

## **The History and Experience of Latinos/Hispanics in the United States**

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In the United States, a nation built by immigrants over the bones of the indigenous people, there have been waves of immigrants. In the current waves, there are immigrants from every continent, culture, every ethnicity, every religion, and sub-groups within these groups. Latino immigrants are one of the largest, if not the largest immigrant group challenging the reality of the United States.

In writing about the reality of Latinos/Hispanics in the United States, it is important to provide an ample historical context to understand where we have come from and where the journey is taking us.<sup>1</sup> Another dimension of this history is to become acquainted with U.S. Hispanic Ministry, its demographics, and significant facts and figures.<sup>2</sup> Lastly, I will suggest areas that as Sisters of Mercy, we need to take into account as we search out the meaning of Mercy in the Twenty-first Century...

### **A History of Conquest**

Long before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, Hispanics were a presence in these lands. It began immediately with Christopher Columbus' first voyage of discovery in 1492, and the first Christian evangelization began in 1493 with the Spanish settlements on Hispaniola.<sup>3</sup> The "discovery" of the Americas by Spain was marked by violence. The missionary efforts of Spain were unfortunately linked with the conquerors' greedy pursuit of wealth. In a very short time, the culture and history of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas was substantially altered. The encounter of Spain with the indigenous peoples of the Americas produced a people, the Hispanic/Latino people. This mestizo (mixed blood) people today live in Mexico, Central American, South America and the United States. The history of Latinos has geographically unfolded in unique ways. This paper focuses on the reality of Hispanic/Latinos in the United States.

## Hispanic Diversity

The term Hispanic, although useful in referring to a cultural group, is nevertheless limited. Using it leads to homogenizing the rich diversity of the peoples it attempts to represent. Other terms such as Spanish-American, Mexican-American, Chicano and Latino have been used over several decades. None has found singular approval over the years, but the term Hispanic, used broadly by U.S. Hispanic Catholics since 1977, has become a popular one. The heterogeneous reality of the Hispanic/Latino population defies ready identification.<sup>4</sup> People of Mexican heritage (66.9%) are the largest among the Hispanic constituency of this country. Puerto-Ricans (8.6%) and Cubans (3.7%) comprise the second and third largest groups within the Hispanic population. The fourth group of Hispanics is made-up of those coming from the countries of Central and South America (14.3%), e.g., Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, Costa Ricans, Panamanians, Hondurans and other Hispanics (6.5%).<sup>5</sup> Hispanics from the Caribbean include those from the Dominican Republic as well as those already mentioned from Puerto Rico and Cuba. While these national groups share similar cultural values, the Spanish they speak is flavored differently, and a distinct appropriation of customs, values and attitudes mark their particular way of being Hispanic. Other social, economic and educational factors shape these diverse groups differently.

The issue of what term to use poses the question of appropriation. How does the group or the individuals relate to the ancestral origins that are part of their history? The birth of the Hispanic people occurs with the encounter of Spain with the Indigenous inhabitants of the “New World” in 1492. A “mestizaje” was produced or, as Virgilio Elizondo describes it, “the process through which two totally different peoples mix biologically and culturally so that a new people begins to emerge, e.g., Europeans and Asians gave birth to Eurasians: Iberians and Indians gave birth to the Mexican and Latin American people.”<sup>6</sup> The historical process of becoming this “new race” is only five hundred years old. It is a process which has been marked by a variety of colonial experiences, such as that of the French, the English and others. Each political power has established and eliminated geographical boundaries in following its political agendas and

goals. And although Hispanics did not cross the borders of the territories that they had occupied for five centuries, the border crossed them.

In this ongoing political process, an appropriation of cultural identity is a challenge for United States Hispanics. Born out of a violent historical moment of the *Conquista*, they face a range of possibilities as they attempt to accept the consequences of that history. This is not an easy choice, especially for U.S. Hispanics who are faced with the degrees of shame or pride that they personally attribute to the reading of their particular history. It is a choice which is influenced by the attitudes of the dominant cultural society in which they were raised.

The challenge of identity is extended along generational lines. The question that faces the youth of any ethnic group is shared by young Hispanics as well. As the immediacy with one's parental cultural roots is more a reality of the past, the young experience a tension between their parents' values and that of the dominant society in which they function. The choices they will ultimately make span a continuum from the decision to maintain only the Hispanic culture as passed on to them by their parents to opting for total assimilation into the social, cultural, and religious norms of the dominant society.

#### Hispanic Religiosity

The question of identity will significantly impact the particular Hispanic experience and expression of "religiosity" of this diverse population. For Latin Americans who migrate to the United States from primarily rural areas, their experience of religiosity may often be highly devotional and rely more on the piety of the individual and/or that of the community. The infrequent attention given to rural communities due to the scarcity of ministers nourishes a reliance on popular expressions of faith which are intimately connected to the rhythm of rural life. A strong adherence to traditional religious practices and beliefs may be the foundational pool from which they will draw.

However, all Latin Americans will not necessarily fall into this religious category. Latinos who have lived in political contexts of oppression, in which their human rights

have been violated as in El Salvador or Guatemala, may have discovered in that struggle a new model of church. This was part of the liberating process for Archbishop Oscar Romero who urged change in the Salvadoran church in order to be faithful to its mission:

Therefore, in the different circumstances of history, the criterion that guides the church is not the satisfaction of human beings or its fear of them, no matter how powerful or feared they may be, but [it is] its duty to lend to Christ through history its voice so that Jesus can speak, its feet so that he can walk the world of today, its hands to work in the building of the kingdom in today's world, and all its members to "fill up what is lacking in his suffering" (Col. 1:24).<sup>7</sup>

For these Latinos, religiosity is shaped in an ongoing way by human events that occur at all levels of life. The political arena is not separate from that of one's faith, and the presence of Christ is sacramentally embodied in the community of believers. Other Hispanics/Latinos choose to retrieve the religiosity of their ancestors and seek ways of appropriating it either in the context of modern-day realities or in re-enacting ancient religious traditions and rituals. Pilgrimages to sacred sites, such as that of Chimayo or the basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, nourish the collective religious memory of their ancestors as well as their own. A mestizo ritualization of ancient Mesoamerican traditions intertwined with the Catholicism of Spain will be sought by others in an attempt to claim a religiosity that is proper for those born in the United States.

The Catholic Church in the United States has not always understood how to respond to the religious expressions that are an integral part of Hispanic/Latino Catholicism. In particular, the area of popular religion has been looked upon suspiciously. Neglect of Hispanic Catholics by the Catholic Church has a long history.

#### U.S. Hispanic Catholicism

As a group of people in the United States, Hispanics were often neglected in the life of the Church. Moises Sandoval writes that Hispanics were silent participants in Church pews. The difficult truth of the matter is that the first significant movement

toward establishing Church structures for the Hispanics occurred in the 1920's. In 1923, an immigration office was established by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in El Paso. But the most significant developments came in the waning days of World War II. In 1944, Archbishop Robert E. Lucey of San Antonio sponsored a seminar for the Spanish-speaking.<sup>8</sup> The seminar convened fifty delegates from the western and southwestern regions of the United States to discuss the pastoral attention given by the Church to Hispanics. Archbishop Lucey's initiative motivated other dioceses to follow suit. In 1945, Archbishop Lucey established the first office for Hispanic concerns on a regional level. The leadership for the position of director resided in the hands of non-Hispanics until 1967, when a layman, Antonio Tinajero, was hired. In 1968, the office would assume national dimensions when it was moved to Washington, D.C., as part of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The office was primarily directed toward the social and material needs of the Hispanic community, and not on their pastoral needs.

In 1971, Pablo Sedillo, Jr., was appointed director, and under his leadership the office finally assumed a more pastoral role with the responsibility of urging the Church to respond concretely to the pastoral needs of Hispanics. Other significant movements began to occur, marked by the consecration of the **first** Hispanic U.S. bishop, Patricio Flores, in 1969. In 1972 the first National Hispanic Pastoral Encounter (Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral) was celebrated, initiating a grass-roots process by which the Hispanic community, for the first time in its history, began a search to identify its pastoral needs and its relationship to the U.S. Catholic Church. A succession of Encuentros would follow, in 1977 and 1985. This process resulted in the formulation of the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry, approved by the National Catholic Conference of Bishops (NCCB) in 1987.<sup>9</sup> The net result was a growing consciousness on the part of the Hispanic people of their identity as Church and their role within it. For many Hispanics it brought about a greater cultural awareness and with it self-confidence. Hispanics would no longer conform to being a passive presence in the U.S. Church, nor would they readily accept a position of non-leadership.

## The Significance of the *Encuentros*

The overall significance of the Encuentros process (1972-1985) cannot be sufficiently emphasized. Prior to this movement, U.S. Hispanics had virtually no say within the Church structures of either Spanish or American Catholicism. The Encuentros represented a first step across the border of pastoral indifference and neglect. For the first time, Hispanics found themselves exploring the question of Church and their place in it. The Encuentros offered a major opportunity for communal reflection and decision making for Hispanics on matters of faith and religious values.

### I Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral (1972)

During the I Encuentro keynote addresses were given by Bishop Zambrano of Colombia and Reverend Virgilio Elizondo of San Antonio, Texas. Both touched upon several aspects of ministry that would later be recognized as important elements for the entire Church: 1) the identity of Church; 2) the place of the Church in the modern world; 3) the incarnational reality the Church is rooted; 4) pastoral activity as the proper exercise of the salvific mission of the Church; and 5) the implicit understanding the response of love expressed through pastoral activity inherently belongs to all baptized women and men.

Specific mention was made of the critical need to establish centers and programs for leadership training of bishops, priests, religious, and laity (Hispanic and non-Hispanics). Recommendations were made for non-Hispanic clergy and religious preparing to work in Hispanic ministry:

The style of ministry of foreign (non-Hispanic) clergy and religious who work in Spanish-speaking communities in the U.S. must be, in the best sense of the world, missionary. That is to say that there must exist, on their part, familiarity, adaptation, and acceptance of the language, culture, and style of Catholicism of the Spanish speaking people. They must have, as their principal goal, the development of native Christian and ecclesiastical leadership, such as, bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and lay leaders.<sup>10</sup>

Recommendations were made for the preparation of Hispanic priests that stressed the importance of cultural identity, bilingual and bicultural formation, strong identification with the Hispanic community, and team-work as the preferred style of ministry.

### II Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral (1977)

Five years later the Hispanic community gathered again to consider six major themes that had emerged since the 1972 Encuentro. The umbrella theme of Evangelization was the principle focus aligned with the topics of Ministries, Human Rights, Integral Education, Political Responsibility and Unity in Pluralism. During the process of the II Encuentro the significance of ministry emerged as one belonging to all Christians through their baptism. The articulation of the emerging concept of ministry was based on the fact that the Hispanic people identified themselves as *Somos Pueblo* (We are a People) and *Somos Iglesia* (We are Church). Ministry is understood as the mission of all the members of the Church without distinction or exception. The gifts and talents of the community are given by the Holy Spirit for the good of the whole. Finally, service is seen as a concrete expression of faith and a way of living the two great commandments.<sup>11</sup>

But in order to accomplish this type of transformative service, it was necessary to know the culture, historical reality, and the actual needs of the community. It was clear as all the themes were explored that it was impossible to evangelize without having knowledge of the realities that Hispanic people lived.

### III Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral (1985)

The III Encuentro was not an isolated event in the history of the pastoral ministry of the Hispanic people in the United States. It was rather one more step in a process of ecclesial participation that began with the establishment of Church offices for the care of Hispanics in the first half of this century, for example, in Philadelphia in 1915 and in San Antonio in 1945.<sup>12</sup>

Now what clearly emerged was that for those of the Hispanic community who had been involved in the process of the Encuentros, the earlier question that plagued Hispanics regarding who could participate in ministry was no longer an issue. The issue now was the fact that good will alone was not sufficient. Time had proven that given the complexity of U.S. society and of the existing structures of the institutionalized Church, Hispanics needed adequate educational formation not only for ministry within the Church but for all dimensions of life.

Several decades have passed since the process of the Encuentros. Despite the enthusiasm of those years, it has become painfully clear that even with educational formation, Hispanics continue to be minor players in the life of the Catholic Church. While Hispanic Pastoral Centers flourished during the decades of the 80's and 90's, poor financial support resulted in the closing of some of those offices. In other cases, some of the offices had to limit their services. In 2006 the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops restructured its main office in Washington, D.C. and eliminated the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs (1968-2006). This decision was made despite the statistics that indicate the importance of the general Hispanic population in the U.S., and their adherence to the Catholic Church.

### Demographics

Population: The 2000 census lists the Hispanic population in the U.S. at 35.3 million.<sup>13</sup> This represents 12.5% of U.S. population.<sup>14</sup> The Hispanic population is young, with 37.5% under age 18. Another 59% of the population is between 18-64 years. And 5.3% of the Hispanic population is 65 years or older.<sup>15</sup>

In 1980, 80% of the Hispanic population was native born. In 1990, 64% of the Hispanic population was native born. According to the 2000 census, 60.9 % of all Hispanics are native U.S. citizens, while only 39.1% are foreign born.

Seven states had more than one million Hispanic residents in 2000: Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas. Fifty percent of the Hispanic population in 2000 lived in California, the highest of any state.<sup>16</sup>

Hispanics can be found in almost every state in the United States. They can be found in unexpected places such as Hawaii and Alaska. Hispanics migrate to places where they can work.

### U.S. Catholics

The 2002 Official Catholic Directory lists the U.S. Catholic population at 65,270,444. Catholics represent 22.9 percent of the total population of the United States. According to a recent survey, 72.6% of Hispanics living in the United States (26 million) are Catholic. Sixty-four percent of all Hispanics attend church services regularly.<sup>17</sup> The ten dioceses of Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Galveston-Houston, San Bernardino, Chicago, Brooklyn, Fresno, San Antonio and Orange have the largest Hispanic populations.<sup>18</sup>

Of the nation's 46,000 priests, 6.3% or 2900 are Hispanic.<sup>19</sup> Of these 2,900 Hispanic priests, approximately 500 were born in the U.S.<sup>20</sup> Fifteen percent of the priests ordained in 2002 were Hispanic. There are approximately 9,925 Hispanic Catholics per Hispanic priest, while there are 1, 230 Catholics per priest in the general Catholic population.<sup>21</sup> Approximately 500 or thirteen percent of current seminarians are Hispanic.<sup>22</sup> Nine percent, or twenty-five of the nation's 281 active bishops, are Hispanic. There is a ratio of one bishop to every 231, 000 Catholics in the United States and a ratio of one Hispanic bishop to every one million Hispanic Catholics in the United States.

Despite the significant population of Hispanic Catholic there are only a small percent of Hispanic clergy and Hispanic Bishops that can attend to their pastoral needs or who are in a position to effectively advocate for Hispanic Catholics. Some dioceses have the practice of "importing" priests from Latin America, but their lack of familiarity with the realities of the U.S. context makes it problematic. Often times they bring with them

cultural attitudes that disregard the values of lay participation, and the roles of Latinas as agents of change in the Church and in society. Clergy from Latin America are sometimes used to a “privileged” status and treat their Hispanic parishioners with arrogance and disrespect.

The Catholic Church in the U.S. has encouraged appropriate priestly formation that will make it possible for the ordained to serve Hispanic Catholics, but this has not proven successful. An increasing numbers of Hispanic Catholics are joining other religious denominations, and are turning away from the Catholic Church. Others are searching for a spirituality that will nourish their faith and relationship with God, and decide that the Catholic Church has nothing to offer. While this affects Hispanic adults, it has more serious consequences for Latino/a youth.

#### Latino/Hispanic Religious Affiliation

While all this is true, it has been noticeable for several decades that changes in Latino/Hispanic religious affiliations are taking place. Recent studies on issues of faith and public life published in *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*<sup>23</sup> reports that almost one quarter of all Latinos in the United States are Protestant. Seventy percent of Latinos are Catholic, translating into 29 million Catholic Latinos in the United States. This is compared to 22 million white mainline Protestants. Twenty-three percent of Latinos are Protestant or identify as “other” Christian that includes Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons. This translates to 9.5 million people. Eighty five percent of all U.S. Latino Protestants identify themselves as Pentecostals or evangelicals (6.2 million people). Thirty-seven percent of the U.S. Latino population (14.2 million) self-identifies as “born-again” or evangelical. This figure includes Catholic charismatics, who constitute 22 percent of U.S. Latino Catholics. Twenty-six percent, or 7.6 million, of all Latino Catholics self-identify as being born-again. One percent of Latinos identify with a world religion, such as Buddhism, Islam or Judaism<sup>24</sup>. And .37 percent of all Latinos are atheist or agnostic.<sup>25</sup>

For both Latino Catholic and Latino Protestant, the relationship with the churches is a complex one. There is an experience of cultural marginalization. The religious sensibilities of both groups are historically shaped by Spanish Catholicism. This has not escaped the attention of Justo Gonzalez, a noted Latino Protestant Church historian who claims that all Latinos are “culturally Catholic.” Gonzales calls for a “New Reformation” where both the richness of Catholic Latino popular religion and the Protestant emphasis on Scripture are integrated. While the call to ministry is more accessible for Latinos in the Protestant churches, few of them occupy roles of authority and decision-making. Over-all the treatment of women continues to be a challenge for Latinas in both denominations. And the religious expression of faith lacks the fervor typical of the Latino culture.

The tension between Latino Catholics and Latino Protestants is divisive to the unity of a community that already faces innumerable obstacles in the United States. More Latino Catholics are feeling emotionally alienated from the life of the parish communities where little is done to welcome them. Latino Protestants find themselves deprived of the rich experience of ritual that is part of the culture and their experience of leadership is minimal.

### Education

According to the 2002 U.S. Census Report, the educational achievements of Latinos are significantly lower than non-Hispanic whites. Less than 27.0 percent Hispanics have less than a ninth grade education compared to 4.0% non-Hispanic whites. Only 16.0 percent Hispanics attain an education in the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade but do not obtain a high school diploma compared to 7.3 percent non-Hispanic whites. Hispanics who graduate from high school or who have some college study experience represent 45.9 percent compared to 59.3 percent of their non-Hispanic counterparts. Only 11.1 percent Hispanics obtain a bachelor degree compared to 29.4 percent non-Hispanic whites.

Given these percents, over 50 percent of Hispanics will not be eligible to attend college or obtain a higher educational degree.

The lack of access to quality education seriously impacts the ability of Hispanic youth to enter the workforce. Hispanics (8.1%) are much more likely than non-Hispanic whites (5.1%) to be unemployed. They are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to work in service occupations. Hispanics (20.8%) are twice as likely to be employed as operators and laborers than non-Hispanic Whites (10.9%). This has serious consequences on the ability of Hispanics (14.2%) to occupy managerial or professional occupations compared to non-Hispanic Whites (35.1%). This reality impacts the earning ability of Hispanics which is significantly lower than that of non-Hispanics Whites.

#### Income/Poverty

The median income of white households in the United States is \$45,904; for Hispanics it is 27 percent less at \$33,455. In 1999, 7.7 percent of non-Hispanic Whites were living in poverty. In the Hispanic community, the poverty rate of 21.2 percent, or approximately 7.2 million people. The poverty level of Hispanics in the U.S. has serious consequences for the over-all health of the Hispanic communities. The consequences are felt in every area of life.

#### Latino Youth and Gangs

The level of poverty forces adults in the household to spend extended times away from home. An increasing number of households are headed by single-mothers. Children are often left on their own while the parents are working. In the absence of adult supervision, youth seek out ways of belonging. For many, gangs provide “community” for children who have no where else to occupy their energies. Latino youth have fallen prey to a gang culture which promotes violence and destroys the hope of a better future for Hispanic families and communities. The city of Salinas in California is a sad example of an escalating gang culture which endangers the young of the community. The number of deaths due to gang violence has become one of the leading causes of death for the young in Salinas. The crimes committed by gang members have threatened the security of the local community, and civic leaders are at a loss at what to do. Gang members are also migrating to Latin America. Gang culture is being exported outside of the United States and threatens the healthy of the communities on both sides of the border.

## Immigration

The poverty in other parts of Latin America forces people to look elsewhere for jobs. The proximity to the United States makes it easier for the poor of Latin American to migrate legally or “illegally” to the United States. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of undocumented from Latin America. It is estimated that it numbers over 10 million.

The September 11, 2000 attack on the World Trade has made this an even more explosive reality for Latinos in the United States. The political rhetoric post September 11<sup>th</sup> has unjustly targeted Hispanic immigrants as potentially dangerous to the security of this country. The punitive treatment of Hispanic “undocumented” has forced many to forego services for their children and themselves. In some cases, the fear of deportation has led Hispanic immigrants to endanger their lives. A recent example of risking one’s life occurred a few weeks ago during the raging fires in Southern California. While searching through the rubble of one of the fire sites, the charred bodies of four migrant workers were discovered in an area that had been evacuated. In another situation, the migrant workers fearing that they would loose their jobs refused to leave the fields. The owner of the fields insisted that they continue working despite the proximity of the fire. Law enforcement officers intervened demanding that they evacuate. After several hours of negotiating with the owner, the officers finally succeeded convincing the migrant workers to evacuate. Despite the denial of immigration services, it is a fact that “undocumented” who sought out help during the fire were taken into custody and deported. It is still unclear how many “undocumented” died in the fire. The hotly debated issue of immigration has serious implications for Latinos/Hispanics on both sides of the border.

## Women and Children

Poor Mexican women who are desperate to find ways to provide for their children become the ideal labor force for transnational industry. Little attention is given to just wages or for the safety of the work environment. The health and safety of women are

often in jeopardy. Women often occupy these low paying jobs and are exposed to toxic working conditions. The careless use of pesticides over fields endangers the health of those working in the field. Pesticides have caused sterility for some women. The involuntary immigration of the “poor” in pursuit of jobs is another example of exploitive labor practices. Since 1993 more than 320 young women have been abducted, raped and murdered in the Mexican border city of Juarez. These are mostly young women who are employed in “maquiladoras,” enormous assembly plants where they often work in U.S. owned factories for 12 hours shifts for \$4-8 dollars a day. Their desperate search for work places them in harms way.

Another situation along the border is the migration of men who come to the U.S. in pursuit of jobs. They leave their families behind. The women and children are left dependent on the monies sent by the husband. In the meanwhile, the mother is burdened with the full responsibility of fending for the needs of her family. The separation of spouses and families often leads to establishing a two family situation; a wife across the border and a partner or second wife in the U.S. Unjust labor practices affect the entire family, but since women are represented disproportionately among the worlds poor and marginalized, it is especially harmful for women. This cycle of suffering is experienced by Latinas on both sides of the border.

The quality of food has become an issue as the environment is degraded. Due to lack of funds, poor women can only purchase poorer quality food. This affects the health of the family members especially the children. Approximately, 20 percent of children live in poverty in the U.S. The feminization of poverty has become a global phenomenon with women comprising 70 percent of the world’s 1.3 billion poor. And the feminization of poverty is experienced within the Hispanic/Latino communities on both sides of the border.

According to the American Community Survey Reports published in 2007, Hispanics had a lower median income level and a larger proportion of their households are maintained by women (19%).<sup>26</sup> Women from Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and

Honduras often migrate to the U. S. by themselves. There numbers increase the percent of households maintained by women (Puerto Rico-26.6%; Dominican Republic 32.3%, Honduras 26.1%). In contrast, about 9 percent of non-Hispanic White households have no husband present. In addition, about 33 percent of Hispanic mothers who had given birth are unmarried compared with about 20 percent of non-Hispanic White mothers. The poverty rate was generally higher for Hispanic children (under age 18).<sup>27</sup> About 29 percent of Hispanic children and 11 percent of non-Hispanic White children lived in poverty.<sup>28</sup> Among some of the Hispanic national groups, the poverty rate for children is about 30 percent higher. This is true for children of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican and Honduran backgrounds.<sup>29</sup> The elderly those 65 and older, have a poverty rate of about 20 percent compared with about 7 percent for non-Hispanic Whites.<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusion

In the interest of time, I have limited myself to addressing select issues that are affecting the quality of life of Hispanics in the U.S. The need for health care, housing, quality education, and appropriate social services are important issues that need to be explored. What may be evident is that the realities lived by many Hispanics in the United States call for our consideration as Sisters of Mercy. The charism of Mercy has always responded to needs that are known. As a young woman, I was drawn to Mercy by the life of Catherine McAuley and her love for the poor and vulnerable. In particular, the women and children of her times, called for her attention.

The colonization of the Americas by Spain has negatively marked the history of Latinos/Hispanics in the United States. We continue to live out the consequences of a history of conquest and colonization. Five hundred years later, the lives of the Hispanic community has not greatly improved. This is true of the Latino reality on both sides of the border. What is experienced in Latin America is shared in similar ways by the Hispanic/Latino community in the United States. The constant migration of Latinos from south and north of the U.S. border makes this a local and global reality for Sisters of Mercy. The Catholic Church has not given this migrant group the pastoral attention it needs.

Our foundresses were called to bring Mercy to a world in need. Mary Baptist Russell, California's first Sister of Mercy, answered the call to serve the wide diversity of languages, customs and religious traditions in San Francisco<sup>31</sup> during the Gold Rush. It is important to note that Mother Francis Bridgeman corresponded at length with Father Gallagher of San Francisco. She only accepted the invitation to come to San Francisco when she was reassured that accepting the mission would not compromise the commitment of the Sisters.<sup>32</sup> The same was true of Mary Baptist Russell who before accepting a mission would make it clear that the primary duties were the instruction of poor Girls, the protection of unemployed Women of good character, and the visitation of the sick.<sup>33</sup> And any work of Mercy in accordance with the Spirit of the Mercy rule.<sup>34</sup>

We share in the history and heritage of Catherine McAuley whose dedication to the poor and especially women and children was the motivating force in her religious vocation. Can that same motivating force inspire us to accept a new call and challenge? Together we search for ways to bring Mercy in the Twenty-first Century.

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<sup>1</sup> For this paper, I am drawing significantly from work that I have already written, and from studies, surveys and Census Bureau information...

<sup>2</sup> I rely substantially on a report provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc., Washington, D.C., 2002.

<sup>3</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops 1988:4.

<sup>4</sup> I will use the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably to acknowledge their importance, and the unsettled situation of defining the identity of Latinos/Hispanics in the United States.

<sup>5</sup> The percents indicated here are taken from the U.S. Census Bureau report on the Hispanic Population in the United States, March 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Virgilio P. Elizondo, *La Morenita: Evangelizer of the Americas* (San Antonio: Mexican-American Cultural Center, 1980) 17.

<sup>7</sup> James R. Brockman, *Romero: A Life* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989) 82.

<sup>8</sup> Moises Sandoval, *On the Move: A History of the Hispanic Church in the United States* (New York: Orbis, 1989) 47.

<sup>9</sup> Despite its approval by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, the plan was not supported. It was not implemented and consequently the growth of Hispanic Ministry growth was compromised.

<sup>10</sup> Office of Hispanic Affairs, *Proceedings of the I Encuentro Hispano de Pastoral, 1972*. Printed in binder form for the participants of the I Encuentro.

<sup>11</sup> United States Catholic Conference, *Proceedings of the II Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference Creative Service Office, 1978) 31.

<sup>12</sup> United States Catholic Conference, *Prophetic Voices: The Document on the Process of the III Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1986) 31.

<sup>13</sup> Total population of U.S. Hispanics: U.S. Census Bureau, *Census Brief*, May 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

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- <sup>15</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. *The Hispanic Population in the United States: Population Characteristics*, March 2001.
- <sup>16</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Demographic Profiles, 2002.
- <sup>17</sup> Survey commissioned by The Latino Coalition and conducted by McLaughlin & Associates' *Opinones Latinas*, August 2002.
- <sup>18</sup> Ruth N. Doyle, Ph.D., *Dioceses Ranked by Total Hispanic (All Races) Population*, 2002.
- <sup>19</sup> A survey on Hispanic priests ministering in the United States, conducted by the National Association of Hispanic Priests, 1999, reports 2900 Hispanic priests, and the 2002 Official Catholic Directory reports that there are approximately 46, 000 priest.
- <sup>20</sup> Survey on Hispanic priests ministering in the U.S., conducted by the National Association of Hispanic Priests, 1999.
- <sup>21</sup> USCCB Committee on Hispanic Affairs. *Hispanic Ministry at the Turn of the New Millennium*, 1999, p. 5. Study by Stewart Lawrence of Puentes, Inc.
- <sup>22</sup> USCCB Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry. The Study of the Impact of Fewer Priests on the Pastoral Ministry was done by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University, June 2000.
- <sup>23</sup> Statistics compiled in the volume, *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- <sup>24</sup> Some Latinos are discovering that they are Sephardic Jews. The re-conquest of Spain from the Moors led to the exile of the Jews in 1492, and forced Catholicism on Jews wishing to remain in Spain. Often times, this conversion was only publicly assumed. In recent years, a number of Latinos are re-discovering their Jewish roots.
- <sup>25</sup> This information is the results of the national survey *Hispanic Churches in American Public Life*. I am drawing substantially from the data provided by Bruce Murray, in "Latino Religion in the U.S.: Demographic Shifts and Trends," FACSNET. See: [www.facsnet.org/issues/faith/espinsa.php](http://www.facsnet.org/issues/faith/espinsa.php)
- <sup>26</sup> *The American Community-Hispanics: 2004*, drafted by U.S. Census Bureau's Ethnicity and Ancestry Branch, Pew Hispanic Center, Washington, D.C.(2007) 3.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid. 20.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid. 20
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid. 20
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid. 20
- <sup>31</sup> Mary Katherine Doyle, RSM, *Like a Tree by Running Water*, Blue Dolphin Publishing, Inc., Nevada City, 2004) 62.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid. 47
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid. 215
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid. 215