in Spanish, one can hypothesize exactly when a Spanish ministry began in which churches.

There is investigation into the summarizations of conferences attended by cardinals and bishops, such as the National Encuentros. Population censuses are used to gain clarity on what migration looked like in New York’s suburban cities, helping make sense of why certain Hispanic ministries begun sooner than others. To highlight leaders influencing and carrying out Hispanic ministry, I use scholarly analyzes of immigration experiences and religious behavior to understand how Latin American immigrants utilized the catholic church.

Another use for the newspapers is that they hold useful information about the local challenges of being an immigrant in suburban New York. These newspapers investigate the experiences and critiques Latin American immigrants had toward the Catholic church as well. I work to piece together these stories and argue the relationship between Latinos and the church changed a lot from 1980 onwards. These short glimpses of local Latin American experiences are analyzed with information from previous studies on Latino Catholicism done by scholars. These scholarly analyzes on immigration experiences and religious behavior bring greater depth into how and why Latin American immigrants go to church upon arriving to the U.S.

This work also relies on the methodology of oral history. Oral history is a way to give voice to the everyday experiences of ordinary people. As we are characterizing a large group of people, it is important to ask Latin American immigrants about their opinion of how they perceive their relationship with the church. It is a way to access information about experiences, feelings, and memories that might not be available using other kinds of sources.

Oral Histories reveal the specific emotional and spiritual needs other Latin American immigrants may have, helping confirm whether participation in catholic community was "beneficial". As we are studying historical relationships, exact opinions of the church would vary and are not universal among all Latin American immigrants. While important, soley relying on the number of attendees to mass lacks nuance and doesn't answer our question on what this historical relationship looks like. We need to hear from both players, Latin American immigrants and from the catholic church to characterize their interactions.

To truly understand what this evolution of a relationship looks like on a local level, I studied Hispanic ministry within Westchester country, specifically in the town of Port Chester.

Port Chester is a port city that has had a history of both immigration and catholic ministry before 1960. Port Chester demographically changes, rapidly increasing in Latin American population density post 1960. Currently is it 65% Hispanic, which makes most demographically Hispanic town in Westchester. This region deserves to be studied because it is a suburban town, not an urban center. The diversification and growth of Latin American immigrants to the suburban town of Port Chester kicks off in the 1980s. My church of choice is known as Don Bosco, “Our Lady of Mercy” in our time of study. Chosen from familiarity with the impressive size of current masses, I am amazed to find that it was one of the last parishes in Port Chester to adopt a Spanish mass. "Our Lady of Mercy's” interaction with the Hispanic community parish has changed drastically in the time spanning from the 1970s to the late 2000s.

In the 1950s and 1960s, modernization theory emerged as a dominant framework for understanding the structural changes underway in Latin American societies, particularly the large-scale migration from rural to urban areas. This sociological and anthropological paradigm aimed to explain and address the challenges and cultural dislocations people experienced as they moved from traditional, rural settings—often characterized by "backwardness"—into modern, urban environments associated with secularism and progressive attitudes. Modernization theorists developed an oppositional model contrasting rural/traditional with urban/modern, concluding that as rural migrants integrated into urban spaces, they would gradually shed traditional beliefs, especially religious ones, in favor of secular, modern values.

Religion, especially Catholicism, was initially considered a marker of traditionalism, while secularism was viewed as a hallmark of modernity. This model expected rural-to-urban migrants to relinquish religious practices as they assimilated into urban culture. However, scholars within the modernization paradigm, such as anthropologist Oscar Lewis, observed that

rural migrants often retained their religious and spiritual practices in urban settings.[1] Rather than viewing this persistence of religiosity as an "incomplete" transition to modernity, Lewis interpreted it as a form of adaptation. For him, maintaining religious traditions represented a meaningful way for individuals to negotiate new cultural landscapes, affirming that religiosity was not a symptom of "backwardness" but a valuable resource for coping with and integrating into new social contexts.

This study builds on these critiques of modernization theory, examining the migration of Latin Americans to the United States to suburban areas around global cities like New York. By focusing on the role of Catholic faith among Latin American immigrants, it explores how religion has facilitated acculturation and provided a foundation for negotiating identity within American society. This analysis seeks to reveal the nuanced ways in which religious practices contribute to the integration of migrants, offering them a means to both preserve their cultural identity and adapt to a new sociocultural environment.

The late twentieth century has had the Catholic Church facing “spiritual competition” with other religions in recruiting new members, especially with Protestant churches. For example, in Brazil, once the most catholic country in South America, has Pentecostal communities close to outnumbering Catholics by the 1980s. Similar strategies attending to the spiritual and physical needs relating to migrating to the United States are also ultized by other American Christian denominations to recruit membership.[2]

---

[1] Prateek Goorha,. "Modernization Theory," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies.* (December 2017). https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.266

[2] Ana María Díaz-Stevens and Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Recognizing the Latino Resurgence in U.S. Religion*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 133.

National parishes, specific institutions only for non-English-speaking Catholics such as Polish, Irish, and Italian Americans, were losing members. Hispanic immigration rose and European-descended American clergy noticed Spanish-speaking singles and families. There was intention to rapidly "Americanize" and integrate them into their church community. This was carried out through encouraging its members to learn English and be integrated into the English-speaking Catholic Church. But in efforts to do so, the church was also "latinized", which was desirable for Latin American immigrants navigating the United States.

If these initial efforts attract enough members, the Spanish catholic community may then have a steady pool of Hispanic catholic leaders. The Hispanic ministry would continue to grow as more immigrants arrive throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Membership increases throughout the 2000s, even if population density did not change as drastically as it did in previous decades. Sentiments of Latinidad are especially strong in the 2000s, proven as Hispanic Catholics, both legally immigrated and undocumented, rise and join with other organizations to fight for immigration rights, most notably in the 2006 marches. This national movement advocated for the rejection of a proposed change to U.S immigration policy. It also advocated for a comprehensive path to citizenship for all illegal immigrants. Solidarity amongst Latin American groups to organize such a large movement across state borders is made possible partially by multi-national spaces such as the catholic church, united by a common language, and common faith.

The most effective and vibrant Hispanic ministries are the ones with leadership consisted by Latino immigrants. These leaders, priests and deacons, but also volunteers within the church community, understand the laity's they need because their experiences are similar. They advocate their parishes, and the larger archdiocese in New York to prioritize funding services for

material and spiritual needs of immigrants. Needs faced could include affording groceries, learning English, finding quality education, understanding the U.S economy, and finding friendships and community. Within these connections, they get help find jobs and a space to live in, as well as legal advice if are undocumented. Churches benefit through growing in membership, and the immigrants benefit gain information and access to services that local governments and organizations may not advertise so openly. The following literature review examines how previous scholars evaluated the topic of catholic immigrants in the United States and context behind the significance of their interaction with the U.S. catholic church.

Latino Catholic History: A Literature Review

Migration History

In 2004, David G. Guitierrez released an overarching histography of Latin American migration into the United States. This collaborative effort of several scholars provided a comprehensive overview of the diversity of experiences and challenges those Latin American immigrants faced in the United States. Organizing these experiences by countries of origin, Guitierrez begins to deconstruct the idea of Latinos as all equal in class, immigration status, and ideology. One cannot understand Latin American migration without the proper context of the specific historical events of each nation migrants come from. The later chapters are more thematic in structure, identifying “common immigrant experiences” and how they foster the construction of "Latinidad”.[3] Guiterrez’ defines Latinidad as an identity that encompasses the

[3] David Gutiérrez, *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States since 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), x.

racial and economic struggles as well as the cultural expressions of Spanish-speaking communities.

In Guiterrez's explanation of the struggles to tell a comprehensive, definitive history of a pan-Latino population in the United States, we are revealed an important insight in this field. The social reality of Latinos is "a combination of physical mobility and deep ties to places elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere." These deep ties to places elsewhere in the hemisphere suggest a history that exists beyond the United States and one that does not end once the border is crossed.

The history of Latin American and Caribbean migration and the Latino experience in the United States is inextricably related, according to the authors, to the historical relationship between the United States and the region. This is a history shaped by colonialism and neo-colonialism beginning in the late 19th century. The US ascendancy in the world order required a hegemonic relation with the Americas for resources, raw materials, food, and cheap labor. Likewise, since the Monroe Doctrine, the US established its ascendance, imperialistic relationship with the region. Much of the reason why immigrants come to the United States stems from the longer imperial and neo-colonial position that Latin America has been placed in since the inception of the United States as an independent nation. This intentional acknowledgement of the power relations between these two states has been undermined by previous scholarship.[4] This political and economic circumstances of Central and South American nations in the 1950s and 60s are due to being subject to the greed of American corporations. The

[4] Gutiérrez, xii.

damage of this influence being so drastic that thousands feel forced to migrate to somewhere safer.

Guitierrez seeks to reveal both movements of intercultural solidarity and divisions within the Latino community through various lenses. In this volume, Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo analyses U.S. Latino history through the lens of religion. The author expands on his monographic work on the resurgence of religion within the Latino community. In this chapter, we have a comprehensive summary of the ideas covered in his longer text from 1998. He argues that Christian religious communities have been significant spaces for fostering Latinidad.

He expands first on the idea that religion is not simply confined to a building or routine. Religious behavior, as he calls it, demonstrates the continuation of mestizaje Catholicism in colonial Latin America. For the author, religious behaviors and the symbolic presence of religious culture covers every niche in Latino society, "from the church goers singing in processions on Good Friday or gathering families for Sunday school to the Latino pugilists who bless themselves with the sign of the cross before a boxing match and the gang members who have religious images tattooed on their arms and chests."[5]

Migrants take their cultures with them, including such religious behaviors into the United States. And these religious spaces have to be shared with other Hispanics from different countries. And Hispanic minuities adopt these behaviors as the church becomes more "Latinized" since 1960. This assembly of Latino history scholars with this common agenda

[5] Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, "From Barrios to Barricades: Religion and Religiosity in Latino Life," in *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States since 1960,* ed. by David Gutiérrez (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 338.

provides a fresh post-colonial perspective on the most important historical developments behind the “Latinization” of the United States.

Our analysis proposes that Catholic religious institutions in the United States played a significant role not only in helping Latin American immigrants acculturate but also in adapting to reflect Latin American cultural influences—essentially becoming "Latinized" themselves. As migrants navigated their place and identity within American society, they brought with them religious traditions, practices, and values that enriched and reshaped the Catholic Church's cultural and social dynamics in the U.S. In this way, acculturation was a two-way process: while the Church provided community support and a familiar space for immigrants to integrate into American life, it simultaneously absorbed and reflected the cultural identities of these Latin American communities, resulting in a Church that evolved to better represent and resonate with its increasingly diverse congregation.

With the change in demographics, a cohort of Latino clergy arises and begins to hold their parishes accountable for serving the needs of the Latino community.[6]This slow mobilization of resources and reimagination of the U.S. Catholic Church's approach to Latino outreach produced results. The events of Vatican II in 1960 introduced mass being held in the vernacular language and women having more opportunities to serve in the mass, including altar service, an opportunity only affordable to men at one point. These changes secured and expanded further the opportunity for Latino communities to have their own space within the church to carry out their religious behaviors and traditions.

---

[6] Stevens-Arroyo, 310.

Stevens-Arroyo is confident to say that Catholicism continues to be used as a medium used to celebrate stages of life, as a provider of resources and community, and as a preservation of cultural identity. New Latin American immigrants that arrive post-1960 are not the perpetrators of this form of Catholicism, yet they are vital in providing a constant reason that the church continued fostering Latino needs. He raises the interesting question of the need for future studies on whether the contemporary assimilation of Latin American immigrants is to the Latino community and not the Euro-American society of the United States. This gap in the historiography of Latino Catholicism is debated in upcoming works from the 2010s and will be discussed further in this essay.

Political movements of U.S. Catholicism

Wald and Calhoun-Brown claim that there is little scholarship on the intersection between Hispanic religion and U.S. politics. They argue that past authors assumed that Latinos used religion as an escape from American politics.[7]They have a chapter on minority groups and brief explanations about how religion affects the political stance and activism of these groups. They compare the Hispanic experience to that of American Jews and other minority groups, with religion as a connection to other members of a specific ethnicity. Participating in the religious community serves to maintain the traditions, history, and identity of that ethnicity.[8] Lack of change is the key idea here, stating that colonial Catholicism inhibited the political movement of Latinos both back then and in modern times. Contrasting Steven-Arroyo's arguments completely, the best that the church does for Latinos is compensation for shortages in resources.

---

[7] Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.), 291.
[8] Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics*, 279.

Wald and Brown quickly conclude this section, leaving an undefined opinion that Latino religious communities lacked any connection to U.S politics.

Timothy Matavia's book is primarily focused on the historiography of Latino U.S. Catholicism. His objective is to emphasize that Latino Catholics have a long history of being important players in Latino social justice movements and in impacting not only Latino parishes but the entire doctrine of the U.S. Catholic Church. This book is structured thematically instead of chronologically. An advantage of this structure is that it strengthens his argument that there are multiple aspects of the U.S. Catholic experience. Moments where political action and U.S. Catholics intersect are organized within a single chapter. However, understanding Catholicism during a specific time is its disadvantage, as it often jumps around to provide examples surrounding a specific theme.

In contradiction to Wald and Brown's argument, Matovina provides plenty of examples of the many ways Latino Catholics who have been involved in U.S. political issues. The earliest example was named in 1854. An anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant party gained prominence in San Antonio's city council. Jose Antonio Navarro organized Mexican Americans to ensure the next election cycle would not yield the same results. He countered the Know Nothing's parties' statements, saying that both their faith and Mexican heritage were things to be proud of.[9] The Hispanic laity too has a pattern of vocalizing their issues to the church to respond to social and political issues that Latinos face, especially in the 1970s and then again in the 2000s. Faith-based lobbying and protest groups are created and strengthened. He then uses more examples of

[9] Timothy Matovina. *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church.* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 193.

various faith-based organizations receiving funding from Catholic parishes and having Catholic members as evidence of the church's involvement in the social movements of Latinos.

Matovina's collection of themes on Latino Catholicism is insightful in organizing the various paths scholars could take to analyze this complex historical phenomenon. It is a handbook for the next generation of historians who seek to understand the specific ways religion plays a role in the Latino experience. His work is significant in emphasizing that Hispanics have always been a noteworthy element in U.S. Catholic history, orienting the reader towards the lens: the beginning of U.S. Catholicism is Latino.[10]

Case Studies of the 2000s

There has been growth in historical investigation of U.S. Latino history through the lens of religion since the 2000s. The first is Schultze's investigation, specifically the intersection of Latino worker organizations and the Catholic Church. The author is a Hispanic priest and writes out of love for his Mexican heritage and the religion he is devoted to. He claims that his work is not meant to revolutionize U.S. Catholic historiography. He has a clear agenda to characterize the Catholic Church as a long-time pro-immigrant rights organization. This interest in using history to educate others about the Latino church demonstrates the public relevance this field of study has. What stands out about this entry are the spiritual reasonings behind the Hispanic church's support for Latino labor struggles. The church will stand with efforts for fair work hours because God instructs men to rest on the Sabbath day, which is one of several examples.[11]He touches upon some primary sources written in important archbishop conferences

[10] Matovina, 20.

[11] George E. Schultze, *Strangers in a Foreign Land: The Organizing of Catholic Latinos in The United States*. (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2007) 23.

as evidence of the church's labor justice stance that he believes in. The investigation into the primary and secondary sources on this topic lacks depth and his overarching argument of the church's character is good but could have been stronger.

A stronger text is Deborah Kanter's work on Mexican parishes in Chicago, published in 2020. It is a deep study of the historiography of Mexican immigration and transformation in the United States, using the Catholic parish as a lens.[12] Denying that immigration is a cause of secularization, she provides many examples of how faith and church attendance remained steadfast throughout the 20th century. Her focus on Mexican immigrant Catholicism reveals the nuance of this field; and accounts that the narrative may differ for other peoples and regions such as the Catholic Puerto Rican experience. Her work is chronological and reveals how Mexican participation in the parish also transformed Chicago outside of the church walls, both socially and culturally. Kanter gives full credit to the Mexican laity for gradually transforming the Chicago parish into an extension of the Mexican community.

Her research, in contrast to Schutze's, is concise. She creates her primary sources by conducting oral histories of Mexican Catholics who attend Chicago's parishes. She also utilizes diaries, Spanish newspapers, family photos, parish bulletins, records of social science studies, and community organizations as further evidence. This book is a blueprint for historians who wish to test how these broader trends of Latino Catholicism apply to the time and location that are being analyzed.

[12] Deborah E. Kanter, *Chicago Católico-: Making Catholic Parishes Mexican* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 3.

Continuation or change in U.S. Catholicism?

Kanter's coverage of the history of Mexican Catholicism in Chicago concludes in the 1970s. There is a low amount of scholarship covering the 1980s and 1990s, despite massive waves of Latin Americans that immigrated to the United States at this time. Within previous Hispanic catholic communities established most parishes that these new Latin American immigrants would settle into would have once had history with another immigration group, either Spanish-speaking or European. How does the surge of migration and creation of multi-national Spanish-speaking communities impact the local parishes, and with it, the cities and towns they are established in?

On the outskirts of New York City in suburban areas, multi-lingual parishes are a destination for many Latin American immigrants. These spaces have less history of Latino presence than New York City and the Southwest, but they do have a long immigrant European-Catholic history. Chapter 1 will identify more of who these immigrants are in a national, state-level, and local level. These needs and experiences are further contextualized. Chapter 2 evaluates the origins and development of the church's response to Latin American immigration. Chapter 3 then applies ideas from previous chapters to interpret a focused study on the relationship between Latin Americans in Port Chester with "Our Lady of Mercy" church. With this long history of Latino movements in the U.S. church, this case study could reveal whether this relationship previous immigration groups had with the catholic church is shared by the Latin American immigrants arriving in the 1980s and 90s.

Chapter 1: Latino Immigration into Suburban New York

New York City has been one of the most diverse cities in the United States. It is well-known city where Irish, Italian, and other European immigrants settled into during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Immigrants identified as Hispanics have also been settling into the 5

boroughs of New York City since 1810.[13] In the two decades following World War II, New York City's Puerto Rican and Mexican population grow in numbers.[14]

Then in 1965, a significant law opens the door for migrants from additional nations in Latin America. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, was a landmark legislation that fundamentally changed U.S. immigration policy. Prior to this act, U.S. immigration was largely governed by a national origins quota system established in the 1920s, The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which heavily favored European immigrants and restricted immigrants from other regions. The 1965 law abolished the quota system based on national origins and established a new policy based on reuniting immigrant families and attracting skilled labor to the United States. This new system prioritized family reunification by creating preference categories for relatives of U.S. citizens and permanent residents. It also introduced categories for immigrants with specific job skills deemed valuable to the American economy. As a result of this act, immigration patterns shifted significantly, leading to a substantial increase in immigration from Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East.

Since 1965, New York's population of Latin American immigrants grow substantially. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans and Dominicans are the most prominent nationalities among this immigration pattern. Not as dominant as the first four nations, it is valuable to note the growth of immigrants are also from Central and South America, such as Peruvians, Guatemalans, Salvadorians, Ecuadorians, and Colombians. This wave of Central and South American migration peaks in numbers in the later 1980s into the 90s, slowing slightly in the 2000s. In addition to urban settlement, in this peak time of migration, begins the variation of "immigrant

[13] Gabriel Haslip-Viena," The Evolution of the Latino Community in New York City" in *Hispanic New York*, ed. Claudio Ivan Remesiera (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 33.
[14] Haslip-Viena," Evolution of Latino Community", 45.

gateways"[14] for settlement nationwide. Since 1965, there is a noticeable increase of Hispanic immigration into neighboring suburban towns and small cities in counties adjacent to New York city such as Westchester, North New Jersey, and Long Island.

Postwar America experienced a significant process of suburbanization, heavily subsidized by new governmental funding programs such as the Urban Renewal Act, the Highway Act, and subsidies for middle-class families like the GI Bill. Traditional historiography often characterizes this process as the suburbanization of former white urbanites, which ultimately contributed to the crisis of urban America. However, as Andrew Sandoval-Strausz has demonstrated, this perspective overlooks the crucial role of Latinos, who moved into neighborhoods vacated by other ethnic groups relocating to the suburbs. There are no new construction or housing projects done in response to immigration. They arrive at fully formed Anglo-dominant built environments and adapt it to their own purpose.[15] Their presence revived cities and towns on their way to becoming ghost towns through finding work and creating businesses, and more jobs as well.

Suburban housing was created during the economic boom of the 1950s. U.S government agencies such as the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) carried out these new laws, established long term, low interest mortgages and low-interest construction loans to help build more homes. This collaboration between enterprise and government helped these new suburban neighborhoods become affordable to middle class families. In New York state, these suburbs were prominent in counties upstate counties such as Westchester, Northern New Jersey, and Long Island. Families descended from Irish, Italian, and polish immigrants entering this social class left New York city and joined these neighborhoods. European descended Americans

acquire enough wealth to move out of New York city and fill up these new suburban neighborhoods.

This time of great economic boom also generated tremendous demand for labor, the value of the U.S dollar would make any job found there result in higher wages than what could be found at home.[15] immigration reform and economic opportunities provided are the formula for a steady flow of migration into the United States post 1960. Once exclusive to white Americans, suburbs become available to rent to all racial identities after the passage of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the fair housing Act of 1968.[16] There were push factors as well to acknowledge such as U.S. interventionism. Especially in the Caribbean in the 1960s, and Central America in the 1980s, the U.S government helped destabilize entire countries, creating waves of refugees immigrating not only for economic pursuits, but also to escape from oppressive regimes.

A space traditionally serving working-class immigrants, there was plenty of affordable housing available to invest in as families moved out.[17] Port Chester is a historically "gateway" neighborhood with a long history of Italian, Polish, and Irish communities working factory jobs. Over time, suburban projects changed the demographics of Port Chester. The middle class would move to the suburbs. Factory jobs and affordable housing are vacant, attracting Latin American immigration in the 1960s from the Cuban and Mexican community.

---

[15] Sandoval-Strausz, Andrew K. "Viewpoint: Latino vernaculars and the emerging national landscape." *Building & Landscapes* 20, no. 1 (2013): 3, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A339636017/AONE?u=purchase&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=0e202ff4."

[16] Becky Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese, "Suburbanization in the United States after 1945," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History,* April 26, 2017. https://oxfordre.com/americanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-64.

[17] Amy Hill Hearth," Village is a Beacon to Hispanic Immigrants," *New York Times,* April 14, 1991. https://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/16/nyregion/hispanic-influx-slowly-altering-a-town-veneer.html#:~:text=By%20the%201980's%2C%20as%20the,of%20more%20than%20350%20percent.

Port Chester's Hispanic population was first consisted by Cubans who fled Fidel Castro's rule in the 1960s, landing jobs at waterfront factories. By the 1980s, many factories closed in response to economic recessions of the 1970s and the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s. Yet, Latin American immigration only grew stronger, finding opportunities instead in restaurants and landscaping, particularly in wealthy towns such as Rye and Greenwich, Conn.[18] By the 1980s, 15.6 percent of Port Chester's population is Hispanic. In 1990, this doubled to 30 percent, which could be undercounted because many undocumented immigrants may be wary to participate in a government mandated survey out of fear of deportation. By 1991, Port Chester and North Tarrytown tie for having the greatest concentration for Hispanic residents in Westchester County[19]. Port Chester was established as a popular destination for immigration.

Navigating a New Nation

There are several challenges that immigrants face living in Port Chester. The ability to speak English was determined the extent of the job opportunities available to the recently arrived migrants. Many migrants who hold academic degrees or previous work experience in skilled labor/blue collar jobs will need to settle for these jobs due to the language barrier. If one cannot communicate in English, migrants often need to settle service jobs that require little to no English, such as nannying and construction. Although pay is relatively better than in their nations of origin, the cost of living rises as well. Many immigrants of the 1980s arrive as breadwinners for families back home, with technological developments making it easier to "send money" back to their home nations. It is easy to find a job, however, these jobs often pay low-income and long hours.

---

[18] David W. Chen," Hispanic Influx Slowly Altering a Town Veneer," *New York Times,* April 16, 2001. https://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/16/nyregion/hispanic-influx-slowly-altering-a-town-veneer.html#:~:text=By%20the%201980's%2C%20as%20the,of%20more%20than%20350%20percent.
[19] Hearth, "Village is a Beacon."

This lack of understanding of the English language changed what assimilation to the United States would look like. As the town still operated primarily the English language, in its public spaces like schools, libraries, and grocery stores, there is some incentive to learn English. This language barrier affects the spaces within Port Chester's community the immigrant could operate in. There is a great need for community, and a sense of loneliness is often felt upon first arriving to the United States.

It's not only companionship that the immigrant needs but also information. In a time without internet translations and maps, to find a home, a job, and needed facilities, one had to speak up and ask others. At times, this is already arranged. Many migrants arrive in Port Chester reuniting with a relative or friend that provides initial companionship and information. This could encourage the newly arrived immigrant to continue finding other Spanish speakers to be able to be function independently in Port Chester. As migration numbers grow throughout the 1980s, new migrants likely move in proximity with other immigrants arriving a few months, or years earlier. Chain-migration continued as immigrants navigated living in their new neighborhoods through gaining information from other Spanish-speaking neighbors or co-workers.

Transporation affected one's daily life as well. Differing from the urban experience, the extent of where immigrants can work in was dependent on the transportation available to them. Port Chester's landscape changes as its downtown sidewalks are constantly used, and the downtown space becomes increasingly important.

Due to a variety of factors stemming from stressful economic situations and potential social isolation, connection to their nation of origin through carrying out traditions is a social need of many immigrants. Port Chester gains an international reputation as a "gateway" city and

immigrants of several nationalities arrive within the same years. Port Chester's "Spanish neighborhoods" are a multi-national one. But there may be hesitancy to befriend neighbors from different national backgrounds despite sharing the same language. Each Latin American country is distinct to one another, and in initial arrival, one identifies as "Mexican" or "Colombian" and not "Latino." There seems to be a preference for interacting with people of the same nation of origin, revealing a need to remain rooted in their home nation's traditions and communities. There are small bubbles of "little diasporas" within the "little village" socially.

In investigating how immigration laws and suburban planning were carried out, we gain insight behind why small towns like Port Chester grew increasingly attractive to new immigrants from Latin America. As Port Chester's multi-national communities grow steadily throughout the 1980s and 90s, public institutions such as schools and churches noticed these changes. In a post-Civil Rights era, many of these institutions, including the catholic church, sought to respond to the challenge of this new demographic of clients that speak a different language and have "needs." Chapter 2 will explore the history of the state-wide development of this new goal to incorporate Latin American immigrants into the U.S. Catholic church.

Chapter 2: The Catholic Church's Response and Role in Latin American Immigration

In this chapter I argue that the catholic church played a significant role in addressing the needs of Latin American immigrant throughout flexibility in its practices and in investment into services that respond to the spiritual and physical needs of immigrants. This chapter strives to characterize the church's response to Latin American immigration, and how the strategy of their response has evolved since the 1950s to accommodate not only a Spanish-speaking community, but an increasingly multi-national community as well.

Non-white Catholics as Second-class citizens

Hispanic presence and culture, including mestiza Catholicism has been in the United States since before the U.S was founded as a nation. The first Catholic churches have existed in the Southwest as it was Mexican territory until 1898. Those buildings remained populated by their Mexican American descendants while receiving new Mexican immigrants.

In the Northeast, the catholic church separated English-speaking American catholic communities from non-English speaking European Catholic immigrants. They would separate these groups through the creation of national parishes. The national parish is a church community specifically catered to non-English speaking communities descending from a single nation. Originally, national parishes will take place in a separate building entirely. But for Spanish-speaking immigrants, their services were held in separate areas of an "American" church, such as the basement, or auditorium.[20] Not in the main chapel where English American citizen Catholics worshipped.

A beneficial aspect of National parishes was their effectiveness with immigrants because they created a space for adjustment into the United States with support from an institution like one from their own countries. Services were held in Latin at this time, but homily was given in

[20] Matovina, 48.

their language of origin, often by clergy that were also foreign born from the same home nation. A community of non-English speaking immigrants had great autonomy over how their service functioned. As a result, immigrants remained attending their national parishes years after initial arrival into the United States. This separation of Catholics by nationality was not questioned during the nineteenth century but later arose some concerns in a post-World War II context. This separation from American catholic community concerned some bishops because it "delayed integration" into American society. This debate surrounded the growing Catholic Puerto Rican community in New York during the 1950s.[18]

Padilla de Armas, a bilingual catholic Puerto Rican immigrant voiced that Puerto Ricans were not welcomed as "equal brothers in Christ"[21] and authored a report of the status of the Puerto Rican community to an Irish American priest, Joseph P. Fitzpatrick in 1951. Her concern was that as national parishes were declining in funding and closing as they were becoming more prominently Puerto Rican as Italian and Irish members gradually moved into suburban areas. Her report requested for the archdioceses to provide further attention and funding to national parishes and other spaces Puerto Rican Catholics gathered in. Padilla de Armas' influential friendship with priest Joseph P. Fitzpatrick helped these concerns reach the bishops. 8 years later, a conference of bishops assembled on how to address the Puerto Rican community.
Some studies were done and found that third-generation Puerto Rican Catholics were likely to leave their national parishes and join the Euro-American parishes. Thus, they felt since Americans descended from the Puerto Rican community would eventually be assimilate into the mainstream US catholic culture, they should just integrate newly arrived Puerto Ricans into the

[21] Matovina, 48.

main parish and eliminate national parishes all together as an institution.[22] On paper, Puerto Ricans were allowed to participate in the main chapel alongside English-speakers. With the mass conducted in Latin then, the language barrier ideally would not be present in mass. The decision was then mandated throughout New York but received mixed reception among the PR catholic community.

In Matovina's analysis of this event, he references a study done by Father Phillip Bardeck of St. Cecila's parish in New York city. His survey found that PR Catholics preferred a separate time and space for their community to worship, despite the opportunity to worship in the main chapel.[23] While integration provided more funding, there was concern on whether PR Catholics would still be able to carry out the religious traditions and styles of worship specific to their ethnic identity. There was no such urgency felt by the Puerto Rican community to be integrated into mainstream Catholic society. The soberness common in American Catholic worship style was unappealing to many PR Catholics.[24] There is a gap on research on exactly how PR Catholics resisted this "Americanization" of their faith.

However, very quickly did the clergy realize that this was not working. Padilla de Arma's report also highlights many Puerto Ricans joining Protestant churches staffed with 800 pastors throughout New York city. In comparison, there were zero Puerto Rican catholic priests. This competition from other denominations was a factor in making these issues more urgent to

---

[22] George Dugan, "CATHOLICS ACTING FOR ASSIMILATION: Archdiocese Here Aims to Avoid a "National" Parish for Puerto Ricans WORK WELL UNDER WAY Master Plan Evolved With Spellman Adjusts Church to Needs of Islanders CATHOLICS ACTING FOR ASSIMILATION," *The New York Times*, March 23, 1959, 33.

[23] Matovina. 48-49.

[24] Dugan, "CATHOLICS ACTING FOR ASSIMILATION".

review by the archdiocese. PR Catholics continued religious behavior, just not within the walls of the American parish.

The Catholic Church's Response to Puerto Ricans

The influx of Latino immigration in the United States first appearing during the 1950s will spark and continue the ongoing process of the U.S catholic church and Latin American churches establishing connections with one another. Catholics from the United States received ministerial training at centers such as the Insitute of Intercultural Communication, founded in Puerto Rico by Father Ivan Illich in 1957. For the 15 years it ran, priests, seminarians, and pastoral workers for the archdiocese of New York learned Spanish out of effort to better serve the Puerto Rican diaspora.[25] This effort strove to create connections across nations between catholic churches."[26] The newspaper gives us great insight to a new strategy the clergy has used to attract the Puerto Rican community into this project toward Pan-American integrated parishes. In 1957 and 1958, 15 seminarians in NY are sent to Puerto Rico to study Spanish in new institution. Sisters and clergy also studied Spanish as well. In 1959, 219 Spanish-speaking priests are stationed into New York's cities parishes and into 25 parishes outside of the city. This effort extended to areas outside the city provides evidence of prominent Hispanic groups in areas outside of the city.

The dismantlement of national parishes and efforts to improve spaces within American parishes for Hispanic worship set the stage to why Hispanic ministry efforts are different than previous evangelization methods to the proceeding Italian, German, and Polish immigrant groups of earlier time periods. The initial goal of rapid integration during 1945-1955 is met with

[25] Matovina, 39.
[26]Dugan, "CATHOLICS ACTING FOR ASSIMILATION".

backlash from Puerto Rican Catholics, because this kind of integration was felt a form of suppression. This movement addresses the church's pious colonization of the past but isn't carried out perfectly, assuming what the Hispanics need instead of hearing them out.[27] However, the shutting down of national parishes forces the archdiocese of New York to pay attention to all communities within these regional parishes. One did not have to be an assimilated third-generation American to receive attention and funding from the archdiocese of New York.

Formation of Hispanic Ministry

As discussed in chapter 1, post 1960s we witness a huge surge in immigration of Spanish-speakers from an increasingly diverse pool of countries in Latin America into New York. This is noticeable and several conferences are held regarding the growing globalization of Catholics. The international conference of Vatican II, concluding in 1965, established churches to abandon the use of Latin during mass but conduct mass in one's vernacular language. In nations that primarily spoke a single language, this was an easy change. But for cosmopolitan United States, changes needed to be made to serve the multi-lingual communities within some regional parishes. More than ever, was it necessary to have Spanish-speaking priests and deacons so that mass could be provided for Spanish communities.

It would be a terrible strategy then to limit the parish to offering only one mass language if the region grew in steady populations of multiple languages. Thus, instead of eliminating the Spanish language, Spanish-masses were formed as an effort to cater to the Spanish-speaking community. With mass conducted in one's native language, it became an accessible and inclusive way to participate in the mass. The national parish dynamic continues further as these masses will constitute of immigrants and American Latinos who prefer worship in Spanish. Not

[27] Matovina, 49.

a word of English is needed to be able to participate in the mass. Attendance to catholic parishes by Latin American immigrants began to rise.

Latinization of Clergy Leadership and Values

One crucial thing that attracted an immigrant laity was the adoption of religious practices and traditions into the way the Spanish mass was conducted. Ministering to the Hispanic community required more than just having a translation of the English service but must respond to the other needs that groups have as "newcomers" in a country.

A globalized method was used to find leaders for this incoming influx of Latin American immigrants.[28] In 1970s, numerous delegations of students, scholars, and church leaders established contacts in Central, South America, and the Carribean. From these connections, many parishes recruited priests from these nations to work short-term in the United States. Many of these priests brought with them established awareness to the civil wars in Central America and awareness and at times, involvement in liberation theology movements, with the well-known murder of Salvadoran Archbishop Óscar Romero.[29]As Latin American leaders adopt these theological developments, they influence the Spanish mass of the United States to look like a Latin American church, through knowledge of the laity's experiences they brought from their country of origin and with some liberal priests among them prioritizing advocacy. Regardless of the theology they carry, most priests will call for greater representation of Latino leaders and voices in U.S. catholic leadership. A Latin American priest may influence a reawakening of churches commitment to the care of the impoverished as many immigrants are in a state of impoverishment and will encounter the church out of economic need. Latin Americans

[28] Diaz and Stevens-Arroyo, 161.
[29] Matovina, 39.

immigrants are the people that the church serve spiritually and there is a choice to serve them physically as well.

These migrations were occurring during a time when the church was in a process of religious resurgence among Mexican and Puerto Rican Latinos. In 1970, the national pastoral office "Division for the Spanish speaking" was revised and was moved to D.C. headed by representatives of both Southwestern Mexican Catholics and Nuyoricans, the two largest diasporas of Latin American Catholicism at the time. Cardinal Robert Stern advocated heavily for Padilla de Armas, a leader of Puerto Rican advocacy, to work alongside priest Pablo Sedillo on imagining the churches' role for Spanish-speakers in a time of great political change.[30]

Many parish leaders shared great desire to minister to new Latin American immigrants. On exactly how stemmed from an ongoing process of dialogue between the immigrant laity and Latin American priests and deacons (who are also immigrants), and Euro-Americans in higher positions of catholic leadership like bishops and cardinals. Many of these Euro-American leaders and vowed religious had lived in Latin America and were familiar with the vibrant faith communities there.[31]Their solidarity was crucial for this movement to grow to a national scale.

Improvements to the catholic church's Hispanic ministry was debated on a local and national scale. This was advocated by Latin American leaders, priests and deacons to revise moments of archdiocese' financial or spiritual neglect and to maintain practices that best served their laity. One way this was done was through conferences, uniting leaders and later members from the laity too in one space to reimagine and revise the identity of the Hispanic Ministry.

---

[30] Diaz and Stevens-Arroyo, 157.

[31] Hosffman Ospino, "Encuentros: Learning from 50 years of synodal experience-if we've been paying attention,"*National Catholic Reporter,* December 8, 2021, https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/encuentros-learning-50-years-synodal-experience-if-weve-been-paying-attention

Policies and sentiments were held accountable on how the Catholic church carried this out for immigrant and minority groups.

These conversations grew to a national scale. National conferences called Encuentros of Hispanic Ministry, helped coordinate national efforts of the catholic church on exactly how to recruit and minister to Latin American Catholics. These Encuentros were exercises of reflection, analysis and discernment across all rankings of leadership. This was revolutionary for such a hierarchical institution. They accomplished two things. First, it coordinated a national response to the evangelization needs of Hispanic Catholics. Secondly, it affirmed Latino presence and contribution to the church and society.[32] The first Encuentro occurred in 1972, calling for a greater participation of Spanish-speaking in leadership and decision making surrounding Hispanic ministry. The second was in 1977, with three more in the following decades. The most effective Encuentro was in 1985. More than 600,000 Catholics, most notably including members of the laity, were engaged in a two-year conversation. This Encuentro resulted in the creation of a key document: "The National pastoral plan for Hispanic ministry" (1987).

This document influenced more parishes that lacked a Spanish mass to re-evaluate their missions. Summarized in a catholic magazine, the national plan creates recommendations for evangelization strategies. It emphasized how churches must support inculturation, allowing minority communities to express their religious traditions and styles of worship for parish

[32] USCCB, "Proceedings and Conclusions of The V National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry, "*United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, November 2019, 20. https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/v-encuentro-conclusions/27/

attendees to feel a sense of belonging to the Catholic parish.[33]An ideal Hispanic ministry should feel like a second home to the attendee.

Conclusion

Latino Catholics fought hard to have a sense of ownership and belonging in the spaces they worshipped in. With the change of Vatican II to give mass in one's own language, along with the now changed things for how Hispanic communities were to be approached, we witness a gradual expansion of opportunities to connect spiritually to Latinos and evangelize to them. Carrying out the 1987 pastoral plan was a great challenge to coordinate on a regional level due to lack of funding. Over time, national and regional support structures would weaken. However, on the local level, Hispanic ministry would expand.[34]

All these efforts guided local churches to become more "Latinized" and more responsive to the spiritual and physical needs of Latinos and Latin American immigrants. As a result, the U.S. Catholic church has grown in Hispanic membership. By the mid 1990s, Latin Americans have been recognized as a focus group for evangelization and as the face of the future of the catholic church.

As immigrants increasingly arrive to suburban and urban spaces throughout the United States, the decision to create a Spanish mass for Latin American immigrants to worship in gradually became more than just a translated service. For immigrants arriving after 1987, the church became a space adapted for social capital and navigation, a cultural center, and a spiritual

---

33 Patrick J. Brennan, "Strategies for an Evangelizing Parish." *The Catholic World*, July 1992, 170, https://ezproxy.purchase.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fmagazines%2Fstrategies-evangelizing-parish%2Fdocview%2F212293539%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D14171.

34 Matovina, 87

comfort.[35] The following chapter will investigate how "Hispanic ministry" evolved in parishes in suburban New York. It seeks to answer the question on exactly how Port Chester's Latin American immigrants and the catholic church interacted with one another.

Chapter 3: Case Study: Westchester New York, Port Chester

To understand the phenomenon of Latino immigration impacting both the communities they settle into and the culture of the local church parish, I focused on a region that has not yet been studied under this lens: Westchester Country, New York. As mentioned before in chapter 2, priests and clergy were trained to serve communities in cities and towns part of greater New York. The article does not specify which exact parishes in this area was it prioritized to have services and masses for Latin American immigrants. However, it is notable that in as early as the 1950s, Spanish-speaking communities outside of the boroughs of New York city were noticed and attempted to be attended to. This chapter will analyze to what extent the policy changes agreed upon by the Archdiocese of New York were carried out in suburban New York for a multi-national immigrant community.

[35] Gutierrez, 216.

Westchester county, a hybrid of urban cities and small towns is one of the places many Italian and Irish Americans first settled into. The catholic church has established national parishes in Westchester to serve catholic migrants of the twentieth century, and those churches have remained. However, with suburbanization of the 1950s, new neighborhoods are created. The descendants of these migrants moved out to wealthier suburban neighborhoods. Affordable housing in these catholic neighborhoods opened, and a steady flow of immigrants from various continents in the world, but especially Latin Americans, settled in.

What is interesting about the suburban areas is the generally smaller pockets of Hispanic community within the cities and towns of Westchester. Unlike New York City, Westchester's surge in migration from Latin America is recent, with the first Mexican migrant arriving to New Rochelle in 1954.[36]There is much less of a Latino presence pre-1960 that obligated church parishes to establish ministry catering to Latin American immigrants. This lack of roots in the religious resurgence of the 1960s shared by more urbanized parishes will demonstrate further the extent of the effectiveness of coordinating regionally the pastoral plan. In my research, the incorporation of Spanish mass and serving the Spanish-speaking community into the regional Catholic churches in Westchester truly kick-started in the 1970s and refines itself repeatedly as immigrant parish members rise in attendance and involvement in the 80s, 90s, and most prominently the 2000s.

Suburban Hispanic Ministry

Effective outreach and service to Latin American immigrants took a few decades for Port Chester's parishes to learn. As mentioned in chapter 1, Port Chester and North Tarrytown's

[36] Sarah Longstreth, "Westchester, A County of Immigrants", *Westchester Magazine*, January 3, 2019, https://westchestermagazine.com/life-style/westchester-a-county-of-immigrants/.

affordable housing and accessible job markets account for why they tie for having the greatest concentration for Hispanic residents in Westchester County.[37] Local parishes that previously had little to no Hispanic population may constitute the majority. Through power in numbers, dialogue between laity leaders and clergy continued. A revival of interest and attendance to Catholic mass results from the extent to which these "needs" are responded to.

The lack of regional coordination explains why Hispanic ministry is carried out sporadically throughout Westchester. Parishes that were formally national parishes tended to be the first to cater to new immigrant communities. By the late 1990s, most of Westchester's catholic parishes had progressed to meet the 1987 pastoral plan's standards. Port Chester's parishes established catholic communities that responded to the laity's needs and acknowledged and honor their presence within the parish. The church became a space of fostering "Latinidad" through active dialogue and services connecting the immigrant experience to religious faith. Assimilation of new immigrants does occur, but to the Latino community rather than the Euro-American society of the United States[38].

In Port Chester there were four Catholic churches: Our Lady of Mercy, Corpus Christi, Our Lady of the Rosary, and Sacred Heart of Jesus.[39] These churches have previously received immigrants, especially of Polish, Irish and Italian origin. Responding to the Latin American immigration went from "rapid Americanization" to "accommodation," understanding their needs reflected the needs of immigrants of the 20th century.[40]

---

[37] Hearth," Village is a Beacon".
[38] Stevens-Arroyo, 332.
[39] These four churches have since merged under one parish called "Don Bosco parish" in 2017. "Our Lady of Mercy" was renamed "Don Bosco" and is the main parish of the Don Bosco merger. Corpus Christi and Our Lady of the Rosary's schools merged. "Our lady of mercy's parish elementary school was closed in 1990.
[40] Matovina, 45.

Recruitment into the Parish Elementary Schools

In The 1970s, Port Chester had a small Latin American population, majority of Cuban and Mexican descent. The churches of Port Chester reached out to new families through inviting the children to be enrolled into parish schools. Port Chester's local newspaper, the Daily Item, contained a "Religion section" that featured articles investigating developments in the church on a local scale. In 1973, there was an article that spoke about the decline of enrollment into parish schools. There was assurance that these schools would continue to operate despite decreases in enrollment and recent laws diminishing government funding for these programs. "Our Lady of the Holy Rosary" reported about one-third of its 300 students to be Spanish-speaking.[41] One Spanish-speaking Salesian sister and ESL teachers from public schools are provided to teach them. This decrease in enrollment comes from demographic changes in the area. Latin American immigration was considered a "situation" that deferred some families from enrolling their children in a school approximate a poorer, black and brown community.[42] Tuition would be a struggle to afford for poorer immigrant families, which limited potential student enrollment as well.

The church, "Our Lady of Mercy" had a parish school run by Salesian nuns. Salesians are a catholic religious sect founded by Saint John Bosco in the 1800s Italy[43]. Their mission was to serve and educate young people in the faith, especially children in impoverished conditions. This parish did take in children from immigrant families who can afford tuition. They were tutored

[41] Kathy Carolin, "Patrochial Schools-optimistic despite price," *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York),* August 16, 1973, 30.
[42] Carolin,1973.
[43] "Who We Are", Salesians Don Bosco Canada and Eastern USA, accessed December 13, 2024, https://salesians.org/about/who-we-are

separately from the other children by bilingual teachers. With the goal to assimilate, once they learned "enough" English, the children would join English classes.

Teresa Roman was one of these children that attended catholic school. A resident of Port Chester for 56 years, she came to Port Chester as a young girl from Cuba in 1968.[44] She recalls her time in her ESL classes in Our Lady of Mercy and compares it to her experience in public school.

"The first school we went to John F. Kennedy School in Port Chester, was horrendous. The kids were mean, made fun of you. And it was very hard. The only good thing about it was that my brother and I were put in the same class, so we were together, so we were able to protect each other. But we were extremely uncomfortable and not very happy. And it was extremely hard. And then once school was over that year, we went to Catholic school, Our Lady of Mercy, in Port Chester. Things there were better because there was more Hispanics. Who did not know English and we were taken out of class to learn English. So we had ESL classes in the basement of the school. Which was very interesting, (she grins) you know, but there were several kids, they took us out of almost every single class except for religion."[45]

Teresa goes on to describe that "no one spoke Spanish" at the public school.[46] The parents enrolled them in "Our Lady of Mercy" out of a desire to improve their educational wellbeing. Her experience in that school enabled her to learn English and make friends with other Spanish-speakers. The only negative aspect of her experience was with one of her teachers. This was from the religion teacher who only spoke English. She would "wrap her knuckles"

---

[44] Teresa Roman, interview by Caroline Jimenez, Port Chester, April 18, 2024, 3.
[45] Roman, interview, 19.
[46] Roman, interview, 4.

whenever Teresa struggled to pronounce and remember the words to the Hail Mary prayer.[47] She noted other strict rules such as the requirement to attend mass at Our Lady of Mercy every Sunday, and report to her to ensure you attended. Even if one attended another church, it did not qualify.

An imperfect experience, but an improvement from public institutions led many Cuban families of the seventies to send their children to Holy Rosary or Our Lady of Mercy. Staffing of Spanish-speaking teachers way key. In modeling the Salesian way, these catholic parishes sought to develop children's faith through enrollment in a school system. Teresa and her brother would remain in that school until 8th grade. Her father couldn't afford to pay their tuition anymore and thus they were sent back to public school. She was no longer teased because she spoke English.

At this time, I hypothesize that the parish, "Our Lady of Mercy" interacted with new Cuban families through including ESL lessons for children enrolled in the parish school. Through catholic school, they sought to get the whole family involved in the parish community by making it a requirement in the curriculum to attend Sunday mass at their parish only. The response to Hispanic migration in the 1970s seems to be this: continue operations in the parish as normal and hire what is necessary to accommodate Spanish speakers. It is unclear in my research if ESL classes were available to adults or if there was a Spanish mass was available at this time. Already struggling due families moving out, the new families moving in struggle to afford catholic school and thus attendance dropped slightly.

[47] Roman, interview, 20-21

1980s: Providing Space for Support

In Teresa's memory, she remembers 1978 to be the year Latin American immigration grew and diversified in Port Chester.[48] There was a decrease of new Cuban families and increasing of new families from Central and South American countries such as Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador, began to enter the town. By 1980, 15 percent of Port Chester is Hispanic.[49]

Countywide, the local press is noticing this change as well and more content is created for English readers about this new wave of immigration. Within the religion section, we can conclude that the first Spanish services appeared in local parishes in the cities of Yonkers and New Rochelle, and in the towns of North Tarrytown, Port Chester, Ossining and Mt.Vernon.[50] White Plains and Mt.Kisco's Spanish speaking neighborhoods were brand new at this time and have a one Spanish mass in each respective town.

Many immigrants already being devout Christians would be drawn to a familiar institution to help them feel anchored to their religious identity.[51] Their spiritual needs can be met through a parish service available in their native language. Problems such as separation from family, demanding work conditions, and the pursuit of purpose in a new nation are issues that had a safe space to be processed in within the familiar prayers and devotion style of the Spanish catholic mass.

Local parishes began to support immigrants in other ways as well. Firstly, through hiring Spanish-speaking priests and religious devotees from Latin America to help find employment,

---

[48] Roman, interview, 28.
[49] Hearth, 1991.
[50] "Religious Services" *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York),* September 24, 1983, *9.*
[51] Michael Morris, "One of a series", *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York),* April 20, 1980, 4.

advise on immigration problems, and provide translators.[52] Parishes would collaborate with federally funded services by providing office space within the church's properties.

There are great benefits in this collaboration. With these programs physically located in their buildings, the church gains stronger reputation of being a support system for immigrants. Those less devoted to maintaining the routine of attending mass would have had other reasons to enter the church grounds, which increased membership. These non-profits benefit from this collaboration, likely saving a lot of money on paying rent in comparison to renting or buying one's own office space.

This also benefits Latin American immigrants as these coalitions are readily available and easy to find if they are within a familiar, walkable institution. This visibility and accessibility of welfare and assistive services will contribute greatly to Hispanic parishes become more popular because services that help one "find apartments, jobs, welfare application, and deal with landlords are provided within these institutions.[53]Churches can prioritize providing for the spiritual needs of immigrants because providing for physical needs have become funded through collaboration with a non-profit organization.

Port Chester

The 1980s we witness the beginning of Spanish masses led by Latin American immigrants. It is unclear if there were masses in Spanish for "Our Lady of Mercy". Instead, a neighboring parish called "Our Lady of the Holy Rosary a few blocks away in Port Chester,

[52] Morris, 1980.
[53] Morris, 1980.

hired Rev. Juan Urrego, a Colombian priest who served that parish from 1980-1985. He was endearingly referred to as “Padre Juan”.[54]

The decision to incorporate Spanish-speaking priests into the parish seems to be effective and Spanish mass throughout the county slowly becomes more available. More research needs to be done in whether it was more common to hire priests from Latin America to run the Spanish mass or whether American priests took up learning a second language. Finding out about Spanish masses was likely reliant on word of mouth from other parish attendees.

As the Hispanic population grows, so does the number of attendees in local parishes. In 1985, it is reported that there is a second Spanish mass available in Port Chester.[55] This was in “Sacred Heart of Jesus” parish, located in 229 Willett Avenue. By 1989, it is reported from the Daily Item that Port Chester has become “30% Hispanic.[56]

The Salesians of Our Lady of Mercy incorporate a new idea into their strategy of outreach to the Hispanic community. “La Casa del Pueblo” is founded in 1990 on the grounds of Our Lady of Mercy.[57] This organization provides literacy lessons in English and Spanish. By 1994, a paper covers that Our Lady of Mercy “serves a growing Hispanic community.“[58] However, it is unclear if mass was offered in Spanish at Our Lady of Mercy at this time.

I hypothesize that “Our Lady of Mercy”, was on the way to adding a Spanish mass also. It seems that work was done in response to that number because it was reported that “Our Lady

---

[54] ”Departing Priest leaves legacy of Hispanic unity”, *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York),* August 10, 1985, 7.
[55]"Christmas Schedules”, *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York),* December 21, 1985, 7.
[56] ”Yes: Finding Sanctification in New York”, *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York),* December 7, 1995.
[57] ”Yes: Finding Sanctification”, 1995.
[58] Larry Dublin, ”’It always seemed like a second home’, Our Lady of Mercy Church in Port Chester marks a milestone”, *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York),* November 26, 1994.

of Mercy" formed "La Casa Del Pueblo". This space offered literacy classes in both English and Spanish since 1990.[59] From there, there's grass-roots organizations created to support Hispanic immigrants, some founded by Catholic Hispanic immigrants themselves such as the Centro Hispano in White Plains.

Others were run directly by the Archdiocese of New York ran, such as The Don Bosco Community Center, a space founded by the Salesian order that has served the immigrant community in Port Chester since 1928.[60]The Don Bosco Community Center closed down during the 1970s due to lack of finances to run it. Through the support of the United Way charity, the facility gets reawakened for new clients, Latin American immigrants. A slow revitalization process funded new youth programs, and a senior center. A boys and girls club were opened in 2001. Throughout the 2000s, Don Bosco community center invested in social service programs including a soup kitchen and food pantry.[61]Since the 1970s, local catholic parishes grew increasingly involved in the spiritual and physical wellbeing of Latin American immigrants.

Assimilation into Latino community

Latin American Catholics led the way in transforming their local parishes to accommodate themselves and other Latin American Catholics to the community. In Port Chester, it meant the creation and improvement of services. The reception to this seems positive as parish members steadily grew, with second-generation Latino children brought over as well. These changes did not cause Latin Americans to assimilate into American culture, but rather a Latino one.[62]

---

[59] "Yes: Finding Sanctification", 1995.
[60] "About Don Bosco Community Center", Don Bosco Community Center, accessed December 13, 2024, https://www.donboscocenter.org/development/about/.
[61] "Don Bosco Community Center", accessed December 13, 2024.
[62] Diaz and Stevens-Arroyo, 181.

The result of these changes is that an increased quantity of Latin American immigrants and Latinos will ultizie the space and services in the church carry out operations, nurturing a Latino catholic community. These operations have institutional support and official standing due to the agencies designed to develop them.[63] These operations include continuing religious behaviors such as worshipping and praying in the Spanish language a charismatic musical style.[64] It becomes a hub of information through the social services housed there. It is a place where immigrants from various nationalities gather, with a shared religious faith helping facilitate conversations with one another.[65] It is a place to celebrate stages of life, such as baptismal and wedding ceremonies.

There is a challenge in catering to such a diverse pool of immigrants, and often during the first year, the closest relationships will be with other immigrants from the same country as one is in. Unable to compose separate masses for each nationality, the church encourages "solidarity" and unity with others from distinct countries. The Spanish catholic community assimilates immigrants to identify as Latino and relate to Spanish-speaking immigrants from different countries through unity in language and religion. Unity in language will bring cooperation, but with that religious component in place, people are much more open to investing in relationships with others even though they are from a different nationality. To practice their faith in their language, many immigrants comply with this and add their own elements to it from their nation. This process of "solidarity" is not perfect and there is still avoidance between some nationalities of the Catholic community due to stereotypes and histories nations have with one another.[66]

---

[63] Diaz and Stevens-Arroyo, 189.
[64] Diaz and Stevens-Arroyo, 195.
[65]"Yes: Finding Sanctification", 1995.
[66] Morris, 1980.

Conclusion

Hispanic ministry is more than a translation of the English mass. It is the creation and revision of the relationship between the physical space and institution of the parish, and the people. This relationship developed over several decades, with immigrants, Latin Americans, and Latino Catholics constitutes just as much the core leadership as they were the recipients of these historical developments. There was immense creativity and advocacy work done toward the formation of this ministry. These efforts led the catholic church gradually become more “latinized”. A ministry originally designed to "Americanize” Latin Americans completely backfires for the better. Institutional support for autonomy over their enclave in the mass is what empowered local parishes to better reflect the very teachings of Jesus: “Love thy neighbor”.

Latin American Catholics are not a minority within the Catholic church, nor is their presence a recent one. These unique needs and loyalty to their faith are what compel transformation in their church community and the archdiocese as a whole. This is a history of the struggle to bridge the gap between higher church authorities and the Hispanic catholic laity. The formation of this ministry coincided with great waves of immigration into the United States. They carried spiritual needs that could only be carried out through religious behavior. Physical needs were rampant as many immigrants face unfair working conditions, language barriers, and separation from beloved family members. In the late 60s until the late 80s, the church sought to coordinate a plan to serve Spanish-speakers, especially immigrants. Several conferences and debates were carried out.

This ministry was never “perfected.” Consistent feedback from Latin American clergy and laity alike held bishops accountable for carrying out the notions for Vatican II for all Catholics. A significant milestone in this relationship was the National Pastoral Plan of 1987. However, the application of a ministry on a national level lost strength in the 90s. Yet, these national efforts paved the way for local parishes to establish masses and support structures that affirmed the identity and needs of its attendees.

Port Chester’s transformation in population brought new life to the local parishes. There is a “Latino” pan-ethnic community being formed as a larger variety of services and communities formed, serving both the spiritual and physical needs of the new immigrants. By the late 90s, the catholic church is a recommended destination to go to carry out operations needed to adjust oneself to living in Port Chester. This adjustment does not mean assimilation into Port Chester’s English-speaking community, as English-speaking Catholics rarely interact with Spanish speaking Catholics due to the language barrier. Rather there is assimilation into the “Latino community” of immigrants and Latinos united by language and religion. When a parish allowed the establishment a vibrant Latino community, Latino leadership grew and essentially, they ran themselves. These changes helped the church become an institution reliable to Latin American immigrants and created vibrant communities that Latin Americans continued to nurture.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Carolin, Kathy. 1973. ”Patrochial Schools-optimistic despite price.” *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York).* August 16, 1973.

Chen, David W. 2001. “Hispanic Influx Slowly Altering A Town Veneer.” *New York Times*, April 16, 2001. https://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/16/nyregion/hispanic-influx-slowly-altering-a-town-veneer.html#:~:text=By%20the%201980's%2C%20as%20the,of%20more%20than%2050%20percent.

Dugan, George. 1959. “CATHOLICS ACTING FOR ASSIMILATION: Archdiocese Here Aims to Avoid a ‘National’ Parish for Puerto Ricans WORK WELL UNDER WAY Master Plan Evolved With Spellman Adjusts Church to Needs of Islanders CATHOLICS ACTING FOR ASSIMILATION.” *The New York Times*, March 23, 1959.

Dublin, Larry. 1994. “’It always seemed like a second home’, Our Lady of Mercy Church in Port Chester marks a milestone”. *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York).* November 26, 1994.

Hearth, Amy Hill. 1991. “Village Is a Beacon to Hispanic Immigrants.” *New York Times*, April 14, 1991. https://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/14/nyregion/village-is-a-beacon-to-hispanic-immigrants.html.

Morris, Michael. 1980. “One of a series”. *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York).* April 20, 1980.

Roman, Teresa. 2024. Interview by Caroline Jimenez. Port Chester. April 18th, 2024. transcript, VOCES: Oral Histories and Spanish for Heritages Speakers archive, Purchase College, State University of New York.

Salesians Don Bosco Canada and Eastern USA, “Who We Are”. Accessed December 13, 2024. https://salesians.org/about/who-we-are

The Catholic World. 1992. “Strategies for an Evangelizing Parish,” July 1992.

"Christmas Schedules”. 1985. *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York).* December 21, 1985.

“Departing Priest leaves legacy of Hispanic unity”. 1985. *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York).* August 10, 1985.

"Religious Services”. 1983. *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York).* September 24, 1983.

”Yes: Finding Sanctification in New York”. 1995. *The Daily Item (Port Chester, New York).* December 7, 1995.

Secondary Sources

Burgaleta, Claudio M. 2019. “How an Irish-American Priest Became Puerto Rican of the Year: Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, S.J., and the Puerto Ricans.” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 6 (4): 676–98. https://doi.org/10.1163/22141332-00604006.

Díaz-Stevens, Ana María and Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo. 1998. *Recognizing the Latino Resurgence in U.S. Religion: The Emmaus Paradigm*. Explorations. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.

Don Bosco Community Center. “About Don Bosco Community Center”. Accessed December 13, 2024. https://www.donboscocenter.org/development/about/.

Goorha, Prateek. 2009. “An Evolutionary Approach to Revising Modernization Theory: An Introduction to the Credible Polity.” *World Futures* 65 (3): 176–203. https://doi.org/10.1080/02604020701839551.

Gutiérrez, David. 2004. *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States since 1960*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kanter, Deborah E. 2020. *Chicago Católico: Making Catholic Parishes Mexican*. 1st ed. Champaign: University of Illinois Press. https://doi.org/10.5406/j.ctvwh8dm8.

Longstreth, Sarah. 2019. “Westchester, A County of Immigrants”. *Westchester Magazine.* January 3, 2019. https://westchestermagazine.com/life-style/westchester-a-county-of-immigrants/.

Matovina, Timothy. 2011. *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America’s Largest Church*. 1st ed. Princeton: University Press.

Nicolaides, Becky, and Andrew Wiese. 2017. “Suburbanization in the United States after 1945.” *Oxford University Press*, April. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.64.

Ospino, Hosffman. 2021. “Encuentros: Learning from 50 years of synodal experience-if we’ve been paying attention.” *National Catholic Reporter*, December 8, 2021. https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/encuentros-learning-50-years-synodal-experience-if-weve-been-paying-attention.

Remeseira, Claudio Iván, ed. 2010. *Hispanic New York: A Sourcebook*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Sandoval-Strausz, Andrew K. 2013. “Viewpoint: Latino Vernaculars and the Emerging National Landscape.” *Building & Landscapes Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 20, no. 1 (2013): 1–18. https://doi.org/10.5749/buildland.20.1.0001.

Schultze, George E. 2007. *Strangers in a Foreign Land: The Organizing of Catholic Latinos in the United States*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Singer, Audrey, Susan Hardwick, and Caroline Brettell. 2008. "Twenty-First Century Gateways: Immigrants in Suburban America." *Migration Information Source,* April 30, 2008. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/twenty-first-century-gateways-immigrants-suburban-america.

Subcommittee of Hispanic Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2019. "Proceedings and Conclusions of The V National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry". *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,* November 2019. https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/v-encuentro-conclusions/27/

Wald, Kenneth D. 2018. *Religion and Politics in the United States*. Eighth edition. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.