

The Community Serving Activities of Hispanic Protestant Congregations



Amy L. Sherman, Ph.D.

Director, Hudson Institute Faith in Communities Initiative

Co-published by

Hudson Institute's
Faith in Communities Initiative



The Center for the Study of Latino Religion
Notre Dame University



December 2003

The Community Serving Activities of Hispanic Protestant Congregations

Amy L. Sherman, Ph.D.

Director, Hudson Institute Faith in Communities Initiative

Summary of Key Findings

From September 2002 through May 2003, Hudson Institute Faith in Communities researchers and their subcontractor, Urban Leadership Institute, together completed a survey of 468 Hispanic Protestant churches in the United States on behalf of AMEN (Alianza de Ministerios Evangelicos Nacionales). The survey focused on the community serving activities of these congregations. Hudson staff also conducted in-depth site visits and interviews at eight Hispanic congregations operating various community outreach initiatives. These included short-term relief programs, human services programs, and community development programs. The top ten key observations and findings from this research are listed below:

1. Approximately 73 percent of the Hispanic congregations surveyed offered social service programs for community residents.
2. The Hispanic congregations offered a wide variety of social services (49 types), ranging from short-term relief programs (e.g., food or clothing assistance) to longer-term, relational ministries (e.g., mentoring, tutoring, ESL, counseling, substance abuse recovery programs) to community development initiatives (e.g., affordable housing development, health care, church-sponsored schools).
3. The most common social programs offered were counseling and food assistance.
4. Hispanic congregations in the study are as frequently engaged in community serving activities as are the several hundred African-American churches surveyed by Andrew Billingsley in *Mighty Like a River*.
5. More than half of the churches offering community services work collaboratively with other local institutions (e.g., schools, other churches, nonprofits, police) in implementing these programs.
6. Even modest-sized Hispanic congregations are engaged in community outreach. Half of the churches surveyed have 135 or fewer regular adult attendees.
7. The most common reason pastors at churches not offering social services gave for their inactivity was lack of knowledge in how to start effective programs.
8. At least 14 Hispanic church networks focusing to some degree on community outreach/community serving programs/community development exist nationwide.

9. Less than half (10 of 25) of the Bible Institute/seminary educational programs geared to the Hispanic faith community that we briefly examined offer significant training in church-based community ministry.
10. The single most important factor required for operating viable church-based compassion ministries that we uncovered was visionary, competent, dedicated leadership.

Background: AMEN “Hispanic Congregations and Community Ministries” Project

In May 2002, Amy Sherman, director of the Hudson Institute’s Faith in Communities (FIC) initiative met with Dr. Jesse Miranda of AMEN to discuss how the Hudson FIC office could undertake research that would be of practical benefit to AMEN. AMEN’s 5-year strategic plan includes the goal of seeing 500 new church-based “compassion ministries” launched from Hispanic congregations. In light of this goal, AMEN and Hudson fashioned a research project with two components:

- (1) a national survey of Hispanic pastors to identify the kinds of church-based, community serving ministries that are currently operational;
- (2) case studies of 8-10 Hispanic congregations (of small to medium size) actively involved in community social services of various types.

From this work, we completed two products. The first is *The National Resource Directory of Hispanic Compassion Ministries* (co-published, Hudson FIC and AMEN, 2003). Modeled on the membership directory of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA), this *Directory* includes a state-by-state listing of Hispanic congregations with operational community outreach programs. It included over 300 entries, each listing the church name, contact information, and a brief description of offered services. A cross-reference index allows readers quickly to identify ministry listings by type of social service. A searchable, on-line version of the *Directory* is available at the Hudson Faith in Communities website: www.hudsonfaithincommunities.org

The second product was a series of eight “instructional profiles” describing the case study ministries in a way that motivates Hispanic pastors to consider enhancing their own outreach activities and provides them with models and advice on how to do so. The profiles are written in English and Spanish.

Both products, we hope, will facilitate peer-to-peer learning among Hispanic church leaders. They will also provide publicity for congregations/Hispanic pastors that have been visionary and have successfully implemented viable community serving programs.

Overview of the Research Project

In the course of this work, we have gathered important information regarding the community serving activities of Hispanic Protestant congregations in the United States. Through our survey, pastors and leaders at

468 Hispanic churches have indicated whether and how their congregations serve their neighbors. We have learned about the range of services offered, the most common forms of community involvement, and the reasons why some congregations are not active in outreach ministry. We have also gotten a glimpse of how collaboratively these congregations work when implementing community programs. We have seen that even modest-sized Hispanic congregations are capable of conducting impressive social service programs. Like most other churches, Hispanic Protestant congregations tend to be more active in short-term, relief-oriented programs (food and clothing assistance) than in longer-term, more “development-oriented” ministries. Nonetheless, a significant number were engaged in delivering the latter kinds of services. The Hispanic churches represented in our sample sponsored a variety of family support and human service initiatives such as parenting classes; GED and ESL training; family counseling; teen mentoring; after-school tutoring and recreational programs; outreach to prisoners; and substance abuse recovery programs. Fewer were involved in community development or economic development activities.

We have also identified a number of networks of Hispanic pastors that, to varying degrees, are attempting to: advance the vision of church-based community outreach ministry; provide “how to” training and guidance; and/or facilitate collaborative efforts in addressing community needs. And we have seen that these networks, and theological training programs geared to Hispanic ministry candidates, are insufficient. Though many formal and informal networks exist, most concentrate on fellowship, prayer, and cooperative evangelism efforts. Relatively few focus on encouraging and facilitating church-based community ministry. There are theological training programs and Bible Institutes specifically serving the Hispanic community, but relatively few offer training programs directly relevant to the work of church-based social service or community development. This lack of training is especially distressing given the number one lesson learned from the on-site, in-depth examination of eight church-based Hispanic community ministries; namely, that committed, competent, visionary leaders are *the* key resource necessary for viable outreach programs. In most of the eight case studies, one or two key leaders were absolutely essential to the church-based outreach program. Without their skills, dedication, and creativity, it is difficult to imagine these programs continuing.

This report is based on the findings from our survey of pastors/leaders from 468 majority-Hispanic, Protestant/Evangelical congregations and our case studies of eight Hispanic, church-based compassion ministries, described in Table 1:

Table 1
Listing of Case Studies

| Church Name | Location | Denomination | Size | Ministry Type |
|--|---------------|----------------------|------|-------------------------|
| El Encino | Downey, CA | Evangelical Covenant | <100 | community center |
| Path of Life | Riverside, CA | Pentecostal | 150 | men’s residential rehab |
| Centro Cristiano Misionero Internacional | Orlando, FL | Non-denominational | 125 | job training |
| El Tabernaculo | Houston, TX | Assemblies of God | 500 | at-risk teens |
| Iglesia Metodista Hispanic de Bethesda | Bethesda, MD | Methodist | 66 | ESL |
| My Friend’s House | Whittier, CA | Assemblies of God | 300 | Housing |
| Leon de Judah Congregational Church | Boston, MA | Congregational | 800 | college prep |
| Iglesia Cristiana Emmanuel | Atlanta, GA | C&MA | 135 | health clinic |

Scope of Hispanic Church-Based Community Services

We know much more about the community serving activities of African-American congregations than we do about the work of predominantly Hispanic/Latino congregations. Numerous books have been published on the former topic, some looking at African-American congregations nationally and others describing the community development activities of one or a few particular African-American churches (see, for example, Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty Like A River*, 1999; C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 1990; Samuel Freedman, *Upon This Rock*, 1993; Nile Harper, *Urban Churches, Vital Signs*, 1999). There are no seminal books on the community impact of Hispanic congregations to compare to Billingsley's on the black church.

Various national studies on congregational outreach give us a picture of how congregations serve communities, but in most of these surveys, Hispanic churches make up only a very small part of the sample. Almost always, data specific to the Hispanic congregations is not disaggregated and analyzed. The *National Congregations Survey* (Mark Chaves, principal investigator) examined 1,236 congregations nationwide, gathering a wealth of data. One question in the survey asked the respondent to indicate whether or not the church had "participated in or sponsored a social service in the last twelve months." Overall, 56.3% of respondents said "yes" while 43.3% said "no." Only 29 congregations out of the 1,236, though, could be considered majority-Hispanic churches. (Twenty-nine were churches where at least 45 percent or more of the regular adult attendees consider themselves Hispanic or Latino.) Among these 29 churches, engagement in social service was low. Respondents from 21 (72%) indicated that their congregations had not participated in or sponsored a social service in the past year.

The wording of the question in the Chaves study, however, is problematic. The phrase "social service" may not be interpreted by some pastors to include the kinds of informal community ministries conducted by many congregations. Ram Cnaan, in his in-depth examination of hundreds of congregations in the Philadelphia area, discovered that often church leaders would initially say that their church offered no social services. Then, as he probed further, he would hear about youth programs that engaged neighborhood students or a men's ministry that distributed food in the community. The leaders would not necessarily label these efforts among the needy as "social programs." They thought only large, formal initiatives, often undertaken in conjunction with the government, constituted "social services."¹ Thus, it is possible that more than 21 of the 29 Hispanic congregations noted above were engaged in some form of community ministry. Nonetheless, this is far too small a sample size to draw any robust conclusions.

The "Faith Communities Today" study, conducted by the Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religion Research, is the largest survey of congregations ever conducted (n=14,301). Overall, it found that almost 9 out of 10 churches provide assistance to individuals and families in need. This generally agrees with the data gathered by Cnaan and summarized in his book, *The Newer Deal*. The Hartford study found that, overall, 88% of congregations offered emergency financial assistance; 85% offered food assistance; 60% helped with clothing; 45% with medical attention; 46% with crisis counseling; and 38% with shelter. Congregations were also involved in providing longer-term or on-going help beyond these short-term, relief programs. Thirty-eight percent

¹ Agnieszka Tennant, "Tallying Compassion," *Christianity Today* (February 2003).

were involved in prison ministry; 33% in drug rehabilitation; 32% offered tutoring programs; 14% were active in assisting immigrants; and 45% served senior citizens.²

The Faith Communities Today study, however, offers little information about the activities of majority-Hispanic congregations. These churches appear underrepresented in the Hartford sample. The sample was composed primarily of denominational groups. Within the sub-sample of American Baptist Churches, only three percent were congregations led by a Hispanic/Latino pastor. The nondenominational sub-sample divided the race of church participants only into “black,” “white,” and “other,” making it difficult to estimate the number of congregations with dominant Latino membership. Within the sub-sample of Southern Baptist congregations, only 2.7 percent were majority-Hispanic. Not surprisingly, the Assemblies of God sub-sample included the highest number of Hispanic-led congregations. 6.7 percent of the total 691 congregations in this sample reported having a Latino/Hispanic pastor. Assuming that those congregations are majority Hispanic (though the presence of a Hispanic pastor is not a guarantee that most parishioners are Hispanic/Latino), only about 41 of the 691 churches could be considered Hispanic. But no separate analysis was conducted on the community serving activities of those congregations.

David Maldonado Jr.'s edited volume, *Protestantes/Protestants: Hispanic Christianity Within Mainline Traditions* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999) includes an analysis of a survey of approximately 300 Hispanic pastors within mainline Protestant denominations (United Methodist, Disciples of Christ, Presbyterian Church [USA], and the Luther Evangelical Church of America). Eighty-three percent reported that their congregations were involved in community ministries, but information on the specific types of social service their churches offered was not gathered.

Michael Mata of the Urban Leadership Institute at the Claremont School of Theology has written two important papers with information on the community serving role of Hispanic congregations.³ The first, “Protestant Hispanics Serving the Community: Summary of Research Findings” (Pew Charitable Trusts, July 1999), is the most directly relevant. This paper evaluates the community and leadership development roles of 134 Hispanic Protestant churches in southern California; 32 were studied in depth. Mata found that these congregations were significantly engaged in community serving ministries. 131 different service programs were identified, ranging from mental health/counseling services to housing, job training, substance abuse recovery, and emergency assistance to child care, ESL, and tutoring for elementary-school age children.

² Carl Dudley, “Reaching Out: FACTs on Community Ministries,” (http://fact.hartsem.edu/topfindings_article8.htm)

³ Mata's other paper is a comprehensive literature review of studies on the role of faith in Hispanic families (“The Hispanic Family and Faith,” Annie. E. Casey Foundation, May 1999). His review cast a wide net, however, and the paper discusses several studies of faith as an aspect of the Latino family health care system, including physiological, emotional, and mental health. In this section, he discusses Davis et. al., “The Urban Church and Cancer Control: A Source of Influence in Minority Communities” (Public Health Reports (QJA), 1994 Jul-Aug; 109 (4): 500-6). This study examined a congregational-based cervical cancer control program in Los Angeles County that served over 1,000 Hispanic women. Hispanic congregations have also sponsored many substance abuse recovery programs. Probably the most notable is that of Victory Outreach International, an organization operating over 400 rehabilitation homes serving predominantly Hispanic urban communities. Mata's review also cites two city-focused dissertations on the community serving impact of Hispanic congregations (Aponte, Edwin, “Latino Protestant Identity and Empowerment: Hispanic Religion, Community, Rhetoric and Action in a Philadelphia Case Study, Temple University 1998 and Carabello Ireland, Elba R., “The Role of the Pentecostal Church as a Service Provider in the Puerto Rican Community of Boston, Massachusetts: A Case Study,” Brandeis University, 1991).

The only other known examinations of Hispanic church-based community ministry underway currently are those being conducted through the Hispanic Churches in American Public Life (HCAPL) project and those underway at the University of Pennsylvania. Regarding the former, the Tomas Rivera Institute has been commissioned by the HCAPL project to conduct in-depth ethnographic studies in several selected communities. This will include interviewing congregational leaders about their community outreach activities. This work is not yet completed. Regarding the latter, Ram Cnaan is working on an analysis of survey interviews conducted with leaders at approximately 100 Hispanic congregations in Philadelphia. Research findings from this are not yet publicly available. In addition, Catherine Wilson, a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania, is completing a dissertation based on ethnographic studies of a few key, well-known Hispanic ministries (Nueva Esperanza in Philadelphia, LPAC in New York City, and The Resurrection Project in Chicago). In summary, there is a significant dearth of knowledge about the community impact of Hispanic congregations and much more research is needed.

Findings from the Hudson FIC/AMEN Survey of Hispanic Protestant Congregations

Against this backdrop, the Hudson FIC/AMEN survey, though not based on a scientifically-designed, random sample, is a significant contribution to the field. Leaders from a total of 468 predominantly Hispanic congregations, all Protestant and primarily Evangelical, completed survey questionnaires. (Two similar questionnaires were used; the pilot one was shorter and was completed by approximately 35 percent of the pastors. The second was longer, though including all the questions listed on the pilot questionnaire, and was completed by 65 percent of the pastors.)⁴ At an “n” of 468, this data set is over three times larger than that of the largest known previous inquiry of Hispanic pastors about their community ministries (Mata’s research in southern California).

Geographic diversity. Respondents were drawn from 35 states, though California and Texas were disproportionately represented. Other states with significant numbers of respondents included Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina.

Church size. For approximately two-thirds of the sample, we have data available on church size. The *average* size of these surveyed congregations, measured by number of regular adult attenders, was 233. This number is skewed, however, by some mega-churches in the sample. One pastor interviewed, for example, served a congregation of 5,000 attendees, and a number served congregations of over 1000 attendees. The *median* size of the congregations in the AMEN study (for which we collected this information) was 135 regular attenders.

⁴ 161 respondents completed a shorter, 7-question version of the survey. This pilot questionnaire was then expanded to include a few additional questions (the original seven questions were also repeated). 291 respondents, or 64 percent, completed the slightly longer questionnaire. The longer version included four additional questions to gather background, descriptive information about the churches (number of members in the church; number of regular adult attendees; language the worship service is conducted in; and year the church was founded). It also included a question about whether the church cooperated with other local institutions in its community service activities, and if so, asking the respondent to list those partnering organizations.

Church age. Nearly 70 percent of the pastors interviewed provided information on the year their church was founded. The founding years ranged from 1850 to 2003. Half of the churches on which age data was captured were founded in 1987 or before. (The median age of the churches in the sample providing this information was 16 years.)⁵

Composition of the sample. The Hudson FIC/AMEN survey was not based on a scientifically designed random sample. One component of the sample frame was drawn from the attendees at the 2002 Cumbre conference co-sponsored by AMEN in Pasadena, CA. This event gathered some 500 Hispanic church leaders. At the conference, survey questionnaires were distributed for completion during a plenary session. Approximately 260 surveys were gathered. Later analysis, however, revealed that in a significant number of instances, more than one respondent filled out a questionnaire about the same congregation. Also, some of the surveys were not completely filled out, some completed were about para-church ministries, not congregations, and a few represented churches in Mexico or Central America. The usable number of surveys garnered from the Cumbre event was 161.

To enlarge the sample frame beyond this, various lists of Hispanic congregations were compiled using information gathered from the internet and from key gatekeepers knowledgeable about the Hispanic evangelical community. These included:

- ④ list of Hispanic churches (by state) extracted from a large national database of congregations developed by the group, Churches Around the World (Iglesias Cristianas Alrededor del Mundo);
- ④ list of majority-Hispanic 7th Day Adventist churches nationwide (from denominational information);
- ④ list of Hispanic congregations from Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, DC compiled by the non-profit agency, Ethnic Harvest;
- ④ list of Hispanic congregations in the Seattle-Tacoma area compiled by the nonprofit agency, Ethnic Harvest;
- ④ list of Nazarene Hispanic congregations nationwide (from denominational information);
- ④ list of Hispanic Baptist pastors (from articles in *The Baptist Standard*);
- ④ list of United Brethren Hispanic congregations nationwide (from denominational information);
- ④ list of Hispanic Mennonite churches nationwide (from denominational information);
- ④ list of Hispanic pastors in Georgia (from a directory compiled by the nonprofit, Arca de Noe);
- ④ list of Hispanic American Baptist churches nationwide (from denominational information);
- ④ list of Hispanic Evangelical Covenant churches nationwide (from denominational information);
- ④ list of Hispanic churches in Florida from www.rwf2000.com/CH/Florida.htm.

⁵ Out of the 236 churches that reported having social services and reported the year in which the church was founded, 51 (22 percent) were established in or after 1998. Thus, 78 percent of the churches with community serving ministries, on which we have age data, have been in existence for at least five years.

Using these lists, and suggested names of Hispanic pastors gathered through interviews with approximately 30 “gatekeepers,” we were able to submit a database containing approximately 600 pastors’ names, telephone numbers, and church names to staff at the Urban Leadership Institute (ULI) at the Claremont School of Theology. From this database, ULI completed telephone interviews with 144 pastors.⁶ These interviews, plus the completed surveys from the Cumbre event, make up the bulk of the 468 total respondents in the Hudson FIC/AMEN survey. Hudson Institute staff also completed telephone interviews with over 50 respondents; a printed version of the questionnaire was distributed to Hispanic pastors gathered at the 2003 Promise Keepers convention; a printed version of the questionnaire was distributed to Hispanic pastors enrolled in classes at Vanguard University; a printed version was distributed to a gathering of Hispanic pastors affiliated with Kingdom Coalition (Southern California); and an e-mail version of the questionnaire was sent to those Hispanic pastors (with email addresses) that had attended the Cumbre event but from whom we had not received a completed survey. From all the sources, the eventual total of 468 completed interviews was reached.

The “bottom line” question of the survey was whether or not the church offered community serving programs. The question was worded in such a way as to flesh out the meaning of the phrase “social services” and to make clear that both formal and informal programs were of interest. Approximately 73 percent of those surveyed indicated that their congregations did offer community serving activities (see Table 2).

Table 2
Extent of Community Outreach by Hispanic Congregations

“Does your church offer community ministries; that is, “social services” such as assistance with food, tutoring, job training, etc., to help people in the community? (These ministries may be formal, with established offices and volunteers or paid staff, or may be informal. We are interested in both types.)”

| | |
|---------|-------|
| YES | 72.8% |
| NO | 27.2% |
| n = 468 | |

Types of Social Services Offered

Hispanic churches provide an impressive array of services. Fully forty-nine different types of community ministries were reported by the Hispanic church leaders. (See Appendix A for a full listing.) These ranged from short-term, relief-oriented efforts such as emergency financial help, toy distribution campaigns at Christmas, and food or clothing assistance to more long-term, relational ministries such as mentoring of youth, job training/placement, life skills classes, and literacy and GED programs, to community development initiatives such as housing programs, health care ministries, charter schools, and daycare centers. The top twelve most common services provided are listed below.

⁶ A substantial number of the telephone numbers proved inoperable. In addition, some pastors were virtually impossible to reach even when interviewers placed ten or more calls to them. The actual refusal rate, when a pastor was reached, was very low.

Table 3
Twelve Most Common Types of Social Service Programs Offered

| Service Type | Number of Churches | Percent of Churches |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Pastoral counseling | 260 | 55.6% |
| 2. Food assistance | 247 | 52.8% |
| 3. Family counseling | 210 | 44.9% |
| 4. Clothing assistance | 192 | 41% |
| 5. Referrals to other helping agencies | 162 | 34.6% |
| 6. Emergency financial assistance | 128 | 27.4% |
| 7. Aid to immigrants | 93 | 19.9% |
| 8. ESL classes | 87 | 18.6% |
| 9. Aid to prisoners & their families | 77 | 16.5% |
| 10. Tutoring programs | 72 | 15.4% |
| 11. Substance abuse rehab/counseling | 56 | 12% |
| 12. Parental training | 50 | 10.7% |
| n = 468 | | |

Some Comparisons: Hudson FIC/AMEN Data with FACT Data

The Hispanic churches we examined are apparently less able to be engaged in providing material resources, such as cash assistance and clothing to families in need, than are the (mainly white) churches represented in the Hartford FACT study (see Table 4). However, the Hispanic churches offer much personal assistance in the form of pastoral and family counseling, youth tutoring, parenting and life skills classes, ESL classes, and, not surprisingly, aid to immigrants.

Table 4
Comparison of Hispanic Church-Based Community Services and FACT Data on Congregation-Based Social Services

| Service Type | Hispanic Churches (% active) | FACT Churches (% active) |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Food assistance | 53% | 85% |
| Clothing assistance | 41% | 60% |
| Emergency financial assistance | 27% | 88% |
| Aid to immigrants | 20% | 14% |
| Substance abuse rehab/counseling | 12% | 32% |
| n = 468 | | n = 14,301 |

Some Comparisons: Hudson FIC/AMEN Data with Philadelphia Congregations Study

Ram Cnaan has conducted a survey of 887 congregations in Philadelphia. Eighty-eight percent of these congregations indicated that they offer at least one community service. On average, each congregation provided 2.3 different community serving programs.

In the Hudson FIC/AMEN survey, 338 of the 341 respondents who indicated that their church conducted community ministries specified what those ministry programs were. In total, an impressive 2,039 programs were listed. The vast majority of the churches represented in the Hudson FIC/AMEN study offered more than one social service program. Over 80 percent listed more than three programs from our list of 23 possible programs (they could also check “other” and describe a service they were operating that was not included in our list).⁷ Very few indicated operating only one program. On average, each congregation provided 6.03 services.

Comparing Hispanic Church Outreach with African-American Church Outreach

Four samples from Andrew Billingsley’s survey data examining the community serving activities of African-American congregations provide some comparisons to the findings from the AMEN survey.⁸ Billingsley surveyed 315 black congregations in the northeastern portion of the United States; 320 black congregations in the north-central region; 320 in the Midwest; and 80 congregations from Denver in a convenience sample. The table below shows how active these black churches were in providing some kind of outreach ministry. Based on this comparative data, Hispanic congregations appear as active in providing community services as are African-American congregations:

Table 5
Percentage of congregations indicating that they have one or more community serving programs

| Hispanic | Black/NE | Black/NC | Black/Midwest | Black/Denver |
|----------|----------|----------|---------------|--------------|
| 72.8% | 69% | 66% | 66% | 75% |
| n = 468 | n = 315 | n = 320 | n = 320 | n = 80 |

How Do Hispanic Churches Conduct Community Ministry?

We were interested to learn whether Hispanic congregations that were active in providing community services were largely working in this arena alone, or in cooperation with others. In the longer version of the survey, utilized in 65 percent of the interviews, we included a question about whether the churches collaborated with other local institutions such as schools, the police, or other churches. In total, 232 respondents answered this question. Of these, 56 percent said that they partnered with other organizations, agencies, or congregations while 44 percent indicated they did not have such partnerships. The most common partners identified were other churches, nonprofit social service organizations, and the police department. Table 6 provides further detail.

⁷ The 23 services listed were: food assistance; clothing assistance; emergency financial assistance; referrals to other helping agencies; homeless services; tutoring; teen mentoring; Head Start; daycare/childcare; GED; ESL; substance abuse counseling/rehab; pastoral counseling; aid to immigrants; job training; health programs; citizenship classes; legal assistance; life skills; parenting classes; teen pregnancy prevention programs; family counseling; and aid to prisoners.

⁸ Some caution, of course, is needed in making this comparison, since the wording of Billingsley’s questionnaire regarding provision of community services differed from the wording employed in the survey of Hispanic congregations.

Table 6
With Whom Do Hispanic Churches Partner in Outreach Programs?

| Partner | Number of churches |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Other churches | 28 |
| Police Department | 24 |
| Social service nonprofits | 21 |
| Schools | 15 |
| Courts/probation/parole | 13 |
| Local government | 7 |
| Hospitals | 5 |
| Food bank | 5 |
| Fire Department | 3 |
| After-school centers | 1 |
| Lawyers | 1 |
| Counseling centers | 1 |
| Emergency Personnel | 1 |

It is difficult to match precisely this data against that of studies completed by other researchers, since questions were worded differently. As noted, in the Hudson FIC/AMEN survey, we simply asked whether or not the church partnered with other local institutions, with the results as indicated above. Then we asked them to name the groups with whom they worked. Ram Cnaan’s survey of 887 Philadelphia churches raised two inquiries probing this topic. The first asked respondents whether the church worked with other faith-based organizations in developing and delivering their social services. Approximately one-third said they did. The second asked respondents whether they collaborated with secular organizations; 38 percent indicated they did. With these findings in mind, it appears that we can offer a tentative hypothesis that Hispanic congregations are at least as likely, and perhaps slightly more likely, than churches in general to cooperate with others in implementing community programs.

Collaboration certainly is the norm for each of the eight churches whose community ministries we examined in greater detail. These congregations were working with local public schools, local government agencies, other churches, the business community, and the police/court system (see Table 7):

Table 7
Types of Collaboration Exemplified by the Case Study Ministries

| Church | Ministry Focus | Partners |
|----------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Iglesia Cristiana Emmanuel | health center | state gov’t, business |
| My Friend’s House | housing/daycare | HUD, business, local gov’t agencies |
| Centro Cristiana | job training/mentoring | business, other churches |
| Leon de Judah | college prep | Nellie Mae, Inter-Varsity, other churches, High schools, HEIC |
| El Tabernaculo | teens at risk | schools, police |
| El Encino | community center | schools, secular nonprofits |
| Path of Life | men’s rehabilitation | courts, police, local gov’t, business |
| Iglesia Bethesda Metodista | ESL | schools, public library, other churches |

Why Are Some Hispanic Churches Inactive in Community Ministry?

127 respondents (roughly 27 percent of those surveyed) indicated that they were not involved in providing community social services. We asked these church leaders to tell us more about the reasons why they were not currently engaged in such programs. They could select as many of the possible reasons listed below as they felt accurately represented their situation. If none of these reasons fit their experience, they could select “other” and tell us their response in their own words:

“We are a very small church and have no resources for outreach ministry.”

“We believe it is more important to engage in evangelism than in outreach ministry or social services.”

“We have the desire to help the community, but we are not sure how to start effective programs.”

“We have future plans to do more outreach in the community, but right now we are focused on other priorities.”

“There are individual church members who minister in the community in various ways, but the church as a whole does not operate formal outreach programs.”

The most common reason given by church leaders for not being more active in community ministry was lack of “know how.” These pastors indicated that they had the desire to better serve the community, but were uncertain about the steps to take to launch an effective ministry. Almost 55 percent of those in congregations not reporting outreach ministries surveyed gave this response. The second most common reason for not offering social services, selected by 46 percent of the non-active group, was that the church was small and had no resources for doing outreach programs. Only eight percent said that the reason their church was not involved in community service was because they believed it was more important to engage in evangelism than it was to conduct outreach ministry or social services.

For those eager to see Hispanic congregations vibrantly active in serving their communities, the survey results are encouraging. Not only is the number of churches already active high (73 percent), but the findings from those churches that are not active leave much room for hope. Thirty-eight percent of the churches without social services indicated that although their congregations have no current programs, they had future plans to get engaged in social services. Roughly one-third indicated that individual congregants were already performing community service even though the church as a whole lacked formal outreach programs. And the number one reason for not being engaged was not theological skepticism about the legitimacy of community outreach, but a simple lack of knowledge about how best to go about starting service programs.

A few observations, though, should temper this good news. First, as noted earlier, the Hudson FIC/AMEN survey was not a scientifically random one. Many of the respondents were drawn from among church leaders that attended major conferences (Cumbre and Promise Keepers). It may be that leaders pre-disposed to be active in such events are more likely than their counterparts to also be active in community service. Moreover, a small portion of the survey respondents were members in a class taught by Dr. Jesse Miranda at Vanguard University. Again, it is likely that these more educated pastors tend to be more active in community serving ministries than those who are less educated. Second, although nearly all the respondents indicated that their

social services programs benefited persons within the church family and neighborhood/city residents, we have no way of knowing from the data collected whether a majority of those served are from outside the church. Third, some may quibble with our choice of including “pastoral counseling” as an outreach ministry (and pastoral counseling was the single most common form of social services reported). Finally, as reported above, only a small percentage of the survey respondents representing churches without outreach programs admitted that the reason for their inactivity was theological. But many of the gatekeepers (network leaders, heads of well-known Hispanic faith-based organizations) we interviewed said that the problem of theological skepticism about the legitimacy of social ministry remains a significant issue in the Hispanic Evangelical community.

Networking

Hudson researchers invested substantial energies in attempting to identify key gatekeepers and networks of Hispanic churches. While there seem to be a fair number of both formal and informal networks of Hispanic churches around the country, we found that few are for the specific purpose of encouraging or providing community service programs. We identified a total of fourteen networks of Hispanic churches that have some emphasis on community outreach. While most are “Hispanic owned and operated” networks, some are not. The latter represent collaborations between a Hispanic network and another non-Hispanic organization. Most Hispanic networks, we found, exist for prayer and fellowship. When the churches in a given network do collaborate, the focus is often on evangelistic endeavors. When we asked gatekeepers and leaders of networks why this was so, most explained that it is easier to do church activities, such as praise services or prayer meetings, than it is to wrestle with the entrenched, long-standing problems that exist in the surrounding community.

Training Programs

To increase Hispanic church-based community ministries, collaborative networks like those described above are helpful. Enhanced training in community outreach for future Hispanic pastors should also contribute. Initially, we had hoped to conduct an ambitious, nationwide scan of theological training programs geared to Hispanics, to identify how many of these programs offer specific training in topics related to church-based community ministry (e.g., courses in community or economic development, how-to seminars on conducting community needs/assets assessments, internships at Hispanic FBOs, etc.) The work required in compiling lists of Hispanic pastors to contact for the survey was so time-consuming and labor-intensive, however, that we were unable to accomplish fully this component of our planned activities. In the end, we were able only to look briefly at 25 institutes/seminaries with programs geared specifically to Hispanic students: Hispanic Bible School; Rio Grande Bible Institute; Catholic University’s Hispanic Studies Program; Goshen College’s “Hispanic Education in Theology & Leadership” program; San Antonio Bible Education; Hispanic Institute of Theology (Concordia Seminary); Hispanic Baptist Theological School; Seminario Biblico del Sur de California (El Cajon); El Seminario Biblico Fundamental de Sur de California (Montebello); Asbury Theological Seminary (Orlando); Loyola Marymount’s Center for Religion and Spirituality; McCormick Theological Seminary (Hispanic Ministries Program); Haggard Graduate School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University; Instituto Hispano at Loyola University (Chicago); Intercultural Leadership Network; Instituto Teologico del Oeste; Vanguard University’s Center for Urban Studies and Ethnic Leadership; Hispanic Ministries Program at Hartford Seminary; Centro Hispano de Estudios Teologicos; Atlantic International Bible Institute; Institute Ministerial Hispano; Houston College of Biblical Studies; Perkins School of Theology; Oblate School of Theology (San Antonio); Word Bible School; and the

Interdenominational Training Institute. We found that less than half (ten of the twenty-five) offered significant courses/programs relevant to training in holistic ministry (see Table 8).

Table 8
Hispanic Training Programs

| Training Program | Community Ministry Focus? | Comments |
|--|---------------------------|---|
| San Antonio Bible Education | Limited | leadership dev; creative VBS |
| Hispanic Bible School | Yes | “Hisp. Urban Issues & the Church” |
| Rio Grande Bible Institute | Limited | 1 holistic ministry course at certificate program level |
| Hispanic Institute of Theology (Concordia Seminary) | Limited | “contextual leadership dev” church planting |
| Hispanic Baptist Theological School | Limited | “contextual evangelism,” Counseling |
| Seminario Biblico del Sur de California | Limited | |
| Hispanic Ministries Program (McCormick Theological Seminary) | Unknown | |
| Instituto Teologico del Oeste | Unknown | |
| Ctr. for Urban Studies & Ethnic Leadership, Vanguard University | Yes | significant emphasis |
| Hispanic Ministries Program, Hartford Seminary | Yes | “Urban Ministry in Hisp Context” required hands-on experience in community |
| Centro Hispano de Estudios Teologicos | Yes | handful of courses |
| Atlantic International Bible Institute | No | |
| Instituto Ministerial Hispano | No | |
| Loyola Marymount | Limited | “Pastoral Care”, substance abuse, counseling |
| Word Bible School | No | |
| Goshen College | Yes | Supervised community ministry |
| Asbury Theological Seminary | Yes | handful of courses |
| Instituto Hispano at Loyola University | Limited | 1 course |
| El Seminario Biblico Fundamental de Sur de California | No | |
| Haggard Graduate School (Azusa Pacific University) | Yes | Concentration in Urban Ministry |
| Perkins School of Theology | Yes | “Christianity and Social Justice”, “Community organizing” |
| Oblate School of Theology | Limited | 1 course in “Contemporary Issues in Hispanic Ministry” |
| Catholic University | Limited | “Church and Social Issues” |
| Houston College of Biblical Studies | Yes | significant emphasis |
| Interdenominational Training Institute | Yes | significant emphasis |

Lessons Learned

Several lessons stand out from the work we have completed.

The first group of lessons relate to research methods. The most cost-effective method of garnering surveys was distributing them at major events. We did not even consider doing a mail-out version of the survey,

expecting that the rate of return would be abysmal. We were unsure about the value of survey distribution via email. We learned it was an ineffective method. Those surveyed by email were aware of AMEN, and the survey was accompanied (twice) by a cover note from John Mendez of AMEN. Nonetheless, only three people in roughly 100 responded. We also attempted to use gatekeepers as distribution agents for the survey. This, too, failed. Despite securing commitments from several gatekeepers to distribute the surveys at their network meetings, we never received a single survey back. We did find that the gatekeepers were helpful in directing us to individual churches/pastors operating community programs. It was largely based on their input that we were able to put together a list of 35 potential case study sites from which we eventually picked eight. We also tried to use denominational leaders as survey distribution agents. These individuals were without exception unhelpful and unresponsive. With regard to the telephone survey, subcontracting with ULI was an effective strategy. Their interviewers—native Spanish speakers and ministry candidates—were able to develop a rapport with the pastors that facilitated the pastors’ willingness to participate in the survey.

The other group of lessons we learned cluster around the issue of leadership. From the case studies in particular, and from analysis of significant Hispanic church-based community ministries that we did not visit on-site, we clearly saw the importance of visionary, committed leadership. This must not be underemphasized in any strategy to expand or enhance the scope of Hispanic church-based outreach efforts. In every case study and every robust church-based community ministry we found, in huge measure the program resulted from the work of one or two key leaders.

These leaders appear to be motivated primarily by their own personal histories. One was an immigrant from Cuba and knew personally the challenge of integrating into life in the U.S. She has now invested over twenty years operating a highly organized ESL program. Two others had been drug abusers and lived at various rehabilitation centers until they were healed. Now the two have launched a men’s residential recovery home designed in large measure by a kind of positive plagiarism—imitating the best models they have personally experienced and avoiding practices they saw were ineffective. Another leader grew up impoverished in Columbia; today he is passionate to see poor Hispanics be able to access decent health care.

Some of the leaders were mentored—though rarely by fellow Hispanics. A few had formal training or education that was relevant to the skills and knowledge they needed to launch their specific outreach ministries. Most, though, just “figured out how to do things” on their own. They had an entrepreneurial, can-do spirit and incredible perseverance. They did express a desire to know about others from whom they could learn, as well as about resources (websites, organizations, training conferences or materials) from which they could benefit.

The vast majority instinctively realized that they needed to connect to public institutions—the police, the court system, the schools, local or state government—to realize their visions. None were scared of potential “church-state” conflicts. All believed that their efforts would enjoy greater credibility if they wooed public officials or civic leaders “to their cause.” All also revealed an ability to “know what they didn’t know,” and to quickly identify other churches/FBOs (usually non-Hispanic) or even secular nonprofits that were operating the kinds of programs they dreamed of implementing.

Finally, almost without exception, these leaders felt isolated. Other pastors they knew were either lukewarm about or hostile to their efforts. A few made comments about being perceived as “odd men out” among their

peers. Some admitted that their own congregations had been either skeptical or indifferent, initially, to the outreach programs they wanted to implement. These leaders said that they had “gotten ahead of their flock” and had had to go back and cast vision and “pull people along.” In most cases, their ministries had received little publicity or “kudos.” Typically, they were not aware of other Hispanic Christian leaders who were active in operating outreach ministries like their own. They expressed interest in networking with other Hispanic peers passionate about community ministry.

Conclusion

Hispanics are now America’s “majority minority.” By various indices, Hispanics may be considered the poorest minority as well. In distressed urban centers, Hispanic youth are at significant risk for dropping out of school, joining a gang, or getting pregnant as teens. Hispanics rank high among the medically uninsured and many are underemployed. These problems are well-known and well-documented. What is not as well-known and well-documented is the effort Hispanics of faith are investing in meeting these challenges. The Hudson FIC/AMEN survey reveals that far from being unaware of or unengaged in the life of their communities, Hispanic congregations do reach out to try to make a difference.

The Hispanic faith community does not have the strong infrastructure of faith-based social services as does the African-American community. African-American capacity-building intermediaries exist. Training conferences and how-to materials relevant to the black community are available. A young black pastor can, without much effort, connect with an African-American mentor/leader with experience in community ministry—probably right within his own city. Little of this is as true for the Hispanic community, though recent growth and efforts by the two largest and most reputable Hispanic FBOs (Nueva Esperanza and LPAC) are bringing training, capacity building, and resources to local Hispanic congregations and FBOs. More of these kinds of efforts are critical. Many Hispanic pastors are willing to become more involved in community outreach, but say they need help in knowing how to get started. And, as our survey revealed, many pastors have already led their congregations in serving their communities. Their efforts provide a foundation on which to build, so that the talents, energies, and assets of the Hispanic Christian community can be unleashed for community transformation.

APPENDIX A: Comprehensive Listing of Services Offered

| | |
|--|---|
| Adopt a Block | Job Training/Placement |
| Advocacy | Legal Aid |
| After School Programs/Activities | Life Skills |
| Summer Camp for Youth | Literacy Program |
| Children's Ministry | Management Classes |
| Church-Sponsored Schools | Parental Training |
| Citizenship Classes | Clean Parks |
| Clothing Assistance | Aid to Prisoners and/or their Families |
| Computer Classes | Outreach to Prostitutes |
| Counseling – Family | School Readiness Program |
| Counseling – Pastoral | Referrals to Other Agencies for Help |
| Daycare | Mentoring and Reintegration Program for Ex-Convicts |
| Deaf Ministry | Scholarship Program |
| Emergency Financial Assistance | Special Education |
| ESL (English as a Second Language Classes) | Sports Outreach |
| Food Assistance | Substance Abuse Counseling/Recovery/Prevention |
| Furniture | Help with Income Taxes |
| Outreach to Gang Members | Teen Pregnancy Prevention |
| GED (Training for High School Equivalency) | Toy Distribution |
| Health Care | Translation Services |
| Housing | Transportation |
| Men's Home for Addictions/Rehab | Tutoring Programs for Youth |
| Homosexual Recovery | Women, Infants, and Children |
| Head Start | At Risk Youth |
| Aid to Immigrants | |

