

COLLEAGUES:

"What does that say?" asked one of our older parishioners, pointing to the new sign on our church door that read, "LA ENTRADA DE LA CLINICA MEDICA ESTA AQUI. GRACIAS." A ten-year-old standing nearby eagerly answered, "The entrance to the medical clinic is here. Thank you."

That brief exchange points to two important truths: the ethnic makeup of our city and congregations is changing, and our children may be better prepared to meet the change than we are.

In this issue of Clergy Notes, we examine how Hispanics--the fastest growing group of immigrants in America--are shaping the religious culture here in Indianapolis. Today in the city there are Catholic, United Methodist, Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Pentecostal, and Jehovah's Witnesses congregations with largely Hispanic memberships. As well, many Hispanics have joined Anglo congregations.

While the growth of the local Hispanic community creates new opportunities for ministry, clergy in both the Anglo and Latino communities often balk at barriers of language and culture. Hispanics, after all, come from many different countries and backgrounds, and there is no single way to serve these diverse communities.

How, if at all, do congregations and religious leaders respond to visitors who speak a different language, or have a different national origin than their own? If you have a story about how the changing ethnic makeup of our city is shaping your ministry, I'd like to hear from you.

Speaking of change, you will notice that Clergy Notes has a new look. The expanded format will allow us to cover issues in more depth; we'll hear what a colleague has to say on the subject; and we'll provide you with some resources.

Your comments are always welcome. Let's stay in touch ...



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When St. Patrick Catholic Church in Fountain Square inaugurated a Spanish-language mass in 1993, about a dozen people showed up the first Sunday. Today St. Patrick's two Spanish-language masses attract nearly 1,500 people every week.

According to people who work with the community, the Hispanic population in Indianapolis has tripled or quadrupled during the past decade. Current estimates of their numbers in the city range between 25,000-40,000.

The growth of the local Hispanic community has created new congregations, and swelled some existing ones. Statistics on the number of congregations serving Hispanics are imprecise. Many of the congregations are small, independent, and have little contact with other groups. At present, roughly two dozen congregations, most concentrated within the central city, offer a Hispanic ministry. The majority of these congregations are Protestant, though the majority of Hispanics in the city attend a Catholic church.

St. Patrick's Hispanic ministry – by far the largest in the city – has involved the church in making fundamental, sometimes painful, changes.

Founded in 1865, St. Patrick once served the immigrant Irish population living in Fountain Square. Today, the church's English-language masses rarely attract more than 200 people. But at 11 a.m. on Sunday, and again at 6 p.m., the building is filled to near-capacity with Hispanic worshipers, few of whom speak English.

Fr. Thomas Fox founded the Hispanic ministry at St. Patrick. He spent several years in El Salvador and speaks Spanish fluently. Sr. Jean Marie Cleveland, the church's parish life coordinator, has studied Spanish but her ministry is primarily to English-speaking members.

St. Patrick's pastoral team has discussed the possibility of bringing the two congregations together in a bilingual mass, but given the language barrier, interaction outside of services would be difficult for a combined congregation.

Here as in other congregations a major challenge for clergy is to find a way to make Hispanics feel welcome. "That's the struggle all the time," Fr. Fox said, "to make people feel at home and that this is their place." Fr. Fox tries to overcome this barrier by assigning Hispanics to key leadership duties in St. Patrick ministries.

"It just takes time," said David Penalva, pastor of Vida Nueva United Methodist Church. Vida Nueva has been serving a Hispanic congregation at its location on East New York Street since 1990. "It requires a different approach to developing a congregation."

Both Penalva and Fox report success with small-group meetings held in the homes of individual parishioners. Hispanics will respond when churches make a serious effort to reach out to them. But bridging the language difference is only the beginning. There are cultural differences and other circumstances to overcome as well.

For most Hispanics who come to the city, finding work is their first priority. Often they take jobs with weekend shifts that coincide with church services. "Scheduling conflicts with people's jobs make it difficult to have continuity," says Penalva.

The fact that Hispanics have different national origins also works against the building of congregations. In Penalva's congregation, he says, "there are many different countries represented."

The term "Hispanic" is in fact very broad, covering people from most of Latin America as well as Spain. At Vida Nueva, twelve nationalities are represented in a church of about 100 people. "Often," Penalva said, "the only thing we have in common is Spanish."

Opportunities as well as obstacles await those interested in reaching the city's growing Hispanic population. This ministry requires a willingness to take risks, a substantial investment of time and energy, and the patience to wait for results.

STRAIGHT FROM THE SOURCE

A CONVERSATION WITH SISTER MARIKAY DUFFY

Sr. Marikay Duffy is executive director of the Hispanic Education Center, which provides educational opportunities for Hispanics and those who work with them. Prior to helping found the Center in 1987, Sr. Marikay had spent ten years as a missionary in South America.

The Center's programs include Messages for Women, which teaches immigrant women basic life skills to help them adjust to an unfamiliar culture, while teaching pre-school skills to their young children. The Center also offers a class for ministers interested in learning Spanish. The Center is the only organization in the city offering a class to help Hispanics prepare for American citizenship.

A non-profit organization with four full-time staff members, the Hispanic Education Center is supported entirely by grants, donations, and the income generated by program fees.

Clergy Notes: Hispanics seem to be concentrated in the central city. Why should suburban congregations care about them?

Duffy: My sense is that there is no part of Indianapolis where there aren't Hispanic people living. They are there. Just like Anglos, when Hispanic parents become disillusioned with the school system, they move. They'll sacrifice for their children. They may have a house that looks nice on the outside, with no furniture inside. But it's going to be better for their children. A way for suburban pastors to really find out about the local Hispanic population would be to contact their school system and ask, 'Do we have Hispanic families moving into our area? Are there any Hispanic children in our schools?' That would give them a clue.

Clergy Notes: Is enrollment in a Spanish-language class the essential first step for people interested in beginning an Hispanic outreach?

Duffy: Not necessarily. You're going to find that most of those Hispanics who live in the suburbs are bilingual already and don't need services in Spanish. What any congregation, suburban or inner-city, really needs to do is to connect with someone or some group in the Hispanic community and listen to them. We can't sit in our chairs and determine what the needs are. It will not get results. We have to be in contact with the community so we can ask, 'How can we best serve you; what is it that we can offer you?'

Clergy Notes: Are there any options for congregations that recognize the growth of the Hispanic population but are not interested in starting a formal Hispanic program?

Duffy: We always have to pray for those who are doing this kind of work. Second, we can support them financially. The Hispanic Education Center doesn't have time to go out and beg, but it would be wonderful if churches would say on their own, 'We want to make this commitment. We're not going to speak Spanish; they're not coming to us; but they affect our lives in this community. They're running our hotels and restaurants. They're doing all these services that make our city a better place. You just have to contact the churches and organizations that are working with Hispanics and see how you can fit in. What if a church decided, one Sunday a month, to have a food collection and then delivered it to a food pantry? If a group of churches got together and said, 'Let's pool our efforts,' then they could make a big difference.

RESOURCES

The Hispanic Education Center (580 E. Stevens St., Indianapolis, IN 46203; phone 317-634-5022) conducts Spanish language classes for clergy. Offered in spring and fall, classes meet twice a week for

eight weeks.

The Hispanic Center (617 East North Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204; phone 317- 636-6551) can assist congregations in finding an interpreter for worship services. The Center is a good source for contacts and referrals in the Hispanic community.

La Ola Latino-Americana (P.O. Box 22056, Indianapolis, IN 46222; phone 317-822-0344), a biweekly, bilingual newspaper about the Hispanic community in Indianapolis is distributed free; an annual subscription costs \$50.